

LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The goal of this project is to develop a comprehensive high school curriculum that will ensure the graduates from the four Lutheran High School Association (LHSA) schools will be able to make a successful transition into college.

The result of this project is that now, for the first time in the 64 year history of the Lutheran High School Association, all of its schools, within each department, share a common Mission Statement, Philosophy, Goals, Objectives, and most importantly, Standards. Each department has answered the question, “What do we want our students to know?”

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BACKGROUND

The State of Michigan recently made sweeping changes to the high school graduation requirements. Prior to these changes, the State's requirements were VERY minimal, leaving the determination of the requirements to the local communities. That is no longer the case. The requirements now meet or in several areas exceed the requirements of LHSA schools. As faith based schools, the LHSA schools are not required to follow the state graduation requirements. However, the decision by the State of Michigan to drastically increase the graduation requirements provided an excellent opportunity for us to evaluate what we currently teach, and require. From that study, we determined that we needed to first address why we teach what we teach, the focus of this study. Then in future years, why we require (graduation requirements) what we require.

95% of LHSA graduates continue their education at the college level. Therefore, the leadership team of the LHSA determined that, rather than adopting the State graduation requirements, we would develop a college prep curriculum based upon what colleges and universities require for incoming students. Not only will the graduation requirements be evaluated and modified, the entire curriculum will also be evaluated and modified to better prepare our students for college. Standards from college entrance exams (ACT), Michigan State Standards, and national standards for each department will be used in evaluating and rewriting each curricular area. Each department will also be expected to imbed faith-based standards into its curriculum, ensuring that we are who we say we are.

For 64 years, the schools of the Lutheran High School Association (LHSA) have shared common graduation requirements. Each school has had great latitude within those requirements to determine what was taught. This is the first time that a common curriculum based upon student outcomes with shared department mission statements, philosophy, and goals and objectives has been implemented.

PROFILE OF THE LUTHERAN HIGH SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

In 1944, the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LC-MS) churches in the Detroit area joined together to open a Lutheran High School to provide a quality, Christ centered (Lutheran) education for their families. Since that time, the Lutheran High School Association of Greater Detroit (LHSA) has operated Lutheran high schools in the Detroit metropolitan area. The LHSA currently operates four 9th -12th grade high schools with an enrollment of 1215 students: Lutheran High North located in a suburban area of Macomb County (634 students), Lutheran High Northwest located in a suburban area of Oakland County (308 students), Lutheran High Westland located in an urban area of Wayne County (231 students) and Lutheran High South located in a rural area of Monroe County (42 students).

There are 76 professional staff employed in the four schools. 93% of the professional staff are members of Lutheran churches. 75% of the professional staff are graduates of the Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod University system. 70% of the professional staff have a Masters degree or higher. 20% of the professional staff have a Masters degree plus 30 hours or higher.

THE PROCESS

In June of 2007, the faculty of the Lutheran High School Association began a three year process of curriculum development. Three questions based upon the “Professional Learning Communities” approach to education, are being used to direct the faculty’s work. The first question being addressed this year is, “what do we want our students to know?” To answer this question, the faculty has been busy creating department mission statements, philosophy, and goals. The majority of their department work has been in the selection of standards. These standards provide the basis for “what we want our students to know,” the learning expectations for each course in the curriculum. This is the focus of the Van Lunen Project.

Next year, the faculty will focus on the second question, “how do we know that our students have learned?” This will focus the faculty work on crafting assessment tools to measure the students’ level of success in attaining the stated standards for each course. In the third year, the faculty will address the question of, “what do we do if they do not learn?” The focus of the faculty within the final year will be in the development of different teaching strategies, related to the students’ differing learning styles.

The faculty of the four LHSA schools met in August to formally begin the task of developing and organizing the new curriculum design. Each department was given a department outline template to follow. By the end of the day, the majority of departments had successfully written their mission statement, philosophy, goals, and objectives. A few departments were beginning to make progress toward the adoption of standards.

