

Strategic Planning IS a Good Idea

John Petrey, Van Lunen Fellow 2013-14
Head of School at Mountain Christian School, Joppa, MD

Consultant - Peter Meerveld

Project Summary:

After much discussion with Bruce Heckman and Peter Meerveld, we determined that in order to address several different areas of need, a new, comprehensive strategic plan was the best course of action. Although the plan was not fully completed, we were able to develop 6 Strategic Initiatives and present those to the community.

We initiated several group exercises with stakeholders to get as much feedback as possible. First we conducted a SWOT analysis with parents, teachers, and the SMT (school ministry team, similar to board of trustees). After summarizing that information, we conducted additional stakeholder meetings with parents, teachers, and the SMT, to help determine the categories for our 6 Strategic Initiatives. We finished the spring semester with additional meetings to develop strategies to successfully implement the initiatives.

What I learned:

- If you do not plan to Strategically Plan, you will miss the timeline you should have set
- Getting a group of people to agree on something is HARD
- Church / School relationships are a blessing and challenge
- Effective communication on the front end is KEY. Playing catch up doesn't work
- Good decisions for the organization can be a big challenge.

What is Different at Mountain Christian School?

This process was challenging because there were so many key areas that needed work simultaneously. While we developed the strategic initiatives, we were also changing and updating in real time. The biggest change is that the relationship with the church is more positive than in recent memory. The church leadership, including elders and pastors, have expressed privately and publicly their support of our school, its teachers and administrators. This is a significant improvement. Another change that was recently finalized was the promotion of my assistant principal to Principal. This move will allow me to focus more time and energy in areas of fundraising and sustainable funding. Finally, we made changes that were easy to justify but difficult to implement due to underfunding and no strategic planning for many years prior. These changes included purchasing more curriculum and technology resources than in the previous 10 yrs. combined, increasing professional development, introducing project based learning and technology integration, hiring teachers with subject area expertise, expanding our course offerings, and raising salaries for all teachers. The most challenging difference is that so many changes have created uneasiness with teachers and parents.