Managing Growth
Richmond Christian School

'Managing Growth' aptly summarizes this project. A Strategic Plan was adopted to guide the construction and financial support of a new secondary school. The plan also called for the establishment of a middle school and included projections of minimal, average and extremely optimistic growth. Within a two year time frame, the extremely optimistic growth projection was surpassed. Rapid growth in enrollment and academic success exposed the need for a strong and supportive infrastructure in the transition from a two campus school into a three campus system. An analogy used to describe our situation was that of the construction of a tall tower. Rapidly constructed, the tower houses many students, staff, parents, boards and committees. But how strong is the foundation and what happens when the winds of change and adversity blow?

It became apparent that managing growth required intentional and visionary planning. The need for a comprehensive and detailed Strategic Plan was essential. This plan needed to include both short and long term goals and required an expansion beyond the financial scope of the existing plan. A school Strategic Plan had to embrace the infrastructure of promotion and future development, staff and curriculum growth, policy and procedure, as well as clear organizational structure and governance.

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1.   The Focus

This project focused on establishing both short term goals with immediate tasks and long term goals which would outline the future plans for Richmond Christian School. The short term goals included such tasks as developing Vision Statements for each campus and writing educational policies that reinforced the concept of "three campuses, one school." Another necessary task was writing a Staff Handbook that would consistently apply expectations and procedures for staff members at each campus.

The long term goal was to establish a Long Range Plan which would direct the decision making and lead the school through the next several years. Questions addressing location and possible amalgamation of the campuses as well as issues of human resources (compensation and professional development) are considered in the development of the Long Range Plan.

2.   The Process

The project was largely driven by the administrative team who worked together to identify the current position of the school. The three campus principals and the systems principal set aside several full school days to begin developing a Strategic Plan. These meetings were held off campus and allowed opportunity for the administrative team to plan without being interrupted by the daily needs of the school. Each campus principal was able to bring their wants and needs to the table and these in turn became part of a formal presentation to the Board of Trustees in December 2009.

At the December meeting, the administrative team presented their findings in a multi-media presentation. In the course of the presentation, the previous strategic plan was reviewed, updates were presented, and future goals were offered for consideration. The board was able to trace how the previous plan unfolded, noting the goals that were achieved and what parts of the plan fell by the wayside.

As part of the presentation, the board was given opportunity to immediately respond to the content presented by the administrative team. The responses were electronically entered and tabulated for immediate feedback and discussion. This method of survey and immediate response ensured the participation of all the board members. It also helped to promptly identify the board's stance on a number of issues.

Various committees and individuals were assigned specific tasks to complete as part of the strategic plan. The education committees of each campus were asked to review and rewrite their mandate and job description. This resulted in the completion of one policy governing the educational committees of each individual campus.

A board member and the systems principal have jointly written the Employee Handbook. This handbook will be presented to the staff in September, 2010. It is anticipated that the new Handbook will unify staffing procedures and expectations for all employees. Policies relating to professional development, compensation, pension, and benefits are specifically notated for clarity among all the staff.

A major decision of the board over the past year was to commit to funding a full-time systems principal to lead the administrative team and oversee the three campus system. This meant finalizing and adopting an administrative structure that would effectively govern a multi-campus school system.

A component of the new administrative structure was to develop a means of immediate and effective communication within the school board and between the school board and the administration. Through an electronic communication tool, Basecamp, this was effectively implemented. This tool allowed board members and administration to stay in communication with one another about school matters between formal board meetings. This has helped to expedite the decision-making at board meetings.

3.   Results

The following list identifies the specific tasks that were completed as a result of this project or are currently in process. The last two items are in process and are scheduled for completion within the next school year.*

- A restructured Education Committee policy was written.
- An organizational chart was adopted in spring 2010.
- An updated Staff Handbook was completed for September 2010.
- Formal Vision Statements were developed for the elementary and middle school.
- An electronic communication tool (Basecamp) has been implemented for the board and administrative team
- Long Range Planning.*
- Design and Implementation of a School Web Page*

4.   Analysis and Commentary

It's messy. Managing growth is an ongoing and unique process. It takes intimate knowledge of both the school and its community to develop a healthy and vibrant Strategic Plan. Such planning takes time and effort. As good food takes time to prepare, so does good planning.

This project took many twists and turns as the administrative team along with the various committees began to discuss the current situation at RCS and plan for the future. Although a timeline for developing a Strategic Plan was established, it fell flat when the goals along the way were not met or adequately discussed and owned by the various stakeholders. A Strategic Plan, no matter how exciting, has to be owned by all stakeholders. This includes the students, faculty and staff, boards and committees, and the parent community.

Originally the Strategic Plan focussed on future building plans. It soon became apparent that this scope was too narrow and other wants, needs and concerns required attention before proceeding with building and relocation needs. Educational goals and issues of human resources had to be addressed. Identifying various options for building needed to be balanced and supported with solid educational goals and spiritual values in mind. Discussing 'why' was as important as discussing, 'how', 'when', 'what', and 'where'.

Insightful and industrious board members are a definite asset in developing and implementing a Strategic Plan. Effective board members keep the administrative team grounded while providing encouragement and support for the work of the administrators.

Policy writing must be precise and concise. Policies need to be simply stated and written with welcoming and gracious language. Policies based upon sound judgement that values the students, staff and parents of the school are long-lived and provide support and security for all those involved.

The most significant outcome of this project involves defining the work of the board and the work of the systems principal and the administrative team. As the systems principal and administrative team take on the day to day management of the school, the school board is allowed to develop policy and procedure and to set the vision of the school. This understanding of the difference between management and governance is crucial to the growth and development of the school. When the board and administration understand their various roles and work in harmony, great things can be accomplished.