



LANSING CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

GROWING MINDS. NURTURING FAITH. PREPARING LIVES.

A Five Year Strategic Plan

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Lansing Christian School – my life's work

From its humble beginning in 1950 as a K-6 school, Lansing Christian currently serves 550 students at its PreK-12 campus. Lansing Christian School is a far-reaching community of believers, serving families from more than 100 churches in the Greater Lansing area.

I am a proud alumna of Lansing Christian. After graduating from Calvin College in 1985, I began my career at LCS, teaching choir, PE and health. After taking a number of years off to raise our three sons, who also attended the school, I returned to Lansing Christian to lead the choir program in 2000. I was hired as the principal of the middle and high school in 2007, while also continuing to direct two choirs. I began serving as the head of school in 2013.

Why a Strategic Plan?

For the six years I served as middle and high school principal at Lansing Christian, the focus of my work was elevating the level of teaching, tending to the climate of our school, and helping the school to become more operationally sound.

When I became the head of school in 2013, I was thrust into learning numerous executive responsibilities, while also feeling a new and deep responsibility to determine where the school was headed. I wanted context, purpose, and intention to guide my decision making, and I longed for a sense of vision and aspiration that was future-oriented. In addition, I had a strong sense that people in our school community were asking the same question. Where is our school headed in the future?

After attending Jim Marsh's session on strategic planning at the Wheaton Academy Best Practices Conference in June of 2014, I came away with a new perspective on what providing this kind of direction for our school could look like. Jim spoke about the importance of using a broad spectrum of people in your school community to be a part of putting together a road map for the future. I had never considered that. In fact, engaging our school community in a collaborative planning process was not something I had ever experienced during the 15 plus years I served as a teacher, principal, or as a parent at LCS.

Now, in my role as head of school, initiating a collaborative process that engages the broad school community through shared leadership became the central focus and the opportunity that I decided to engage in this year.

It's all about the Process – Engaging the Lansing Christian School Community

For me, the task of putting together a five year roadmap and strategic plan for Lansing Christian School was an opportunity to focus on a process that would engage a broad spectrum of our school community in a new way. This process took nine months.

Already in late August of 2014, our administrative team and board began reading “Learning from the Best, Volume II” by Gene Frost. Over approximately two months we discussed the importance of mission and vision, and how we could begin to bring more value to our school. These discussions were instrumental in engaging the board and administrative team to begin to think together about what we wanted for the future of Lansing Christian School.

The Foundation – Vision, Mission and Core Values

Why do we exist? Where are we going? How will we behave?

These became the fundamental questions that the board and the administrative team engaged in at the start of the strategic planning process. Our mission and vision statement have been in place for more than fifty years, and we have never operated with a defined set of core values.

For a number of years I have felt the void of operating without a vision statement. I longed for something that was aspirational in nature, student-focused, and addressed student engagement with the world. Others did too. Tending to this work as part of the strategic planning process provided important and relevant context for the work that lied ahead.

In the late fall I put together a vision task force that included members of the board and administrative team and a few key faculty. The task at hand was to write a vision statement and a set of core values that reflect what we value, giving direction for how we will behave at every level of our school.

As a Christian school that comes out of the evangelical movement, the Reformed perspective of engaging and transforming the world had not been part of our school’s mission or vision in the past. At the same time, over the years, the teaching faculty and the board have adopted and implemented more of a Reformed philosophy. The information below represents the work of the vision task force that was approved by the board in late January.

Vision (New)

Equipping young men and women to engage and transform the world for Jesus Christ.

Mission (No change)

Recognizing God as the source of all truth, wisdom and knowledge, Lansing Christian School partners with Christian parents to educate children to the full extent of their God-given abilities. We engage students in an academically challenging environment that fosters spiritual, intellectual, social and physical growth. We equip students to exalt God and follow Christ in all of life.

Core Values (New)

We Glorify God in All of Life

Knowing God, loving His Word, and living for Him are the foundation for everything we do at Lansing Christian School. We seek to live our faith in our relationships, our character, and our service.

We Honor God through Excellence

Striving for excellence is expected from all members of the Lansing Christian School community. We foster excellence in academic, co-curricular, and extracurricular programs.

