

Strategic Planning & Enrollment Growth



Hollandale Christian School has been providing Christian Education in Southern Minnesota for the past 60 years. During that time our constituent base has shifted, making 2010 the perfect time to begin the process of Strategic Planning. To help us identify our areas of strength and our areas of weakness, a survey was created. This survey then became the foundation for our strategic plan.

Twelve key school community members were responsible for analyzing the information into eight key goals under the four overarching themes of Personnel, Program, Facility and Finances. This document will help our school remain true to the mission and vision of providing Christ-centered education even while the key players may change.

As part of the Strategic Planning process, new ideas were utilized in an attempt to increase our visibility and thereby increase our enrollment. It remains to be seen whether these changes will have the intended impact and outcome.

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Rationale for Strategic Planning

Hollandale Christian School has been providing quality Christian Education in Southeastern Minnesota for the past 60 years. Over the course of those years our constituent base has shifted from our students coming from one church to now having over 20 churches represented. This outreach has been exciting for our school. Many students and families are being impacted for Christ.

I have been a teacher at HCS for 12 years, with 5 of those years also as the principal. The focus of my project for the Van Lunen Fellowship involved 2 main parts; Strategic Planning and Enrollment Increase. Strategic planning was deemed to be an important course to pursue by the current members of the school board who were convinced of the value of this endeavor.

The question at the heart of our project was “What can we do to raise the bar of Christ-honoring excellence and help advance the effectiveness of Hollandale Christian School for future generations?” Working from this beginning point we prayed that God would continue to receive glory and honor as we desired to spread His word to those in our community.

Much of the credit for the direction and creation of our school’s strategic plan goes to the consultant I worked with on this project, Mr. Don Distelberg. His advice was invaluable and the amount of time and effort he put into our school’s strategic planning was deeply appreciated by all.

Process of Strategic Planning

The process of strategic planning was begun at the end of the summer of 2009. The school board was behind the project and a committee was established. The committee was made up of 12 members. The entire 7 member board was part of this group along with the administrator, 2 faculty members, 1 parent and 1 alumnus. The initial contact with the committee members was done via email to let them know the steps we would follow in the process of strategic planning.

At the beginning of the 2009-2010 school year I created a survey to be given to all parents. This survey addressed the following categories:

- School Philosophy and Mission
- School Leadership
- Instructional Program
- Growth
- Spiritual Development
- School Culture
- Technology Services

- School-Home Partnership
- Facilities
- Finances

Parents were invited to give their opinion of various questions under these headings and also had the opportunity to comment in general on the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Don Distelberg was able to proof the survey and offer valuable suggestions before its distribution. Of the surveys sent out, 88% were returned. The responses were tabulated and copies of the survey were made available to the members of the school board and the strategic planning committee.

During our December board meeting, we spent time discussing the results of the survey and paid particular attention to the comments. These proved to be a good thermometer to measure the feelings of many families.

At the time of the Van Lunen conference in January, these steps had been taken. It was during discussions at this conference that I became convinced of the need to have someone other than myself facilitate the actual strategic planning session. Don Distelberg consented to come to Minnesota to lead our team through the process of Strategic planning.

During a Saturday in March, the 12 member team met with Don for 6 hours to go through Strategic Planning for Hollandale Christian School. We began with a look at the mission statement that we adopted 5 years ago. The team was still satisfied that our mission statement gave words to who we were, so we proceeded to draft core values that helped us look forward with a vision for where our school hopes to be within the next 5 years.

We used the SWOT analysis to identify key areas for concentration in the drafting of a strategic plan that will be useful to the current school board, and administration and faculty, as well as the future leaders of our school. This time of discussion was extremely beneficial to all involved as it gave us a chance to dialogue about key aspects of our educational program and the needs of our community.

By dividing into different groups and sharing our discussions with the larger group we are able to cover a wide variety of topics in relation to the Christian education we are providing. The times of sharing were important times of reaffirmation as we continue to plant seeds in the hearts and minds of our students.