A meeting in October enabled the faculties from the four schools to once again meet by departments to continue their work on the development of their department outlines. Each department was focused and on task. The primary focus of this in-service day was on the final adoption of department standards. Most departments felt comfortable with being able to accomplish the creation of the department outlines by the due date of January 18. The administrative team focused their time and attention on the Theology department, assisting them in the development of their standards, since no standards exist from our church body.

As of the due date, January 18, 2008, only 18 of the 40 department outlines were submitted . All department outlines were submitted by April 20. They were reviewed and proofed. The four Science department outlines were very close to being accepted. Slight modifications were made to the Science department outlines to bring them into compliance. Proofed copies of department outlines were returned to the faculty along with the corrected version of the Science outlines for the faculty to use as the example.

Another joint faculty meeting was held in June for the joint departments to once again to make revisions to their outlines. Since the meeting in June, all departments from each of the schools have submitted their updated department outlines. All department outlines with the exception of one department have been accepted.

Over the summer, faculty members will be working on the development of course outlines and syllabi following the templates they were given. These documents will be collected, reviewed, and accepted by each local school principal.

THE RESULT

For the first time in our history, our schools (faculty) have worked together to answer the question “What do we want our students to know?” The finished document that each department has produced captures the essence of who we are and what we are about. The department outlines that have been created will provide guidance and direction for each of our schools for years to come. Now that the difficult work of developing them has been done, modifications and enhancements to them as time goes on will be easily accomplished.

This past year has been full of challenges with turns and twists throughout. It began with changes in the perceived direction of the project from its beginning. At first each of our four schools expected to develop their unique curriculum for their school based upon their size and needs. The direction turned when the Superintendent directed that he expected the faculty to develop an Association-wide curriculum with slight differences from school to school. That change was a huge paradigm shift for our faculty who have been accustomed to nearly total independence and control of their local school department curriculum. In many cases each individual teacher who has had the freedom to decide what they teach in their classes also needed to change. Not only did they have to work with others in their department in their own school, they had to work with other teachers from other schools, AND they had to agree on the following key elements for the department outline: Department Mission Statement, Department Philosophy, Department Goals and Objectives, and Department Standards (what they want their students to know). Looking back, I am truly amazed at the accomplishments the faculty has made over the year.

LESSONS LEARNED

Do NOT make assumptions. I assumed the Superintendent;

- was on the same page with me regarding the direction and goals of the project. We were both heading in the same general direction, but not on the same path, I needed to adjust and get on his path.

Do NOT make assumptions. I assumed that the Principals;

- were going to take an active leadership role in this project since they were a part of the decision and the results of this project were going to greatly impact their schools. Once it was decided that this project was mine to lead, and even though they were asked to give input and given monthly (sometimes weekly updates), any questions from their staff were immediately directed to me. They were not at all interested in assisting with the proofing or approval of the department outlines that were submitted by their faculty. In the future, I would actively engage each Principal by assigning them a specific area of the project to oversee. One change that I did make was to place the Principals in charge of receiving and approving their local faculties’ course outlines and syllabi.

Do NOT make assumptions. I assumed that teachers;

- work collaboratively. This was a group project (system wide department project) which meant that teachers needed to share information and ideas with one another outside of the formalized time they had together. With all but a couple of exceptions, they did not call or email one another, and then were astonished when their outlines did not match up with one another.
- are natural leaders. They lead students every day. There was hesitation on the teachers’ part (within their peer group) to step up and take control of the meeting. They would have preferred that I appoint a leader for each department.

- can follow directions (templates/forms) since they expect students to follow directions every day. Some departments resubmitted their department outlines five times, not because of the content but because they did not follow the template, even when a sample (following the template) was provided. I am still at a loss as to how I could have made it more clear.
- would meet deadlines, since all teachers have deadlines for student assignments, papers, and projects. Less than half of the departments turned in the first draft of their department outlines by the due date. Some outlines were nearly three months late. Teachers have many demands upon them, and need to prioritize their time and focus. It could be that the writing and submission of their outlines was not a priority. With five months to complete the assignment, I am sure many people put it off, forgot about it, and then struggled to pull it back together. I should have broken down the assignment, requiring different pieces of the outline due at staggered intervals. This would have kept the project actively in front of the teachers. Secondly, I should have delegated the responsibility of collecting the outlines to the Principals, holding them accountable for the communication and collection of the outlines.