We Live and Learn in Christian Community

Cultivating caring and respectful relationships is integral to every aspect of school life. We prepare students to flourish as they discover and develop their God-given gifts and abilities. We teach, model, and practice servant leadership.

We Partner with Christian Parents

Lansing Christian School exists to assist parents in building a strong Christian foundation for their children. We serve Christian families who desire a Christ-centered education for their children.

Engaging the Community in SWOT Discussions

Serving in the development and fundraising role for the first time this year gave me new understanding about the importance of having a vision and a plan.

In September and October I sat down with each of our major donors to determine what they perceived to be the value of a Lansing Christian education, and to gain understanding about their passions as they relate to the school. These were valuable conversations that provided context and important information for each of the discussions that followed as part of the SWOT analysis.

During the month of October I met separately with the board, the administrative team, and with key faculty to understand what they saw as strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to our school. This became an important opportunity for me to personally engage with each of these groups, and to strengthen my capacity to ask good questions and listen.

Common themes that surfaced with each of the different groups included the importance of an excellent academic program, the value of athletics, and how deeply our teachers are valued. There were also surprises, like how much people value the sense of community and cross grade level opportunities in our Prek-12 school, along with how much people desire a greater sense of diversity.

On November 5, Jim Marsh came to our school to engage almost 50 people representing the board, administrative team, faculty, donors, and parents, in a full group SWOT analysis. What became apparent during these discussions was how little any of us ever think and dream outside our current limitations.

Engaging the Community in Committee Work

After engaging in the comprehensive set of SWOT sessions, we had enough information to define five key areas and key questions for committee work moving forward. I then appointed board members, key leaders and faculty to serve as committee chairs.

The committee chairs each chose their own committee members, with input and suggestions from me and the administrative team. The administrative team then worked with me to bring relevant data and information specific to each committee as a way to inform their work over the next month.

The task of each committee was to make recommendations for the five year strategic plan in the form of goals and initiatives. The committee work that was completed during the month of March was intense, and created a dynamic energy in the school. The conversations that were happening throughout the school were constructive, they were broad, and they were far-reaching. My general sense was that people were honored to be a part of this kind of thinking and engagement about the future of their school.

The steering committee (representing the chairs of each committee) met in mid-March to share the initial goals from their respective committees and provide feedback. The steering committee met again at the end of March to make final recommendations. In each of these meetings, I served in a facilitation role, which a new and different way of leading for me.

Achieving Ownership through Collaboration

Throughout the month of April I spent many hours working through the recommendations from the committees, and I engaged individual administrators and key leaders in thinking with me in each of their respective areas. Next, I engaged the administrative team as a whole to review the plan and I met with the board to ask for feedback around specific areas that required additional thought and discernment.

These discussions accomplished two things: deeper understanding and deeper investment in the contents of the five year strategic plan.

Board Approval

By the time the five year plan came to the board for approval on May 18, there was very little discussion or question about the contents of the plan because was already a level of understanding and ownership accomplished through the process. On June 15 I will be seeking board approval for strategies that will be implemented during the 2015-16 school year.

Summary

Initiating this kind of a collaborative process as a means for writing a five year strategic plan has fundamentally changed the way I am seeking to lead our school in the future.

Having a five year strategic in place now gives us the opportunity to use the plan in way that will affect how we operate as a school moving forward. The strategic plan now becomes the context and content for my work with the board and the administrative team. It will also provide structure for meetings and reports, and serve as measure for evaluation.

In addition, as we move forward I will continue to cultivate a culture of shared leadership and collaboration at our school. This includes:

- Engaging more people in the important work of the school.
- Giving key leaders oversight and accountability to accomplish the work of the strategic plan and engaging the broad constituency through task force work.
- Asking more questions and seeking more feedback as a way to grow capacity in others.
- Communication throughout the organization that speaks to the context of why we are doing what we are doing, as it aligns with our new vision.

I am deeply grateful to the Van Lunen staff and to Jim Marsh for the great work that God has been able to accomplish at Lansing Christian School this year. The work that God puts in front of us often seems greater than what we are able to accomplish on our own, and it is. The Van Lunen program has equipped me in just at just the right time, and in just the right way for the new work that God has called me to do at Lansing Christian School.