



IDENTITY

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Background

Over the past 3 years, Nanaimo Christian School has undergone some significant change and challenge. In general, the changes have been positive and have resulted in a higher level of staff satisfaction, financial stability and increasing enrolment, however, there are still lingering effects that need to be addressed. The former Principal, who was in that position for 19 years was let go, causing the staff and community to be divided. Drastic changes and conflict within the Board have resulted in a newer Board of passionate and commitment parents who are still working to understand their roles as Board members.

With so much change, it was my belief that our school had lost its identity. Before we could look at expansion for our growing school, a development message needed to be created. The identity of Nanaimo Christian School needed to be made clear in order for us to truly have impact on the lives of our students, to bring unity to the Board, and become known in our community; we needed to know who God has called us to be. Our identity **MUST** be rooted in His plans for Nanaimo Christian School.

The Plan

I drafted an ambitious plan and submitted it to the Van Lunen Faculty for review. In their wisdom, they acknowledged that the tasks I had identified were good, but that my timeline for completion was unrealistic. The initial plan was then turned into a 3 year plan and for the purpose of this project, four of the tasks became the focus of my Van Lunen Project.

Using Simon Sinek's terminology of The Golden Circle, the IDENTITY plan was developed to help the NCS community to understand the **WHY**, in order to provide future direction for the **WHAT** and implementation or improvement on the **HOW**. As the identity is developed, the what and how will most likely change in response to a better understanding of of who we are called to be. Developing this identity was the focus of the Van Lunen project during the 2015-16 school year and will provide the basis for an ongoing strategy in years 2 and 3. A graphic is provided in Appendix 1.

Two of the four tasks played a very minor part of the project as they were either in process, needed to become more intentional, but did not require significant effort. Developing a community of mind was easier than expected, with the exception of building stronger relationships with the First Nations community in our area. The graduate profile needed some minor adjustments but continues to provide us with a 'measuring stick' on our effectiveness. The other two tasks were not as easy! These tasks are outlined below, including accomplishments, obstacles, celebrations, and the impact that it is having.

The 4 Tasks

Community of Mind

“Community does not develop naturally. It requires tremendous struggle and the answers to all the tough questions are in the struggle. The struggle...is essential because the children we teach will not care how much we know until they know how much we care. A school that is a true community is a group of individuals who have learned to communicate honestly with each other; who have built relationships that go deeper than their composites, and who have developed some significant commitment to rejoice together, mourn together, delight in each other, and make each other’s conditions their own.” - Thomas Sergiovanni, Building Community in Schools, p. 32

This task proved easier than initially thought thanks to a group of parents who connected with purpose and offered to help by ensuring that new families were not only welcomed at the start of the year, but they were continually provided with opportunities to engage with the NCS community. More community events and a changing our new parent orientation night to face-to-face coffee meetings with the Principal have had a very positive impact.

Unfortunately, attempts to strengthen relationships with our local First Nations band, the Snuneymuxw, was not reciprocated. Rather, due to a lack of understanding of our tuition model a human rights tribunal was filed against me for discrimination as our First Nations families do not receive a graduated family rate. This is due to the fact that education for First Nations is funded federally and has resulted in a time consuming process. Thankfully, the Federation of Independent Schools in BC is advocating on our behalf to have the tribunal dropped.

Board Development

With an inexperienced Board of only 5 members, training and development was needed in order for the Board to provide the leadership, direction and support necessary. Ed Noot from the Society of Christian Schools in BC was a great asset as he provided ongoing consultation to myself and the Board chair through this process. In all honesty though, my relationship with the Board and the lack of consistent leadership from them, is currently my greatest stress as the Principal of NCS. It is important to acknowledge that their intent is great and they have made some very good strides forward but that it is my impatience at the pace of the Board development that adds to the stress.

It was intended that the Board would journey into understanding of their governance structure, from operational to visionary or somewhere in between. I was able to get the entire Board to attend a Board develop conference and Ed Noot, from SCSBC, has met with several Board members on two occasions to help and guide this process as well. Although, I do believe that a better understanding that the role of the Board should be less operational, there is still a default tendency to micromanage operations.

The most significant accomplishment of the Board this past year was the creation of a Board member's handbook. It identifies roles and committee responsibilities, meeting expectations, navigating between being a parent and a Board member. It includes a commitment letter that must be signed and an interview process for any new Board members to ensure they support the mission and vision of the school.

A major role that I played during this past year was to train Board members through teachable moments to help them understand their roles and process in a very tangible way. Even though I was guided through this by Ed Noot, and cautioned about some of the dangers, it served well for a time, but needed to end abruptly. Several Board members felt that this approach was micromanagement of the Board, which was never the intent. It was interesting to observe as I stepped back from Board involvement and focussed on other areas. There was confusion, panic, and no Board actions were completed for 5 months. However, I see now that this was a necessary step as it forced the Board to have conversations, for someone to step up and take the chairperson role and for the Board as a whole to appreciate the magnitude of the responsibility that they have committed to. So, even though it did not occur in the manner that was planned, the outcome ending up being similar.

The Board has a long way to go, but I believe they are on the right track. I have not had a clear job description in my three years at NCS and I have asked for this to be a next Board priority. Not only will this provide some direction for me, I also believe it will help to clarify what the Board needs to be responsible for. It is my prayer it will remove micro-management of operations and equip the Board to become the leaders that our school needs, who protect the mission and vision.

