

School
Reorganization:
Job Redefinitions

July 17

Nanaimo Christian School participated in an external school review as part of its ongoing pursuit of its vision and mission. This resulted in recommendations to move the school from a traditional Christian School model to a hierarchical system. This shift in school culture was to transition the principal and eight other key positions' into redefined roles and responsibilities. One of the changes was to move the principal into an executive management role. Mainly, this brought the development office under the supervision of the executive principal away from directly reporting to the board representative. The educational leadership team developed new job descriptions within this context as well as basing new leadership roles on personal strengths of gifts and talents. Rewritten job descriptions will be completed by year end. The transition resulted in new direction, increases in measureable outcomes, greater accountability and efficiencies. Positions and their vertical realignment are now in stark contrast to the previous horizontal system. New communication procedures and protocols are being established. Overlapping areas need attention and clarification since not all school activities fit in a specific position role. The project's allotted time span is eighteen months, ending June, 2012. The new direction will fully unfold in the years to come.

Contact www.admin.ncs@shaw.ca or Ph. 250.754.4512 for more information.

Changing
School
Structures
by John Reems,
Principal,
Nanaimo
Christian
School, 198
Holland Rd,
Nanaimo, B.C.

Project Focus and Method

In January, 2011 Nanaimo Christian School participated in a regular, provincial school review conducted by an external team of educational authorities from the advisory organization, the Society of Christian Schools in B.C. Its purpose was to examine the effectiveness of the school's practice in mission and vision, governance, administration, educational program, financial management, and parent partnerships and community relations.

The context of the visit was to bring NCS into a new reality since the previous six years saw the school experience major expansion, conducting its first capital campaign and staying with its organizational structures that have served it from its inception in 1988. Therefore, as change was 'in the wind', the critique exposed structural and governance practices that would be better served through a more streamlined, hierarchical model. Thus, a process was initiated that would change staff positions and identified nine positions requiring redefinition. It has been described as an opportunity to start the school as if it were in its first year, beginning from ground level. Consequently, education administration structures were primarily simplified to roles in staff and student development for vice-principals in a systemic model from Kindergarten through to graduation. Previously the education team was specialized by elementary, middle school and high school divisions with each vice-principal responsible for operations in their division. Their new definitions were created with an understanding of personnel strengths. The principal overseeing the school was enrolled in the Van Lunen Center (VLC) for Executive Management in order to prepare and equip him for new expectations. Along with the VLC, the school provided a board representative expert in business hierarchies for further training. By Christmas, 2011 the first administrative job descriptions were individually drafted by the teaching professionals. The preliminary drafts were processed and directed by the principal to the board governance member.

The central office employees comprised of development and office staff was ushered into the new structure through individual interviews with the head of school. In broadening the work assignments timely, Christian School International webinars and VLC consultants supported the internal development (admissions and in-school community relations) and external development (community relations, fundraising, annual goals, etc.) positions in re-writing their job tasks. These were drafted in the second school trimester.

Finally, the central office staff consisting of the administrative assistant, secretary and bookkeeper, is being transitioned at the time of this writing. The changes in their work will primarily focus on communication improvements. Increased expectations in internal school interactions and team work in promotions and marketing are projected. Further training in communication technology is needed to meet societal operational levels. These skills will support a new website launch with appropriate communication links and greater access to the organization (special events, inquiries, etc.)

The school community as a whole is gaining awareness and more mindful of the change and inherently understands the executive leadership model. It is a time of redefinition and renewal for the community.

Project Process Description

Implementation of the change began when the Board of Director's governance committee representatives visited the principal and outlined the new direction for the school. The principal was respectfully invited to consider the transition period and was given time to decide to implement the new direction. Upon acceptance, the decision process direction was outlined for the administration team. The principal was encouraged to apply and was accepted at the Van Lunen Center for further training. The administration team as a whole was asked to list all school responsibilities and activities and then sort them into new roles or "pillars". A change in school culture theme started through the local media, staff and membership meeting communications, school newsletter, etc. The principal engaged selected staff for processing job redefinitions.

Project Results

1. The new structural model and mindset has been established in staffing positions, culture, procedure, and communication flow. Some are not yet convinced and express misgivings. Fitting people into the model appears a simple task yet in a multi-tasking environment such simplicity is elusive. Not all tasks or people fit the model. For instance, the educational administration is sorting the sum of tasks that lie outside of their newly defined roles and still need doing.
2. A Development committee has started and establishes the school's first annual goals. The fundraising target of \$50,000 is exceeded through increased communications and expectations of the external Development Officer. Promotions increase promotion strategies in the new website launch and advertising targets through promotional posters in churches and the community, church bulletin inserts and on the community television bulletin board.
3. The principal becomes the pathway for board communication. All positions report to the principal. The Board of Directors is to administer their vision and resourcing mandate through the principal position, intentionally freeing the group from involvement in daily operational matters. Envisioning responsibilities are to be enhanced allowing for "strengthening what is and creating what isn't". Noticeably, the board now operates more at "arms-length" making communications and relationships more formal and distant. Such distancing puts greater need for improvement in communication from the executive principal. As process is 'transitional' some procedures take time to learn and put in effect and old habits of staff directly contacting the board were quickly corrected.

The educational leadership team indicated increased stresses particularly in assuming new roles while simultaneously administering in the older model areas. Greater team support and "check up" times were not scheduled and should have been as each team member focused on personal 'territory' reducing teamwork opportunities for growth in the new direction. Yet, the vice-principals met more often with each other as the principal increased meetings with the central office staff. Full team meetings became more attentive to the "how and who". This detractor took away from school direction development.

Development staff was receptive to onsite support, appreciating webinar information sessions and greater resourcing from the VLC. Fertile ground was tilled for renewal and creativity in their work. Redefining work roles serves as a communication key, allowing staff to know their responsibilities and roles and provides for measurable outcomes increasing accountability and capacity. One cannot assume

that general organizational flow charts (see attachments) and explanation of the hierarchical model will give internal clarity. Staff job descriptions serve that function and are now in place. This can only benefit the school as it moves forward into its next season.