

Trinity Christian School Faculty Development Plan

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TRINITY
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

What I Did:

The steps we took to put this plan together

Step 1 -- Establishing the Goals or Outcomes Sought with the Plan.

At the leadership level we discussed in great detail the question :
What specifically are we trying to accomplish with this plan?

We agreed upon the following outcomes as our goals

- A) Teachers being and feeling valued and cared for with salaries and benefits that allow them to support their families and thus be able to commit to the ministry of Trinity Christian School long term.
- B) The mission of the school being carried on for generations because of the internal training and collegial professional development culture, always being lifelong learners ourselves as we seek to instill this value in our students.
- C) Systems, procedures, and mechanisms in place to appropriately mentor, evaluate, equip, monitor, encourage, and provide meaningful feedback to the teachers as professional educators and Christian leaders.
- D) Teachers have a given path of development and growth with stages and evaluations that allow them to have a specific path of growth that will match our school's unique classical Christian mission, philosophy, and pedagogy.
- E) Teachers will have a greater understanding and ownership of our unique mission, being empowered to initiate growth and change, causing a collective creativity that is greater than what could be accomplished by just a few leaders at the top.

Step 2 – External Research, Learning from our Peers

We established several sources for external research and considered the outcomes we were seeking as we read and talked with other school leaders.

- A) I interviewed 6 other school leaders from Classical Christian Schools and ACSI Schools. They really helped me grapple with the “nuts and bolts” logistics of how to put a training program in place.
- B) I met with and discussed the different elements of the plan with ACSI's Vice President of Academic Affairs. He was very helpful as you can imagine and pointed me to the current

research going on in teacher spiritual formation at Biola University and the different sources of research done on effective teacher evaluation.

- C) I spoke with the Association of Classical Christian Schools about how they prepare teachers for teaching in a distinctively classical Christian school. They sent me the materials from 4 schools who have put together an internal teacher certification program.
- D) I read a few books by Charlotte Danielson, James Strong, and Gordon Brown on Teacher Evaluation models.
- E) I looked through the previous Van Lunen projects related to faculty development and teacher training.
- F) I examined the national research on salary schedules in ACSI and public schools, gathered the salary schedules from the schools in our area and read several articles about the advantages of and challenges surrounding tying compensation to training.

Step 3 – Internal Research – Listening and Brainstorming with our Faculty

We then took some of the ideas for the rough skeleton of the plan that was forming and went out and beta tested the concepts of the plan by holding listening sessions with the faculty. After all the teachers were the ones the plan was for and was designed to help. This step gained buy-in and excitement from the staff in addition to helping us brainstorm and adjust the plan with the faculty.

Step 4 – Designing the Plan

Following this lengthy research phase, I designed a faculty development program. It took into account the teacher's compensation, training and evaluation, spiritual formation and worldview, and ownership of the program.

A brief outline of the plan with some explanation is below:

Compensation

- 1) A new Salary Schedule based upon research from the ACSI schools in the Rocky Mountain Region, the Public schools in the quad-city area, and national research on this topic.
- 2) A 2 year plan to phase in stronger premium reimbursement programs, Samaritan Ministries as an option, and conduct a census to see what the costs are involved in offering group health insurance. We have grown since we last checked on this and did not have a large enough group.
- 3) Small Bonuses for steps in the training levels (mildly tying compensation to training with small increases at each phase of the training)
- 4) Produce a catalog of other income sources for teachers in the summer and throughout the year in order to bolster the salaries for the teachers.

Training and Evaluation

Teachers will have a “professional development portfolio” in which they will document their growth and track the goals they have and the feedback they receive.

Grid of Growth and Development Phases

Phase 1 – Basics of Teaching at Trinity Christian School (New Teacher Orientation)

Phase 2 – ACSI Certification Requirements (required by our accreditation)

Phase 3 – Essential Elements of Instruction (a local training for Christian schools in Arizona)

Phase 4 – Classical (Grammar Phase)

Phase 5 – Classical (Logic Phase)

Phase 6 – Classical (Rhetoric Phase)

Phase 7 – Trainer/Coach Mentor Teacher

Each of these phase have a detailed description of responsibilities and requirements. Modest increases in pay come at three different stages.

Teachers will have the following commitment of time to training.

- 1) Orientation week before school starts (20 hours)
- 2) Two in-service full days together as a faculty (16 hours)
- 3) One full day per quarter to work with an assigned faculty cohort (32 hours)
- 4) Two half day in-services together as a faculty (7 hours)
- 5) One optional personal/professional day per year to go and observe or learn somewhere besides Trinity (8 hours)
- 6) On the two other days that are scheduled to be parent teacher conferences, it is understood that the time not being used for meeting with parents will be used by teachers for professional development.

This is a total of 80-90 hours of training per year devoted to professional development. This is double what we have had in the past. In order to accomplish this we had to be willing to cover the substitute teaching required to give the additional 4 days to work with the cohort and the one optional day per year. We also needed to make sure we put a more thorough substitute teacher training in place if substitutes were going to be used more.

For evaluation, we borrowed from Charlotte Danielson's model and ACSI's Leading Faculty to Excellence and then added a few modules of our own from Essential Elements of Instruction (a local teacher training in Northern Arizona for Christian schools) and our Classical Elements of Teaching developed by our faculty leaders.

The evaluation steps involve goal setting, observations, planning documents, self-evaluation, student artifacts, and written reflections on lessons all catalogued in the teacher's professional development portfolio.

