

Strategic Planning 101



Christian Unified Schools of San Diego embarked on an ambitious Strategic Planning journey during the 2008/2009 school year. Believing that if you are not moving forward, you will go backwards, the purpose of the Strategic Planning process was to clarify needs and set a specific course towards improvement and growth. To help Christian Unified understand its strengths and weaknesses, surveys of staff, parents, and students were employed, and a team of key constituents were assembled to talk candidly about the issues.

Four overarching areas and nine objectives were identified through the process. Twenty-four specific initiatives were established under these categories. A leader and team members were organized for each initiative and timelines were set for accomplishing specific tasks. The process of planning helped the school think more clearly about its overall mission and what activities it should be involved with, along with those it should eschew. But planning is only step one. Now comes the hard work of actually implementing the Strategic Plan.

Chuck Leslie
Superintendent
Christian Unified Schools
2100 Greenfield Drive – El Cajon, CA 92019
(619)590-2180
cleslie@christianunified.org

Project Focus – The Need for Strategic Plan

Christian Unified Schools has been serving students with a distinctly Christ-centered education since 1965. Founded by Dr. Tim LaHaye, it has a rich legacy of impacting lives with a program that is strong in the arts, athletics, and academics. Located in beautiful San Diego County, the school offers grades K-12 and currently has more than 900 students on two campuses. While Christian Unified is an independent organization, it has a close affiliation and governance overlap with Shadow Mountain Community Church, a Baptist congregation of more than 5,000 members whose pastor is Dr. David Jeremiah.

When Superintendent Chuck Leslie joined the school in 2006, Christian Unified Schools was in a state of financial crises. Due to changing demographics in Southern California, most private and public schools have seen enrollment drop over the past decade. With competition from home schools, charter schools, and hybrid schools, private Christian schools in the area have especially been hard hit. Enrollment declines, along with an anemic tuition schedule, and a campus facility that needed a major facelift, had put Christian Unified in a precarious situation.

A successful fund raising effort, combined with tuition increases and staff reductions have righted the school's financial ship, keeping it from sinking. It is in this backdrop that the Strategic Planning process began. The Strategic Plan is an attempt to move the school from "crises mode" to "pro-active mode" – to plan for the future and not just react to present problems. While the ongoing economic malaise has in many ways perpetuated the crises status (tuition assistance applications are up, new applications are down) the primary purpose and focus of the Strategic Plan remains the same: to chart a purposeful course in which the school can fully implement its mission to "teach students to think, learn and live from a Biblical worldview."

The Strategic Plan's focus is to answer the following question, "What strategic initiatives should Christian Unified implement over the next few years to better achieve/accomplish its mission?"

Project Process – Getting It Done

The first task was to organize the team who would do the work of constructing the Strategic Plan. While certainly the Head of School or Board Chairman could – on their own, or together – determine valuable goals for the school's future, such an endeavor would not build a collaborative effort to accomplish goals. Plus, it would be limited to the perspective of just one or two people.

Consequently, two key board members and the Superintendent recruited a team of twenty members that included the following:

- Board Members
- Administrative Personnel
- Parents from various grade levels
- Faculty from various grade levels, both new and long-term teachers
- Alumni

The Strategic Planning committee first met for an all-day session in October. At that session, they: (1) reviewed and reconfirmed the school's mission and vision; (2) conducted a brief analysis of the school's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; (3) reviewed the Needed Improvements that had been compiled by the school's accreditation self-study report; (4) began to organize the broad outlines for the Strategic Plan; and (5) constructed a timeline for accomplishing their work.

The timeline set by the committee included three additional half-day meetings with several opportunities for input from the school's constituents in between. At the second meeting in December, just about a month following the first one, the committee finished the broad framework for the strategic plan, getting it to a place where it was ready to share with others. Input was then garnered from the Board of Directors, the school administrative team and department heads, and finally to the entire faculty and staff. A meeting in February reviewed the input from these groups and yielded changes to the plan.

There were plans for parent, alumni, and student meetings in the spring to share the draft of the Strategic Plan in order to receive perspective and feedback. However, with the time constraints of an accreditation year, those meetings have now been moved to the fall. In the fall, the school also plans to complete a school-wide survey of parents, employees and (older) students as an additional way to gather valuable feedback and analysis.

Project Results

While the Strategic Plan is still in draft mode until the fall, the work already done has been significant. Many of the Initiatives identified are already being worked on and the plan has given valuable direction to the Superintendent and administrative team. In its current form, the Strategic Plan identifies four overarching areas and nine objectives for the school to focus on to fulfill its mission.

