

Yuma Lutheran School Strategic Plan
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The Need for a Strategic Plan

In the four years I've been at Yuma Lutheran School, I have noticed several things. The school community is one that is always in transition. The city of Yuma and our school are both very transient. With a heavy military population, migrant farmers, and border patrol stations, families are constantly moving in and out of the area. Not only do we have a fluctuating school population, we also have a fluctuation in our teaching staff. While we have several veteran staff members, more than half of them are newer than I am. Fourteen of my 22 full time teachers have been at the school for three years or less. Yuma Lutheran has also had four principals in the last 10 years. Because of this fluctuation, there are really no traditions here, there is no future planning and no one to steer the school into the future. The one constant is the senior pastor who has been at the church for 23 years. With a church to run, he has little to do with the future development of the school. For a school of 60 years, I'm surprised by the lack of a strategic plan or goals for the future life of the school. The recent growth of the school and being a part of the Van Lunen program have made it clear that a plan needs to be put together to support the growth of the school and the development of the program we provide. Working with Elisa Carlson and discussing our situation with other Lutheran School administrators, has led me to develop the Strategic Plan for Yuma Lutheran School. The Strategic Plan covers three main areas:

accommodating the growth of the student population, developing the technology curriculum, and building our Service Learning Program.

Accommodating Growth

Our student population has grown by 100 students in the last 4 years. We have split combined classes, added teaching staff, hired a full time Exceptional Student Services teacher, hired an assistant principal and opened a 3rd section of one of our grades. We have waiting lists for most grades for the coming school year and have outgrown our space. We would like to expand our facilities to include a science lab, a media center, additional classrooms, a room to be used for our music program and a space for our before and after school care. Ten years ago, the church took on the debt of adding a 10,000 square foot gymnasium. Until that debt is paid off, they are not willing to take on any additional debt. The school, being a ministry of the church, is not allowed to take on debt of its own. The congregation is about 2 years away from being debt free, however, I would like to start the building process before that. My goal is to raise 2 million dollars during the 2018-2019 school year to present to the church so that we can get started earlier. During the 2018-2019 school year I will work with a fundraising consultant to reach this goal.

Technology Curriculum

Yuma Lutheran School and the Parent Teacher Organization have spent thousands of dollars the last several years to outfit each classroom with chromebooks, iPads, projectors, Apple TV's, and other technology resources that teachers have requested. To date, a parent volunteer that is knowledgeable in this area has managed all of our resources and trained our staff. This year her husband has taken a new job that will take them out of the Yuma area. With no formal

curriculum in place for our school, we need to begin development on a technology curriculum and hire someone to manage all of our devices. I have asked for a job description from our volunteer so I know all that she has been doing for our school for the last 6 years.

Service Learning Program

The final piece of our Strategic Plan includes the development of our Service Learning Program. In 2016 we began serving the Yuma community through this program. Each grade level has chosen a focus. For example, the seventh grade focus is on Children Helping Children. They participate in the Cuddle Kit program making blankets for children in the Yuma community and also volunteer at two Yuma Special Olympic events. We have a part time director for this program. The first two years have been busy finding activities for the students to participate in and for the most part, have been trying to figure out what works and what doesn't work. It's time to sit down and figure out real goals and objectives for this program. I believe this program can be a huge help to the community and a great opportunity for our students to develop a desire to want to serve others.

What I Learned During This Process

The most important thing I learned is that the school can't take on its own debt. While I understand this, it makes the process longer. Before the congregation will take on more debt, they want to pay off the current debt. This is a great practice and I'm glad they are fiscally responsible. However, it makes it more difficult for me to be able to move forward as quickly as I want/need to. I would love for our building project to be completed for the 2019-2020 school year. I don't think that is realistic. I'm hoping that by raising some money for this project this coming year, it will help bring excitement to the congregation and help us move forward. That

being said, this will also be a busy year for me because it is an accreditation year. It seems that those years are always busy. Now that I know the process for getting large scale projects done through the church, I can better prepare myself going forward. I've also learned that I need to be patient. I've always been a person that has a plan and wants to get it completed now! The church process really slows that down! It's not a bad thing, but I will have to learn to be more patient during the process.

The Difference it Makes for Yuma Lutheran School

I think the biggest difference it makes for our school is the team building through this process. I don't think the staff has ever really felt like a part of the big picture here. Part of that is because there really hasn't been a big picture. In 60 years it seems like there has been no vision for the school. The school has seen some hard times in the past and so much focus has been on just staying open. In the recent 10-15 years the school has really started growing. In just the four years I've been here, we've grown by over 100 students. We are around 30 students from maximum capacity for the current space we have. It's time to focus on the potential of our school and to continue to show the community that we are the #1 choice for Christian schools in Yuma.

The additional classroom space will impact the school in several ways. It will provide us with 3 more classrooms. Two years ago we added a third kindergarten class. In order to do that, we had to give up one of our preschool classrooms. One of the new classrooms will be used for an additional preschool classroom. Since we downsized the preschool, we have had as many as 20 students on a waiting list. It is not beneficial for us to continue to turn away that many students each year. The other 2 classrooms will open up the opportunity for us to move our library to a bigger space and set up a media center as well. It can be used as a computer lab or

project area. Just having the space for a teacher to bring a class will be great! We could use one of the rooms for a makerspace or for just an extra classroom. We are always looking for an extra space and this could be the opportunity for just that. We have a new science teacher that has done a great job in making our middle school science classes much more hands on. By using part of the new space for a science lab, it will give us an opportunity to grow that program even more. Our music classes currently meet in the church fellowship hall and could have their own space. The orchestra class meets in the back of the church and could be moved to their own space. Our youth program for the church doesn't have a designated space to meet each week and our building project would include a space for them as well. The other space we need is a meeting space. Currently the staff meets in a classroom for all professional development and for staff meetings. We are getting too large to fit in any of our classrooms. A new meeting space will be created to be able to fit us comfortably!

We have been adding new technology devices to our campus faster than we probably should be. Our technology person is excited to get devices in the hands of those teachers that are willing to learn to use them. We need to take a step back to determine the best plan to implement and use the devices that we've already purchased. Our technology curriculum will be updated and we will have a better system for adding and implementing new devices.

We are so excited to take our Service Learning Program to the next level! We want to include parents, provide video updates as service projects are completed and include an evaluation process after each event. We want our students to create habits of lifelong service to others. What a blessing to be able to serve those in our own community.

Going through this process helped me focus on a few items that need to be addressed instead of the long list I keep creating for myself. Thank you for the support, the amazing training I've received and the community of great leaders I've been introduced to. The Van Lunen program is something that I will recommend to any leader looking to improve themselves and grow as an individual. I pray that this program continues to reach leaders as it has reached me!