

Marc Verkaik
Lead Administrator
Kalamazoo Christian School
Kalamazoo, MI

VanLunen Project - Summer 2020

Kalamazoo Christian School - Strategic Plan

In the Fall of 2019 it was identified that our current Strategic Plan was 90% accomplished. It was also during this time that I began my role as the Lead Administrator of Kalamazoo Christian School. The School Board and I felt that it was time to start the process of establishing goals that would guide us over the next few years.

The first step I took was to enlist the help of a parent and current Western Michigan University professor who has guided various parts of WMU in strategic planning. She helped guide our thoughts and actions in preparing to introduce a strategic plan to our community. We also looked into how the past strategic plan was established in order to put our plan in place. As a result of these efforts we decided to offer an opportunity to our constituents, stakeholders, teachers, staff and students in developing our plan.

We used four areas to guide our thoughts - Hallmarks, Hopes, Holes and Handbrakes,. We held seven listening sessions in February/March to gather data. We asked each group to list items on a post it note in response to questions in each area. Hallmarks were the things that KChristian has done well and should never change. Hopes are the things we want to become or get accomplished. Holes are the things that are missing in order for us to achieve our Hopes. Handbrakes are the things that are preventing us, either internally or externally from achieving

our Hopes. The people in attendance then took these post it notes and put them into general categories and labeled them. We took the labels from each group and typed them up to organize the work that the listening sessions produced. A binder that produced over 100 pages of notes was generated and the work of looking for common themes began.

In the Summer of 2020, each school board member was given a binder of all the data. We held board retreats to start digging through the information. We divided the board members along with various staff members who held areas of responsibilities into five small groups. Education, Governance, Marketing/Enrollment, Development/Fundraising and Facilities. Each group shifted through the work of the listening sessions and developed a list of goals for their particular area. The five small groups fine tuned their work by combining with another group and sharing, editing and revising their goals. These groups then had to present in front of the full board what their goal area was and the goals they established. The full board could then ask questions, provide comments and revise the goals if necessary.

The next challenge was to assign dates and a timeline to each goal area. We wanted to make this timeline reasonable yet push us forward. We also developed a color coded system that would indicate the following: completed, on target, behind or needs to be revised. Over a period of a few months, a strategic plan was developed and approved by the School Board.

However we had one problem. The number one topic that came up in our listening sessions but was harder to flesh out, was the area of diversity. As a result, we addressed this area as a whole

board. We sent a team to investigate potential educational training partnerships. The team spent the next few months talking about and writing goals that fit the mission and vision of our school. As the race issues became more significant near the end of May and into June, we shared our plan with our school community and how we are addressing this weighty issue. One action item is to form a task force. We received a few emails with a desire to join this task force and help reach the goals in our plan.

We engaged our stakeholders in helping us list ideas and plans. The School Board did the heavy lifting of taking those ideas and putting them into goals. Now we needed to communicate our plan to our community. We wrote about this process in the Fall/Winter edition of our school publication called the Torch. We posted this information on our website. We used our Annual Meeting in April to share the general goals with our community.

And then March 12 happened. Our plans were pushed aside so we could address the task at hand. We moved quickly and decisively to navigate the realities in front of us. We coordinated our teachers and students on line work. We communicated with parents continuously and consistently. We informed our community of how we were addressing elearning. This time brought many challenges but our team, the school board and staff stepped up and responded.

As we have ended the school year and started planning for the start of next year, the challenge is to bring back our Strategic Plan. We need to look back over the work we did and evaluate whether these goals are still relevant and timely. We are reassessing whether the end dates for

each goal is still practical or whether we need to extend each goal. The Admin Team has already started this process with our Educational Goals and our Facilities Committee is looking back over their goals. However, with the cycle of moving new board members on, getting them up to speed and informed in a time where it is hard to be together has been a challenge.

In order to address this challenge, I have started to meet with the new board members 30 minutes prior to our board meetings and work through a board training session. We cover a number of items but we are focusing on the role of a board member and making sure they understand the strategic plan of the school. We are also keeping the strategic plan on every agenda from each subcommittee of the board to the board meeting themselves. I am hoping that by doing these things, the strategic plan will guide our work over the next few years.