- **Christ-centered Governance**
 - Philosophy/Governance/Policy Objective
- **Quality Instruction that is Biblically-based**
 - Faculty Development Objective
 - Instructional and Curriculum Excellence Objective
 - Technology Objective
- **Sound Fiscal Stewardship**
 - Budget Forecast Objective
 - Facility Plan Objective
 - Marketing and Retention Planning Objective
- **Student Development**
 - Student Life Objective
 - Spiritual Discipleship Objective

Each Objective has one or more specific Initiative attached to it. There are twenty-four Initiatives in total. Each Initiative identifies a Team Leader, Team Members, and a Timeline. Below is a portion of the Strategic Planning document to serve as an example:

Sample Portion of the Strategic Plan Document:

<p style="text-align: center;">PART ONE Christ-centered Governance</p> <p>Philosophy/Governance/Policy Objective: To review, refine, update and professionalize CUSSD's philosophy statements, governance documents, board policies, and school policies in order to add clarity to the school's mission and procedures, thus improving the Board of Directors, the administrative team, and the faculty and staff's ability to successfully fulfill CUSSD's mission.</p> <p><u>Initiatives:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Review, refine and update CUSSD's corporate bylaws in order to clarify board procedures and to create more consistent board membership. <p>Team Leader: Chuck Leslie Team Members: Larry Hertel, Michelle Johnson, Erik Naugle, David Chidlaw Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010</p> <p><i>(Four additional initiatives follow under this objective)</i></p>
--

The final draft of the Strategic Plan is seven pages long. It was approved by the Board of Directors as a "draft" on June 9, 2009. The final version is scheduled to be approved in November 2009 after input is received from parents, alumni, and students.

Analysis

Taking the time to think through the schools' programs with an eye toward the future was a very rewarding task. The school grew stronger through the process and we are currently implementing key initiatives that will serve Christian Unified Schools for years to come. While I am somewhat disappointed that we were unable to complete the entire Strategic Plan during 2008/2009 school year, I am excited to share the vision with our constituents in the fall and look forward to receiving their perspective. While I am certain that the basic building blocks will stay the same, priorities and details will undoubtedly be impacted from their input. In truth, we were much too busy to conduct these meetings in the spring and, besides, parents and students are more positive and excited about school after summer break than just before it!

As we organized the strategic needs of our school, we asked ourselves questions regarding every area of the schools operation. Going through an accreditation during the year undoubtedly influenced this direction. We are jointly certified by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). The self-study portion of the accreditation report which we finalized in the fall of 2008 required us to review every aspect of the school. Analyzing the “Needed Improvements” from each section of the self-study became the building blocks of the Strategic Plan.

While this broad analysis was useful, we were probably too ambitious in the scope of what was reviewed, which caused us to create more goals and specific Initiatives than we can focus on at a time. Nonetheless, our plan moving forward is to leave all the Initiatives in place as they are important and we need to be reminded of them. Someone within the organization needs to be giving attention to each area identified. However, the Board and Superintendent will prioritize which Initiatives should receive top executive attention and place our greatest efforts on those. The reality of the economic slow-down will mean that marketing, retention efforts, fundraising and budget priorities will undoubtedly usurp much of the time. Initiatives with those areas of focus will be given the greatest priority.

It has often been said that if you aim at nothing, you’ll hit it every time. The Strategic Plan for Christian Unified Schools has given it several specific targets to aim at. While we may not hit the bull’s eye each time, and while undoubtedly the targets will change; the process of creating targets and then aiming at them has strengthened the school. Through the Strategic Plan we are better prepared to fulfill our mission to “teach students to think, learn and live from a Biblical worldview.”

Christian Unified Schools



**Strategic
2009-2012**

Plan

DRAFT

*Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:
He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn,
the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.*

Psalm 37: 5-6

Introduction

Since 1965, God has blessed the ministry of Christian Unified Schools, giving it a rich legacy of impacting students' lives through Christ-centered schooling. This Strategic Plan celebrates the past and present strengths of CUSSD, while, at the same time, striving to provide a vision for the future. Firmly committed to our Biblical roots and Christ-centered foundation, we look forward to the new ways God will use CUSSD moving forward.

Strategic planning is a journey, not a destination. This document provides a philosophical foundation and multi-year projections that we believe will guide CUSSD to even greater service and stability. Be cautioned, however, that this plan is not intended to be an all-encompassing, inflexible blueprint for the coming years. It is a living document to be divided and distributed as an annual "game plan" to the individuals and groups responsible for implementation; to be implemented, debated, altered, or rejected; to be reviewed on an annual basis for accountability; to be amended as new conditions arise; to be thoroughly updated periodically to maintain a fresh planning horizon.

The Strategic Plan also serves to communicate to the stakeholders of CUSSD – parents, students, alumni, donors, faculty, staff, church members, volunteers – the priorities and key initiatives the school seeks to accomplish. By God's grace and as a community – "the CUSSD family" – we hope to achieve great things, knowing that ultimately it is the Lord who directs our path.