Graduate Profile

Several years ago, a graduate profile was drafted that focussed on academic excellence, spiritual growth and lifestyle integrity, however it was not widely used or publicized. As part of this identity project, the profile was altered to align to the new mission and values, providing measures in the categories of Belong, Believe, Achieve, as outlined in the Mission and Values task.

Mission and Values

Entering into its 28th year, Nanaimo Christian School's mission statement has remained relatively unchanged. However, the school community, the city of Nanaimo, the philosophy of education and pedagogical approaches have all changed dramatically. The mission statement, although worded well was long on statement and short on mission. The mission statement from 1988 was as follows:

The Nanaimo Christian School is a Christ-centered, grace filled community, serving in partnership with Christian families for the purpose of educating our children to the fullest of each one's unique potential. We encourage students and staff to pursue excellence in

all aspects of life by sharing a Biblically based curriculum that will enable them to impact their world for Jesus Christ in the quest of their calling.

Following the process as directed by Zach Clark, the staff, the Board and the parent community were all invited to initial sessions in which everyone was able to share what they value about Nanaimo Christian. Although the first planning session with the Board was scheduled for August 2015, it did not actually happen until January 2016. For myself, this was frustrating as it felt like we were months behind where I had hoped we would be in this process. During this time, the Board and I were challenged on some significant issues forcing us to truly reflect on our beliefs. An admissions application from a same gendered couple for their kindergarten aged daughter and a grade 8 student proclaiming his same gender attraction challenged each of us to think about what it meant to be in Christian community. Do we remain a covenantal community or do we incorporate a missional focus into our identity? I believe the Lord laid these issues before us as they become instrumental in guiding us to greater unity through this process.

During this time, the staff reviewed their own lists of value statements in small groups and several themes were clearly identified. Nanaimo Christian School is a community, it is a place where students are accepted for who God has called them to be, we provide Christian education and we are innovative. The staff were then put into divisions and challenged to use these value statements to write a statement that reflected the WHY of their specific divisions and could be used as a measure. This is what the divisions drafted:

K-5: *Kindergarten to Grade 5 at NCS is a Christ-centered community that loves and cares for kids and intentionally celebrates their individual growth in relationships, in Faith and in academics. Loving Kids and Celebrating Growth*

Middle School: *NCS Middle school is different. We're always moving, laughing, and learning in new ways. We celebrate progress over perfection and skills over content because we love that each student is unique. We help kids discover who they are and who they're called to be. Middle school is a community. We live together, learn together, and grow together. We belong here.*

High School: *Nanaimo Christian High School is a community where students and teachers work together to create learning experiences that are challenging, flexible and relevant. We provide Christ-centered learning that responds to student culture, needs and interests. Choice is important. Gifts are developed. Our students will have impact.*

Using these statements, praying for clear direction 7 mission statements were drafted for the Board to begin reviewing. Unanimously, one statement was selected and modified that reflected most accurately who we felt God was calling us to be. A mission statement short on statement but long on mission, with clearly identifiable measures:

In community, NCS pursues Christ-centered educational excellence that equips students to live Biblically, act responsibly, work cooperatively, communicate effectively and achieve success in who God has called them to be. Belong, Believe, Achieve.

The core values that support the mission, took several meetings to review and revise, but these are exciting descriptors that truly support the mission statement:

- Nanaimo Christian School is **Christian community** – everything that we do and teach is rooted in the Christian faith and founded upon God and His Word. We desire to partner with families in the education and spiritual growth of our students.
- Nanaimo Christian School is a **community of grace** – we go beyond just rules and consequences in order to reach the hearts of our students and inspire Christ-like transformation.
- Nanaimo Christian School is **responsive** – we recognize the uniqueness of each student and strive to exceed expectations and provide a positive school experience for all.
- Nanaimo Christian School is a **safe haven** – we commit to provide an environment where students are protected both physically and emotionally, and provide a loving atmosphere where they can safely grow into the person God has called them to be.
- Nanaimo Christian School is **forward-thinking** – we value innovation and strive to discover the best practices for student learning.
- Nanaimo Christian School is **intentional** – we lead, serve, and teach with great passion because we are confident in what God has called us to do. We work to cultivate that same passion in every one of our students.

The parent community of NCS was surveyed and 89% indicated that they were very supportive of the revised mission statement, 9% indicate that they were supportive, and 2% indicated that they were not supportive. All of the core values received over 92% support in the same survey. When voted upon by the school society, both were passed unanimously.

Conclusion

This identity project has and will continue to have transformational impact on Nanaimo Christian School and ultimately in the lives of our students. It is the intent that the process that Zach Clark has been walking me through will continue as we take the revised mission and values and being to craft a development message and a strategic plan with giving driven steps. Through this message and plan, long term priorities will be clarified, as well as immediate needs that will enable us to move forward in our vision for graduates.

I am incredibly grateful for all of the help support from the Van Lunen Program as I do not believe NCS would have come so far so quickly in addressing some significant needs. The faculty, my fellows, and my consultants, have not only had tremendous impact on me, personally and professionally, they have impacted my staff, my Board, my school, my community and the city of Nanaimo.

Praise be to God!

Appendix 1

