

## **Better before Cheaper**

Name and Position: Raymond Verburg

School: Community Christian School

Location: Drayton, Ontario, Canada

Email: [principal@ccsdrayton.org](mailto:principal@ccsdrayton.org) or [rayverburg@gmail.com](mailto:rayverburg@gmail.com)

Consultant: Dan Kraus, (719) 278-9600, [dan@graceworksministries.org](mailto:dan@graceworksministries.org)

### **Project Description and Outcomes**

The title of this project, “Better before Cheaper” reflects the complexity of this project. All of the initiatives focused upon school improvement. These initiatives focused upon items that were part of a strategic plan that Community Christian School adopted in January 2016. The purpose of focusing in on school improvement was to ensure that we had a school that had established and identified high satisfaction among our parents. Our desire was to confirm that our parents believed they were receiving significant value for their tuition. An important part of plan also included a communication plan that will help us to focus on telling our story in a way that reinforced the value of Christian education at Community Christian School. Our desire was to have this in place before we proceeded with two larger and more significant tasks, tuition restructuring and a substantial capital campaign for infrastructure improvements.

This project had many elements that worked towards the overall goal. All together the initial plan had eleven goals and they were:

1. Board adopt consent agendas to focus more time on strategic goals.
2. Create a strategic plan dashboard to draw attention to progress or lack of progress in achieving strategic goals.
3. Create a new vision statement that expressed our vision from the viewpoint of desired student outcomes.
4. Develop a brand playbook and communication plan to define our identity and to tell the story of that identity.
5. Begin a Word of Mouth taskforce and campaign.
6. Send out a Parent Satisfaction and Referral survey through GraceWorks Ministries.

7. Develop a school health indicators dashboard for the Board to maintain a vigilant watch on the health of the school.
8. Develop an external website that communicates our story and easily draws people into the story.
9. Develop an internal website to meet the specific needs of parents and students.
10. Change our tuition structure to move away from relying on donors to finance the day to day operations of the school.
11. Create a donor plan that benefits from all of the changes above.

This was an ambitious project, but through the dedication and hard work of many individuals we were able to accomplish many great things. I have included examples or documents that demonstrate the results of our work in the appendices of this paper.

Over the past year, our Board of Directors adopted or is working toward achieving several aspects of this project. At the October Board meeting, they approved the strategic plan dashboard as a reporting tool on the progress and achievements of our strategic plan. At the November Board meeting, we began to use a consent agenda to save time at Board meetings. Over several meeting the Board wrestled with school health indicators and sent two items to other workgroups to develop sections of the plan. This work is still ongoing.

One group that dedicated a large amount of time and effort towards achieving the goals of this plan was our Communication and Marketing Taskforce. This taskforce began its work by reviewing and refining our identity. Inspired by the work of Simon Sinek, we wanted to understand our why. We received feedback from our parents during a membership meeting in the fall. Out of that work, we wrote a new mission and vision statements and also created a new tagline. After these were approved by the Board, we turned our focus on creating a brand playbook that clearly identifies who we are, our values and how we wish to tell that story. The brand playbook is in the final draft stages. The work of this taskforce is now complete and many

members of this team have confirmed or are considering taking leadership on our Word of Mouth team that will begin its work in the fall.

In January, we sent out the Parent Satisfaction and Referral Survey through GraceWorks Ministries. It took several months, to gather enough responses to create a report. We received ninety responses from parents, staff, donors and alumni with the majority of responses (62) from our parent community. The survey highlighted the love our community has for our school. We received a satisfaction score in the 71<sup>st</sup> percentile compared to all of the Christian schools in GraceWorks Ministries' database. We scored in the 77<sup>th</sup> percentile for parents willing to make referrals and we scored in the 28<sup>th</sup> percentile on program elements, so while parents are satisfied, we have work to do on our program elements to ensure that parent satisfaction continues into the future. One very helpful tool that we received as being a part of this survey was the addition of a Word of Mouth Strategy Calendar that will guide the work of our team in the fall.

The development of our websites did encounter some snags throughout the year. We had a small team of three individuals, none with a lot of website development experience. Two of the members of this team were involved in other activities of this project, the chair of the Communication taskforce and myself, which made time to dedicate to this work difficult to find. Also, we purchased a template that we liked and thought it would be easy to plug in our content; however, the template was not as user friendly as we initially thought and hoped. This work will take greater priority next year.

Finally two of the bigger aspects of this project, tuition restructuring and a donor plan to kick off a capital plan are at the very beginning stages. Conversations surrounding tuition restructuring are beginning. Many of the conversations happened organically from the other work being completed. The Board approved in May to work with Chuck Evans to begin the process of

understanding a tuition structured on value and protecting the income side. We hope to have a Skype conference in September or October. The Board also approved the hiring of an architect in the fall to help us understand the potential and the limits of our current structure in meeting learning goals and facility improvements. We hope the architect will help us create a “strategic plan” for capital investment. This work will lay the foundation for a capital campaign and donor plan that incorporates the items that I learned in this program.

It has been a busy, but rewarding year.

### **What I Learned**

I have grown in my skills over the past year due to the things I learned within the program and as I worked to achieve the goals of this project. I have learned that finding efficiencies in meetings creates the space for better and more strategic conversations. These conversations are very engaging, which leads to greater satisfaction of the participants and a greater willingness to serve.

I have learned that engaging conversations and true collaboration is a powerful leadership tool. The Communication and Marketing Taskforce meetings were the highlight of my year. This team freely shared ideas and feedback without the fear that any idea would be rejected without careful consideration of the idea.

I have developed my facilitation skills. Each element of my project required that I lead small groups in developing ideas. I learned how to listen to their ideas, draw out those ideas, silence is a powerful tool in order to wait for ideas to appear, ask clarifying questions and restate what was said. At the beginning, I feared facilitating these sessions, but by the end of the year I was becoming more and more comfortable and I look forward to continuing this learning journey.

I have learned about marketing and communications. I had almost no experience in this area. I have researched and learned about the marketing world. My knowledge is still limited, but I am more comfortable engaging in conversations about this topic.

### **The Difference It Made**

This project is changing our school for the better. This project has facilitated a governance change that was occurring slowly over the past few years, but now has sped up that change. The Board is now thinking and acting strategically. I believe that we are now a strategic board. Day to day operations are no longer part of Board meetings. All of the discussions and decisions have strategic and long term implications.

Also, I am seeing a community that coming together around a stronger vision. As more small groups are invited in to help identify and work with the vision, there is a greater degree of buy in that translates to enthusiasm. I see evidence that this school community is going to grow stronger. I also see evidence that this also has caught the attention of the devil. There were several moments during the year that I sensed spiritual warfare. This only drove me closer to the Lord and to fully rely on His strength, wisdom and comfort.

This project opened the doors for important conversations to occur. As we wrestled with our identity, words and ideas, items on this project list that I did not share with others began to happen organically. They became natural starting points in beginning the work of a new goal. I knew this project was ambitious, but we achieve a lot more than I expected. I think that the engagement lead to those conversation, so work could begin without me laying down the foundation first. They laid their own foundation. By listening, I only pointed out what they were doing.

Through the Parent Satisfaction and Referral survey, we also learned about our weaknesses and the treats that exist. This allowed for us to name them without it being negative or a personal attack on anyone. It was feedback and now we have to work with it and solve the issues. By doing it this way, through a third party and norm referenced survey, there is a greater willingness to accept the feedback.

Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this fellowship program over the last year. It has been a great professional development experience that is making our school better.