This Strategic Plan is the result of the work and input of numerous individuals. Input was received from the administrative team, parents, faculty, staff, alumni, and current students. Statistical data, parental and student surveys, Superintendent "coffee", and board committees all contributed to document. The Strategic Planning Committee consisting of 20 members of parents, teachers, administrators and board members are to be thanked for their work in preparing the framework and overall directions for this document.

The Board of Directors of Christian Unified Schools officially approved this preliminary draft of the Strategic Plan on June 9, 2009.

Chuck Leslie
Superintendent

Mission Statement

Recognizing the preeminence of Christ, partnering with parents, Christian Unified Schools of San Diego teaches students to think, learn, and live from a Biblical worldview by integrating God and His Word as the primary source of knowledge and Truth.

Vision Statement

Christian Unified Schools of San Diego students acquire deep and personal knowledge of Christ and His Word, achieve the highest levels of Christian scholarship and learning, and accomplish the eternal purposes for which God created them.

Expected School-wide Learning Results

We expect our students to be:

Effective Christians who:

- Accept the Lord Jesus Christ as personal Savior.
- Apply the teachings of Jesus to provide the foundation for moral and spiritual living.
- Demonstrate a desire to share with others their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.
- Value others and self, based on a Biblical view of man.

Investigative Learners who:

- Assess their needs and apply appropriate strategies to learn concepts and skills.
- Formulate positive personal values based upon Biblical principles.
- Continue learning throughout life.

Perceptive Thinkers who:

- Identify, analyze, discriminate, prioritize, and apply information.
- Make responsible decisions.
- Apply critical thinking skills.

Effective Communicators who:

- Convey messages clearly and accurately.
- Understand and use the fundamental processes in communicating.
- Receive and interpret messages respectfully.

Quality Producers who:

- Display a growing knowledge of curriculum.
- Develop God-given abilities
- Demonstrate standards of excellence.

Involved Citizens who:

- Respect and submit to authority.
- Demonstrate positive and productive citizenship.
- Practice Biblical principles.

PART ONE

Christ-centered Governance

Philosophy/Governance/Policy Objective: To review, refine, update and professionalize CUSSD's philosophy statements, governance documents, board policies, and school policies in order to add clarity to the school's mission and procedures, thus improving the Board of Directors, the administrative team, and the faculty and staff's ability to successfully fulfill CUSSD's mission.

Initiatives:

2. Review, refine and update CUSSD's corporate bylaws in order to clarify board procedures and to create more consistent board membership.

Team Leader: Chuck Leslie

Team Members: Larry Hertel, Michelle Johnson, Erik Naugle, David Chidlaw

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

3. Review and update CUSSD's board policies in order to delineate and distinguish board policies from administrative policies.

Team Leader: Chuck Leslie

Team Members: Larry Hertel, Michelle Johnson, Erik Naugle, David Chidlaw, Admin Team

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

4. Review, refine, and update administrative policies to add clarity to day to day procedures.

Team Leaders: Heather Lewis (grades 7-12); Keri Willis (grades K-6)

Team Members: Kary Sterkowitz, Scott Meadows, Mishe Harvey, Karen Andrews, Heather Lewis, Martha Avery, Pam Vandervliet, Keri Willis

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

5. Review CUSSD's philosophy statements in order to refine and update the school's ESLRs and Core Values; and to create a curriculum and instructional philosophy that fully supports the school's mission.

Team Leader: Karen Andrews

Team Members: Mishe Harvey, Heather Lewis, Teri Littlefield, Kerri Willis, Pam Vandervliet, Admin Team, Board of Directors

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

**PART TWO:
Quality Instruction that is Biblically-based**

Faculty Development Objective: To recruit, cultivate, and retain a Christ-centered, highly qualified faculty and staff that will inspire students to reach their full potential in Christ.

Initiatives:

1. Develop and implement measurable, individualized professional growth plans for all faculty and staff.

Team Leader: Mishe Harvey

Team Members: Instructional Leadership Team

Timeline: See committee worksheet

2. Investigate and implement additional means for recruiting highly qualified faculty.

Team Leader: Scott Meadows

Team Members: Mishe Harvey, Heather Lewis, Kary Sterkowitz

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

3. Compile compensation and benefits standing in comparison to competitive opportunities for faculty and staff in the region and determine target salaries for the future.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, Admin Team, Board Rep, Harry Allen, Rian Molumby, Wendy La Frenz, Pam Vandervliet

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

Instructional and Curriculum Excellence Objective: To develop and maintain an intentional district-wide review of the instructional core to ensure excellence in “wisdom and eloquence” of every graduating student thus fulfilling CUSSD’s mission and vision.

Initiatives:

1. Develop a master plan for an intentional vertical alignment of curriculum K-12 ensuring continuity and rigor within each subject area.

