

Strategic Planning at St. Columbkille



We don't have a strategic plan at our school. Last school year the superintendent asked each school in the archdiocese to develop a strategic plan. The "carrot" for doing this was that a school could apply for grants from the funds raised by the Archdiocesan Capital Campaign. However, those grants would be need-based. Being in a suburban school we would probably not qualify for need-based grants. So, my intent was to write up a quick and dirty strategic plan to fulfill the request made by the superintendent rather than go through a more intensive process and come up with a comprehensive and meaningful plan.

However, last spring I began thinking that we needed to be thinking about and planning for the future in the area of financing our school. For example, the parish has an educational endowment, but it is a little under a million dollars, not nearly enough for a school/parish with our resources. I feel that we needed to be planning for the future now. Also, it is the endowment that generates the funding for our tuition assistance program. In order to remain accessible to students of all socio-economic levels we need to make a concerted effort to grow that fund.

I have become convinced that we definitely do need a good strategic plan and we need to go through a thorough process to develop one. Even though we just finished our accreditation process last spring; and even though things are going well and we have good enrollment, high academics, and we are well-respected. Strategic planning is an important and essential part of a school. In fact, this is probably the best time to do it because we are not in a crisis mode. Think about what happened at St. Mary-St. Michael Catholic School in Connecticut. In less than 25 years their enrollment went from 266 to less than 100. This is not an unusual scenario for Catholic Schools across the country. They didn't develop their strategic plan until things were desperate. What I take away from this is that strategic planning should be done before you have a crisis on your hands.

The challenge of this is convincing other people (stakeholders) that we need to spend the time and energy to do this now. I keep thinking of the Hebrews when they were slaves in the land of Egypt. Joseph was Vizier, Pharaoh's right hand man. He knew there was a famine coming and so during all the years of plenty he put away grain and food so that they were able to survive the famine. That was his strategic plan in practice. I think that is how we need to look at it.

I can't close without mentioning blended learning. This is an exciting innovation for Catholic schools. We have been very traditional at St. Columbkille, utilizing a one size fits all approach. With the technology that is now available there is no reason why a blended learning approach cannot be implemented. In addition to higher student achievement, this would also allow us to customize learning for our students. Additionally, it fits in well with the Technology Plan that is being

developed by our archdiocese in the Catholic Schools Office. I see this as a possible strategy for academic excellence in our strategic plan.

The more I read about strategic planning and learn about the experiences of other schools, the more convinced I am that this is a crucial part of our future success as a school and ministry of our parish and diocese.

In His Service,
Jim Makey, Principal