Do NOT make the assumptions. I assumed that I clearly and concisely communicated the rationale, benefits, and expectations of the project to the faculty.

- People do not always read thoroughly or with detailed comprehension. I needed to check for understanding and rephrase things, possibly several times. Even when I thought it was redundant, I should have sent information out again rewritten and rephrased.

Throughout this entire project, the key lesson learned relates to managing change. I went into this project with the belief that people would see the great value in having a hand in developing a formalized curriculum. I soon realized that everyone reacts to change differently. Yes, some will embrace change, many will have other reactions. A conference call with David Medema of Medema Consulting Associates LLC, in September, helped clarify how people react to change, and ideas to manage them based upon their response. David identified four ways people react to change and responses the leaders should have with each type.

- First is the victim. This person asks, “why me, why are you doing this to me? I already have so much to do, you are asking too much.” The response to the victim is to work with them on exploring choices. Help them see the choices that they have with the inevitable change that is coming. We had a few victim types who only saw how much time they would have to put in on this project. To address these concerns, three full in-service days for all faculties were provided as well as many local school faculty meetings were devoted to working on the project.
- Second is the critic. This is the person asks “why are we doing this?, I already do a great job. This is foolishness, and a waist of my time.” The leader in this case needs to build on the critic’s knowledge, have the critic have input into the process. Bounce ideas off of them. There were several critics, typically the teachers with many years of experience. I shared with them that we needed to tap their wisdom, getting it down on paper in an organized fashion, so that their legacy would follow as young new teachers were hired to replace them upon their retirement.
- Third is the bystander. They want to stay on the sidelines to see if this really worth their time or if it is really going to work. They may need more information before committing. The response to these people is to clearly explain the impact the change will have on them. I am sure each department had some bystanders, which may explain the delay in receiving the department outlines. My bystanders were in several instances, the

Principals, not because they had to be convinced about the value of the project, rather, because I was in charge and they have become accustomed to me taking care of everything when I am in charge of a project. Unfortunately, this was a much larger project than any before and did require the full buy-in of the Principals. This is an area that I need to focus on in the future.

- Fourth is the charger. These people will be so motivated that they will not wait for more explanations or for the timeline to follow. They will jump on the change with all that they have. These people need to be slowed down and given a deliberate pace to work. We did have three chargers, one of which was classic. He was so driven to get this project completed and implemented, that following the faculty meeting in August, he worked on the project for two straight days, pulling an all-nighter and turning in a department outline, course outlines and course syllabi the following Monday. I had to remind him that the department outlines were to be developed and adopted by the departments in each of the schools. I thanked him for his hard work and diligence on the curriculum project, and encouraged him to email his work to the other schools so that they could use his outline as a guide.

One other lesson that was reinforced for me was that people are more agreeable when they are fed. Breakfast and lunch were provided at each of the joint faculty in-services. As I would meet with individual faculty departments after lunch, I would take with me a case of candy bars to distribute. This small gesture broke the tension that I could feel as I walked into several of the meetings. Teachers were appreciative of the treat and could chew on something sweet, rather than me!

SUMMARY

This has been a great experience for our faculty as well as for me. Faculties from each of our schools have worked together which in itself is an accomplishment. Each of the ten academic departments has developed their department outline with common key elements. From those, each department in each school has personalized the outline for their specific needs. We now know what we want our students to learn.

I have personally learned that:

- I must be flexible, ready to adjust my plans as situations arise.
- I need to delegate more.
- I cannot assume anything.
- I need to communicate clearly and often.
- People react differently to change, and therefore must be dealt with differently.
- Keep a case of candy bars close by.
- Pray more often and truly release things to God!