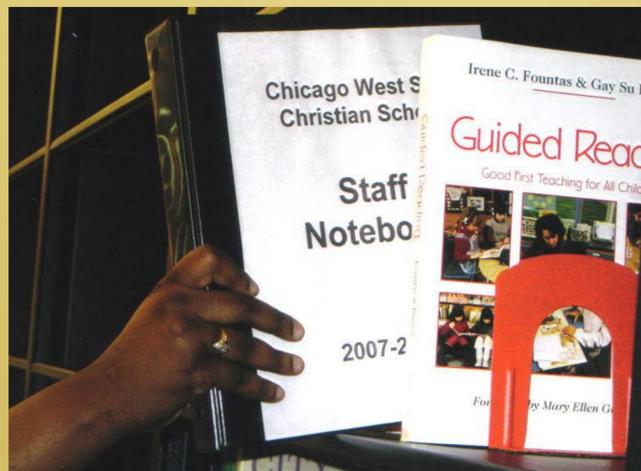


Developing Manuals That Reflect Mission, Shape Culture and Improve Education

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Project Summary

Project

We developed parent, staff and board manuals that contain organizational materials, procedures, policies, annual goals and materials to foster growth and reflection throughout the year.

Goal

Our goal was to create materials reflective of our school's mission and culture that would be used regularly to guide the school community's efforts to shape and improve the school.

Importance of Project

We wanted to make sure the manuals came off the shelf and were used! Because documents are often created, glanced at and forgotten, we understood the importance of making usable manuals that push forward an understanding of mission, culture and goals.

School Description

Chicago West Side Christian School is an urban Christian school that has served the primarily African-American North Lawndale neighborhood of Chicago for almost 40 years. Today, nearly 200 students in grades pre-K through 8 participate in Christ-centered education that seeks to equip students to lead and serve as Christians in the world.

Project Results

Parent Manual

The 2007-2008 parent manual, revised with parent and staff input, informed parents of key policies and procedures, the school's mission, and aspects of the school culture.

Unfortunately, many parents seemed to relegate the manual to the shelf quickly and often did not know its content. Thus, the manual will be revised again this summer with the following changes:

- Upload newly revised manual to website
- Add school photos, text boxes and a detailed index to heighten visual interest and make document more user-friendly
- Revise and rearrange content to better explain
 - Who we are (mission, culture and goals)
 - Expectations of parents and students
 - The school's programs, operations and policies

Staff Manual

The revised staff manual, developed by administration and staff, includes:

- organizational materials such as calendars, schedules
- contact information, forms, procedures and policies
- Sections on mission and school culture
- Goal-focused readings and action plans for professional development and annual goals.

Board Manual

The newly developed board manual reflects board training for the year and includes:

- discussion materials from BoardSource and articles on policy/procedure distinctions
- defining documents on the school's mission and culture
- bylaws, minutes and financial information

What We Have Learned

Work in Progress: Parent Manual

An interesting and engaging format is critical if we want the parent manual to be read. We must also provide both print and web-based access to the material,

Goal Achieved: Staff Manual

The staff manual was well-used throughout the year. Staff members appreciated that their manual could be used both as a reference tool and as a working document reflecting the staff's professional development activities and goal achievement throughout the year. As the school sets 2008-2009 goals, the manual will be revised to include and reflect those goals as well.

First Steps First: Board Manual

Our goal to develop the board manual moved quickly from creating the product (a policy-filled manual) to training the board about its roles and responsibilities in governance. The board has responded well and is eager to hold a retreat in August to evaluate and establish strategic goals. With ongoing training and goals in place, the board will move forward to add effective policies to its manual.

Final Thoughts

We learned a great deal about process, content, responsiveness and usefulness as we developed the three manuals. Each has a distinct audience whose needs must be understood and reflected in both format and content if the manuals are to be effective in helping the school community to understand, shape and improve the school.