

Van Lunen Fellowship
Written Project
Concordia Prep School
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The purpose of this Van Lunen Project was initially to develop a Strategic Operating Plan for Concordia Preparatory School (CPS) in Towson, Maryland. As the process developed, the scope widened to redefine some of the school's foundational documents to provide additional missional clarity. While this work is ongoing, the project will result in the following objectives completed by the end of the 2020 calendar year:

- Development of the Concordia Preparatory School Playbook for Success to act as an operational strategic plan.
- Review and revision of the mission and vision statements of Concordia Preparatory School.
- Revision of the Concordia Preparatory School Profile of a Graduate.
- Selection of Biblical verses to support Concordia Preparatory School Core Values.

During my first year as headmaster, in preparation for a capital campaign to update the school's aging facilities, Concordia Preparatory School partnered with the Lutheran Church Extension Fund in a missional clarity process that redefined its mission and vision statements. This process also set forth a plan for the CPS Board of Directors and administrative team to clarify roles and to start the process of developing a strategic plan. The administrative team completed its short term objectives including hiring a communications and marketing director and developing a school-wide communication and marketing plan. The board of directors then formed a Strategic Planning committee and began regular meetings.

As the board of directors started developing a strategic plan, they focused on areas of growth as a governing body prior to outlining a plan of growth for the association. Despite strong leadership and building initial momentum, this effort fizzled with board turnover and nothing actionable came from the process. Since that time the board has formed several committees to

address this need, but due to a number of circumstances there has been no consistent strategic planning discussion in twelve months, which resulted in frustration for some on the committee.

As headmaster, I encouraged the board but leading a successful campaign and the challenge of being a first-time head of school, I did not place the necessary priority on this process. Over the past four years, Concordia Preparatory School has grown significantly as it has improved academically, co-curricularly, and financially by operating essentially on a series of thematic goals as outlined by Patrick Lencioni in *The Advantage*.

Our initial Van Lunen workshop with Michyl Thom and Elisa Carlson helped me realize as a young headmaster that I had failed to recognize the importance of effectively communicated mission and vision statements as well as the importance of defining a clear strategic direction. While I considered other needs of the school initially, it was soon evident that the most pressing area of need for our school to build on the momentum established by the Renew and Rejoice Campaign and by our growth was to develop an operational strategic plan to guide our administration as we led the school. I also realized that if this project was going to be completed in time to impact the 2020-2021 school year, our administrative team would need to take the lead.

The first step of the project was to obtain permission from the board of directors to proceed with the process of developing an operational strategic plan. After some initial debate, permission was granted, especially when it was framed as my Van Lunen project for school improvement. On a positive note, it also kindled a discussion of the board's role in this process which led them to form another committee to evaluate the school's mission and vision statements.

To complete this project our administrative team began a review of the mission, vision, and values of Concordia Preparatory School with our faculty and academic leadership team. This work was accomplished during August staff meetings and by using open forums for faculty and surveys

for our stakeholders. These results determined a number of important things that helped guide this project:

- The process revealed that the current mission and vision statements were not as emphasized as they should have been. This resulted in the board of directors reviewing these statements for clarity and possible revision.
- While Concordia Preparatory School had just undergone a missional clarity process, there was a lack of clarity among some faculty members about the direction of the school and the vision of the board of directors and the administrative team. This resulted in the development of the Concordia Preparatory School Playbook for Success, which was derived from Patrick Lencioni's book *The Advantage*. A plan for communicating this direction is in the process of being developed in order to be implemented the following school year.
- The core values that had been developed by the original missional clarity process were the most impactful result and it was decided to further revise and develop these values with belief statements and supporting Bible passages. Faculty members and department heads were organized into two committees to complete this work during the spring of 2020.
- The process revealed that there were differing views of a Concordia Preparatory School Graduate. This resulted in revision of the Concordia Preparatory School Profile of a Graduate statement, again by committees that consisted of department heads, faculty, and administrators.

In December, a smaller group of core administrators was established to help build a cohesive leadership team to begin building the Playbook for Success. This project developed slowly as the team dug deep into the results of the surveys and open forums. The group then worked to answer each of the questions posed by Lecioni. This was scheduled for completion in April, prior to spring break but was delayed by the COVID-19 outbreak, resulting closures, and shifting of priorities.

As our administrative team developed this Playbook for Success, it wanted to gain as much input as possible from our community as we defined our aspirational values and key strategies for growth. I began the process of meeting with classes in the middle and upper schools with the hope of speaking with each student at Concordia Prep School. These sessions offered students the chance to share input about the school and its direction. Our administrative team worked to schedule Town Hall meetings with various parent groups to gather their input as well. Unfortunately, both of these procedures were ultimately interrupted by the COVID-19

pandemic. Since we were unable to gather all of the data as originally planned, our team developed surveys to glean the information that we were looking for in order to finalize our values and strategies for growth.

While this project is ongoing, the results thus far have been encouraging. The Concordia Preparatory School Playbook for Success has been developed and after board approval, will be launched this fall with our community. This will be a very important guide that will provide clarity to our administrative team and faculty as we work together to maintain our momentum through the pandemic and into a stronger school community in the future. The Playbook for Success will also provide an overview of operational goals for our board of directors which will help them continue to focus on strategic initiatives.

The process of developing this Playbook for Success also helped me to rework and build a smaller and significantly more cohesive leadership team. I am confident that each of us would agree that experiencing the processes of building the Playbook for Success, renewing our Profile of a Graduate statement, and developing belief statements and Biblical support for our core values was invigorating. From this, I have learned that regular and purposeful time with this group to tweak this Playbook for Success will continue to build our team and improve our community. It also helps to build a unified direction and clarity of roles for our team as we work together to make Concordia Preparatory School the best ministry it can be.

This entire process has also resulted in a stronger connection between the administrative team and the faculty. Many members of our faculty appreciated the opportunity to share feedback in these crucial areas and it has improved morale throughout the year. I anticipate that it will also increase investment in the Playbook for Success as we implement the strategies in the coming school year. I have also learned to continue to be purposeful in providing our department heads and

faculty with these opportunities for feedback and input in direction of Concordia Preparatory School as we improve as a school.

In addition, I learned that a school's mission and vision statements need to be more than a poster in each of our classrooms; they need to come to life. A lack of clearly defined, and in our case, specific mission and value statements were one of the key contributing factors to a lack of understanding of direction. I look forward to working with the board of directors and the faculty and staff to redefine these statements over the next year so that our team can use them to guide us as we work to further the Kingdom of God.

One of the most important things I have learned in this process is that what I think people know about the decisions and direction of our school is not necessarily the case. This process of defining clarity has been important, but working to communicate this direction in coming months will ultimately determine the success of these changes. Our administrative team is currently working on the best method to regularly communicate these points to our departments for the coming school year.

A result that I am hopeful for is that our board of directors will be motivated by this progress and work on their end to continue improvement in their operation as a governing body. Their involvement in evaluating and revising our mission and values will hopefully result in encouraging them to stay in the crow's nest of the association ship and continue to work to position the Baltimore Lutheran High School Association for continued success.

Finally, I am thankful to the Van Lunen Center for encouraging this project as it will have a positive impact on the Kingdom of God as it improves our school and I look forward to evaluating and tweaking these initiatives over the next few years to help Concordia Preparatory School become the best version of itself possible.

Bibliography

Lencioni, Patrick. *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business*. Jossey-Bass, 2012.

Pue, Alan. *Rethinking Strategic Planning for Christian Schools*. Purposeful Design Publications, 2017.