

VAN LUNEN FELLOWS PROGRAM APPLIED PROJECT

# A Culture of Professional Development for Whittier Christian High School

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**Whittier Christian High School is an independent, coeducational, college-prep school of 658 students in grades 9-12, located in Southern California.**

### **Summary of Project Goals and Results**

**Goals:** In the quest for excellence at Whittier Christian High School, my Van Lunen project addressed the importance of building a robust professional development program for faculty and staff. I firmly believe that when the minds of the faculty and staff develop and transform, the end result is student growth and success. Based on this premise, a successful professional development program offers a significant predictor of whether or not the school will be relevant and thriving into the future. Consequently, my main goal was to develop a culture of professional development on our campus.

**Results:** Whittier Christian High School has made strides toward accomplishing this established goal. Both the beginning and the continued professional development conversation on campus have been successful, fostering professional growth and allowing for employee feedback and input. WCHS leadership firmly believes that the professional development program must be covered with the fingerprints of the faculty/staff to successfully implement and enhance the mission of our school. In that spirit, the WCHS Board, administration, faculty, staff, students, and parents have participated in multiple meetings and surveys this past school year to create a viable plan. The initial stages of this implementation have also taught me that a robust professional development program is a process that will require significant time and steadfast commitment.

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## The Focus of My Project

The main goal for my project revolved around developing a culture of professional development on our campus at Whittier Christian High School.

### Project Objectives:

1. Create a compelling vision to prioritize the development of our faculty and staff
2. Develop an excellent professional development program
3. Nurture a school culture with ongoing feedback among all stakeholders

## The Methods for Completing My Project & Project Results

- In the fall of 2011, I presented the vision for the WCHS Professional Development Program to the Board of Directors and gathered feedback/input.
- During November 2011 I shared the vision of the professional development program with the entire faculty and staff in two separate Friday staff meetings with open discussion. This month was also dedicated to gathering the faculty and staff's answers to the following two questions:
  1. What do you believe our needs are with professional development?
  2. What are our barriers to professional development?
- From November 2011 into the spring of 2012, the Head of School and the Administrative staff used this valuable information to further discuss the opportunities and challenges of the professional development program with academic department leaders and individual instructors or staff members.
- Two of the main outcomes of this process was the realization that the leaders of the WCHS professional community must:
  1. Foster a culture that highly values professional development.
  2. Create available "time" necessary to build a successful professional development program.
- At the conclusion of the conversations on campus, the Head of School along with the guidance of his consultant came to the conclusion that a viable plan for the 2012-13 school year would represent momentum and success for this project.
- The following areas have been selected to formally develop in building towards a robust professional development program at WCHS:

1. The Administration along with the Academic Senate will formally analyze the annual review process for all WCHS employees and consistently utilize this process into the future.
  2. All human resource documents used in the annual review will be reviewed by the Administration and outside consultation to maximize the effectiveness of each tool.
  3. The performance evaluation will be designed in a manner that requires a goal setting process for all employees.
  4. The Administration will enhance and implement a new teacher observation program where all teachers will be observed a determined number of times annually. Observation rubrics will be developed, and additional training for observers will be made available to those participating.
  5. The Administration and the Academic Senate will create specific learning objectives for all In-Service Days.
- Throughout this process, WCHS is grateful for the service of Rob Elliott and the entire Pondera Advisors staff.

### What I Learned Through the Project

- The input/feedback of faculty and staff is critical to the success of organizational objectives:
  1. With leadership valuing this truth, the professional development conversation is alive on campus.
  2. A great result of my project is both faculty and staff have engaged in offering feedback and input on professional development and other topics to advance our God-given mission.
  3. The review process began formally this school year for ALL employees with supplemental questions:
    - What was the highlight of your year here at WCHS?
    - What is a professional development goal you have for next year and how can the administration be of support?
    - What obstacles stand in your way from accomplishing your professional goals here at WCHS?
    - As you think of next year - what are you looking forward to and what are you concerned about?
    - How can we, the faculty and staff of WCHS, more effectively accomplish our school's mission?
- This is all a process that takes time and dedication.

1. Professional development is not yet an overall highly held value in the WCHS culture.
2. Available time is the single greatest challenge to developing a robust professional development program according to all gathered input.
3. The implementation of an excellent professional development program is a process that requires both significant time and a steadfast commitment to developing our employees.