Our strategic plan is built on several underlying principles. Among these are: to be effective, to be realistic, to be visionary, to be practical, and to be relevant. By setting a goal of where we as a school want to be for the 2014-2015 school year, we have set up some practical steps to help us achieve this vision. Another important step in our strategic planning process was to identify not only the strengths and weaknesses of our organization, but more importantly the opportunities that we should be utilizing.

Moving Forward with our Strategic Plan

The draft of a Strategic Plan for Hollandale Christian School included 8 key goals under the main headings of Personnel, Program, Finances and Facility. For each of these 8 goals we have a 5 year plan for implementation of our objectives. We also identified the person or persons responsible for seeing that these goals are promoted and fulfilled.

The Strategic Plan for the Hollandale Christian School was adopted in May. The newest board members and faculty were given a copy of the adopted Strategic Plan and time has been scheduled during the next board meetings to be sure we are beginning to put into action the necessary steps to work at our Strategic plan. The challenge will be to make time during the regular board meetings to ensure that we are staying true to the mission and vision we have set before us and to take the steps necessary to see that we move forward in boldness and with the leading of the Holy Spirit as we seek to provide Christian education in this place.

The entire process of Strategic Planning was a great learning experience for our school. One of the most important outcomes was an understanding by the board members that all members of the school community need to embrace the mission and vision for our school. If it is just the vision of a few, it will be difficult to move forward. I look forward to working with the school board to challenge ourselves to be the hands and feet of God in this place and to work towards advancing His kingdom at Hollandale Christian School.

Enrollment Increase Strategies

A second part of my project included some strategies to increase enrollment at our school. Our enrollment has been fairly steady at about 80 students over the past 10 years. The economy has impacted our tuition and therefore our families. Our school continues to operate on a tight budget with reliance on donations as well as tuition monies.

Our school can easily support another 10-20 students without any major staffing changes. It is our hope and desire to attract new families so that we can hold our tuition steady and make Christian School affordable to our families.

To spread the word about our school a few strategies were put in place. We set up a few home meetings where some families were able to invite at least 1 new family to their home to share about Hollandale Christian School. We will continue to encourage these types of informal gatherings to share by word of mouth what our school is about.

Another step to increasing enrollment was a new informational brochure. This brochure was created with the help of an alumna who lives in the Twin Cities and

considers using her talents as a gift to our school. The new full color brochure gives information about the educational program offered at Hollandale Christian School and gives potential families other important information as well. The new brochures are part of the material we mail out to those who request information about our school. We also have these brochures available at the Chamber of Commerce offices in the surrounding communities.

Another way I have sought to get our school's name and information out was to create tote bags that were distributed to 8 area preschools to be given to the children who will be starting Kindergarten in the fall. These tote bags were created with the assistance of a parent with a background in graphic arts. A logo of a school house and children playing and the words, "There's a place for me at Hollandale Christian School" were imprinted on small cloth bags of various colors. Into these tote bags were placed a brochure about our school, a pencil, pen, stickers, a readiness workbook, and an invitation to our school's Kindergarten Round-up. Approximately 240 of these tote bags were brought to the area preschools in February.

A final strategy used at Hollandale Christian School was to create a onesie with a building block logo and the words, "There's a place for me at Hollandale Christian School". These onesies are size 12 months and are available in pink and blue. At our school we have a representative from each church that can be available for announcements and information. These representatives were asked to contact me when a member of their church has a baby. As the principal of the school, I then send them a letter of congratulations with a onesie. In the future I hope to ask for a photo of their child wearing the onesie so that we can create a bulletin board at school.

Analysis

Each of these new strategies has been fun to put into place and have generated many positive comments. It will remain to be seen whether any of them will have an impact on the enrollment at Hollandale Christian School, and whether or not they will be continued in the future. As our society continues to change, our marketing strategies must continue to evolve.