Team Leader: Mishe Harvey

Team Members: Instructional Leadership Team

Timeline: See committee worksheet

2. Review all assessment measures in the District Report Card and determine appropriate actions in order to create a goal for each assessment tool.

Team Leader: Mishe Harvey

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, Instructional Leadership Team

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

3. Review the feasibility of adding additional class offerings to Christian Unified Schools and establish a plan to add desirable options (Latin, logic, engineering courses and additional foreign languages should be studied).

Team Leader: Mishe Harvey

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, Instructional Leadership Team

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

Technology Objective: To provide teachers and students with technological tools and training that allows them to excel in instruction and learning.

Initiative:

1. Create a district-wide master technology plan that incorporates hardware, software, curriculum, facilities, professional development and funding.

Team Leader: Scott Meadows

Team Members: Kathy Alesi, Kris Fondaw, Susie Abel, Maria Keckler, Jerry Harder, Mishe Harvey, Joe Michel

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

PART THREE: Sound Fiscal Stewardship

Budget Forecast Objective: To develop annual and extended budget forecasts which include tuition planning, salary planning and development/fundraising goals.

Initiatives:

1. Produce a three-year budget forecast including realistic enrollment figures, tuition increases and salary/staffing targets.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, John Paulson, Erik Naugle, Lisa Keith

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

2. Review salary targets established by the faculty development committee to examine feasibility of implementation.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, John Paulson, Erik Naugle, Lisa Keith

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

3. Draft a three-year fundraising plan to include goals for the Annual Fund, tuition assistance, facility development and endowment building.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, David Beezer, John Paulson, Erik Naugle, Lisa Keith

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

4. Review and update tuition assistance and scholarship policies to ensure best practices.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, David Beezer, John Paulson, Joe Michel

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

Facility Plan Objective: To develop facilities that provide for academic excellence, athletic training and artistic expression that will give glory to God in the context of Christian schooling.

Initiative:

1. Create a strategic plan that will allow CUSSD to fully utilize its existing buildings and properties to achieve its academic, athletic and arts potential.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, Phil Hertel, John Paulson, David Beezer, Scott Meadows, Kary Sterkowitz

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

Marketing and Retention Planning Objective: To maximize enrollment at CUSSD to provide the resources necessary to fulfill the school's mission.

Initiatives:

1. Refine and improve CUSSDs marketing plan with the specific intention of retaining and recruiting students, thereby increasing enrollment.

Team Leader: Dave Beezer

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, Jack Higgins, Kim Johnston, Carrie Schindler

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

2. Review and report on the feasibility of additional alternative educational structures (i.e. home school, boarding school, international school, online schooling, etc.).

Team Leader: Chuck Leslie/Scott Meadows

Team Members: Martha Avery, Heather Lewis, Mishe Harvey, Joe Michael

Timeline: February 2009 – June 2009

3. Establish a plan to establish a greater presence amongst our parents, alumni, and in the San Diego community as a distinguished, set-apart, Christ-centered school of excellence.

Team Leader: Dave Beezer

Team Members: Chuck Leslie, Jack Higgins, Kim Johnston, Chuck Leslie

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

PART FOUR: Student Development

Student Life Objective: To develop athletic and artistic programs that allow students to fully express their God-given gifts, to create student activities that unify and uplift the student body, and to develop strategies that help better integrate international and domestic students.

Initiatives:

1. Develop a three-year athletic plan that maximizes resources to allow students to develop their God-giving talents.

Team Leader: David Beezer

Team Members: Jim Fuller, Joe Michel, Thomas Lowery

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

2. Develop a three-year fine and performing arts plan that maximizes resources to allow students to develop their God-giving talents.

Team Leader: Jack Higgins

Team Members: Harry Allen, Bill Yeager, Lynn Ernst, Noelle Tierney, Melissa Johnson, Dusty Sniff, Linda Swope, Lisa Gruber, Mishe Harvey, Denise Whitelaw

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

3. Establish a plan to help better integrate international students with domestic students to encourage friendships, enhance campus continuity, and growth within the full body of Christ.

Team Leader: Karen Andrews

Team Members: Scott Meadows, Heather Lewis, Tobin Wilkin, Rian Molumby, Melinda Miller

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010

Spiritual Discipleship Objective: To develop the whole student by nurturing their spiritual gifts and God-given talents and abilities through intentional discipleship.

Initiative:

1. Review the various discipleship opportunities at CUSSD and determine additional efforts to add to the intentionality of developing Christian leaders.

Team Leader: Tobin Wilkins

Team Members: Keri Willis, Pam Vandervliet, Mike Stone, Heather Lewis, Rian Molumby, Krista Breuninger, Eric Johnson

Timeline: February 2009 – February 2010