

Crafting a Development Message

“The Ezra Project” by Jared Ramos, Van Lunen Fellow 2014-2015

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Van Lunen Consultant: Zach Clark

What I did:

The project ended up being the creation of a Development Message for the school—a document that clearly expresses the school’s mission, vision, and core values with the specific intention of communicating to potential donors the school’s purpose and plan for growth. Originally, I had planned to work on restructuring the administrative team to be more effective, but after the first summer session at Van Lunen, I realized that the creation of a strategic plan was more urgent. However after working on the idea with my consultant Zach Clark, he suggested that we begin with a Development Message that would help to inform the strategic plan that would come after.

- July-September – Surveyed the school community (board members, teachers, staff, and parents) to get a better understanding of personal experiences about the school, perspectives, and suggestions.
- October – Held a retreat in which board members and teachers were instructed about the history of the school and worked through some reflection questions to refine the mission and vision of the school
- November-March – Met regularly with a board committee to review the responses from the surveys, and the answers collected at the retreat, in order to draft the basic elements that made up the Development Message.
- March-present – Communicating the Development Message to key players interested in partnering with the school to see its growth.

What did I learn?

I learned that before we can know who does what in the school and how, we need to know who we are as an organization. Through this process I was able to better understand why we exist as a unique school and figure out ways to lead my team to articulate that purpose to the outside community. I learned that leadership can be lonely and frustrating, but that the Lord teaches us always to fear not.

What difference did it make?

The difference was huge. The process involved in getting all the key players of the school community together to draft the Development Message created unity and made each person feel valued. The work that we drafted together has helped us all better understand who we are, which has helped in everything from the admissions process to the design of promotional materials. The document that was created will now serve as a guide for many future decisions, most importantly, the creation of the strategic plan this summer and a curriculum project that will also commence in June. Our school has a better understanding of who we are now which I know will help us address the issue of low enrollment that we have seen over the last few years. Personally, the project made a big difference in my life, by teaching me to understand better my own role in leadership and how to manage difficult situations by leaning more upon God and trusting Him to give us strength in times of our own weakness.