Spiritual Formation and Biblical Worldview Training

All faculty will go through a handful of reflection exercises in order to determine where Jesus would lead them to focus their attention and growth. This is a Holy Spirit led self-directed decision. This avoids any ideas about a formula or certain way things must be developed in the growth of a faculty member. Once a decision is made goals are set and activities are discussed with a spiritual mentor. These activities are then added into the faculty member's professional development portfolio and discussed at semester meetings with the administrator or faculty coach.

All faculty will be assessed on their Biblical worldview on given topics. From this assessment, the teacher will discuss what areas of growth that will be most important given the teachers assigned classes.

A selection of Worldview Training materials will be available in the Library for faculty to choose from in order to strengthen the areas that need strengthening.

This will also be included in the teacher's professional development portfolio.

(This worldview assessment portion of the plan is still in beta test. We are having a few senior level faculty take some assessments in order to inform an ongoing discussion on how best to assess worldview in a teacher in such a way that is respectful, valid, and sensitive while still being affective. We are also following the work of a few studies being done on this and the improvement of said assessments.)

Ownership and Initiative of the Program

This is really the result of this program. The founding headmaster and leaders are working to delegate more responsibility and ownership to the classroom teachers, empowering them to lead in ways that are consistent with the mission and core values of the school. This is the goal. In order to accomplish this we have already identified teachers who can become leaders.

- 1) We raised 2 of the more senior teachers who have a great understanding of the distinctive of our school and sent them to coaching training and gave them the task of each coaching 2 or 3 teachers each this year.
- 2) We also identified a group of teachers who are serving as the Academic Council in order to work together to set academic policy, address training needs, and give counsel to the administrative leadership on things pertaining to the teachers and the academic program.
- 3) We appointed a curriculum chairperson who is in charge of convening the curriculum committee.
- 4) We set the teachers into cohort groups in order to work collaboratively across the curriculum ensuring that the school expected student outcomes were aligned with the different grades, subjects, and reflected the school mission and core values.

Step 5 – Sustainable Funding for the Plan

Several elements of this plan involve financial resources. The board agreed that it would be wise to allocate a portion of the Annual Fund to the training of teachers. This allowed us to double the amount of funding for teacher training. Additionally, we agreed to an ongoing tuition percentage increase in order to fund the salaries of the teachers. In order to continue with these increases in tuition, we also doubled our efforts in raising scholarship funds for families. As a result we have record enrollment, record scholarship amounts, and record teacher salaries all in the same year! Without this step all of the plan would have not succeeded because it takes money to implement all of these steps. We must fund our growth.

Step 6 – Seek Feedback and Continue to Monitor and Adjust the Plan

As more of the plan is implemented each year, we have put mechanisms in place to ensure that we are listening to the effect on teachers, students, and parents. This will plan serves as a baseline to start with as we grow, ensuring that we stay on mission as the founders intended. Stepping into the second decade of the school, we will diligently seek to improve the training and care of teachers as the school grows and changes.

What Challenges Did I Face?

- The #1 challenge I faced was figuring out how to provide the time for teachers to work on the added requirements. We solved this by taking a few half day in-services and making them full days and by getting substitutes to cover the time for the faculty cohort groups to work together.
- This led to the #2 challenge of funding the days the teachers had substitutes and funding the increases in salary for the different steps. We solved this by allocating a portion of the annual fund to teacher training and by agreeing to raises in tuition that could fund better salaries for our teachers.
- This tuition raise was another challenge. We solved this by doubling our efforts to bring in scholarship moneys going forward.
- It was a great challenge to figure out how to increase the trainings that we had and still include the many things already required of teachers by ACSI accreditation for example. We had to choose to more selective in what was required. For example, we chose to focus more on in house trainings with great materials then to always just go to the regional ACSI training.
- Another challenge is that we had to continue to work with a small number of staff members who just "didn't want more to do." This attitude was a very small minority of staff members. We are solving this through listening to their concerns and working to address them and through future hiring decisions.

What Did I Learn?

- In setting in place the teacher training, we needed to give the teacher's time in their schedule to complete the requirements. We cannot just add requirements without giving more time.
- It is very important to teachers that they not only have time to work through the requirements but that more importantly they have time to collaborate across the curriculum and across the grades. They really do value the time to collaborate and be a part of a team. This connectedness builds their morale and sense of ownership, resulting in a greater professionalism.
- Tying compensation to training levels with appropriate assessments or proof of competence at that level is a great way to encourage teachers in their professional growth and does not carry the same "baggage" as merit pay for teachers based on students' performance.
- Teacher evaluation needs to be more of a 360 view including teacher self evaluation, administrator observations, planning documents, and student artifacts.
- Teachers feel even more cared for when there is more intentional time given to their spiritual formation. Our staff responded very positively to this aspect of the program.
- Most teachers want greater ownership and are excited about being more involved in the direction of the program and being freed to be more involved in the creative process of building our school program.

What Difference Did It Make?

It seems that the results of a plan like this are difficult to observe right away. The true test of the impact of this program will be increasingly observable in the years ahead. That being said, the training and care involved in this faculty development program led to greater retention of teachers and much higher marks on the surveys from faculty this year. This organized the many different things we were doing for training and evaluation and just made this more streamlined, purposeful, and intentional. It is something that will allow us to train teachers and care for them in accordance with our mission and vision for years to come. Teachers are already becoming more willing to take on extra projects and responsibilities because they see it as part of a whole approach to caring for them and becoming a more collaborative learning community together.