



Positioning *Lutheran Schools*
for **OUTREACH**

A planning process for developing school harvest strategies



WELS

Christ's Love, Our Calling.

Developing a Harvest Strategy

Questions to Address

Your congregation and school's mission statement most likely identifies at least two important ways your school serves the body of Christ—nurture and outreach. The foundation of your school's harvest strategy is the true and enduring Word of God. But which are the first bricks to be laid on that foundation? Determined by the gifts and passions of congregation members and called workers, each church has its own particular strengths. Each congregation has its unique ministry orientation. Congregations and schools that desire to strengthen their outreach efforts should consider the knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and organizational structures needed to bring about such a change.

KNOWLEDGE

The development of a harvest strategy begins with an assessment of your mission field. You must create a knowledge set about the work to be done.

What sheaves are waiting to be gathered?

1. What do the demographics of your community suggest about the opportunities to do outreach through your school? Are there large numbers of unchurched families and children in your community?
2. What conclusions can you draw about the need to reach the unchurched in your community? How has the pop-culture of the day affected the lives of people? Of children? Does your community appear to need the Good News your church and school is offering?
3. Who is currently expressing an interest in your school?
 - Families of non-Christian religions?
 - Families needing a reform school?
 - Families of other Christian denominations well entrenched in their own churches?
 - Families of sister (WELS/ELS) churches?
 - Families who are believers but who have no church home?
 - Families who are unbelievers?
 - Families who claim a church home, but in reality, don't have a church home?
4. What is the general perception of the public schools in your community?
5. Are other Christian schools already reaping a harvest in your community? If they are, what is attributing to their success?
6. What is your school's niche in your particular harvest field?

How has God equipped you for the harvest?

1. What spiritual gifts has God granted to the called-workers at your church/school?
2. What spiritual gifts has God granted to the lay leadership of your church?
3. What outreach experience has God given to your called workers?
4. What experiences have your lay members had with evangelism?
5. Do your called workers have the resources (time) to carry out the work of outreach?
6. If your congregation's called workers are already pushed to the limit of their abilities, are there lay members with the abilities, gifts, and passion to take over some of the called workers' current tasks, freeing the called workers to conduct outreach?
7. Do you have lay members with ability and gifts for outreach and evangelism?
8. What personality traits on the part of your called workers lend themselves to the work of outreach?
9. How aware are your congregation members of their own personal mission fields—their FRAN (friends, relatives, associates, and neighbors) networks?

PLANNING POINT

1. What gaps exist in your members and called workers knowledge of your mission field?
2. Do you need to conduct a thorough demographic study of your harvest field?
3. Do you need to bring school-related outreach opportunities to the attention of your congregation's membership and possibly even to your called workers?
4. Would your efforts be strengthened through a Bible study on the doctrine of the Universal Priesthood?
5. How can you lead your members through an evaluation of their personal mission fields?

Develop a specific plan for heightening your congregation's awareness of its existing harvest field and specifically the school-related outreach opportunities. Your plan should include goals, issues, strategies, and action steps.

ATTITUDE

Identifying and recognizing your mission field has led to an increased awareness of your school's outreach potential. Before this knowledge can lead to action, however, a positive, Christ-like attitude toward outreach must be present (or developed) in your called workers and congregation.

What feelings exist about the harvest before you?

1. A review your congregation's chosen wording for its mission statement can provide insight into the mission-mindset of your congregation.
 - Does the wording of your mission statement indicate an emphasis on nurture or outreach? Is there a balance?
 - Does the mission statement provide a solid foundation on which to build an outreach-oriented school ministry?
 - Is there a specific mission statement for the school?
 - Do the statements work in harmony with one another?
 - Are they succinct, and therefore easily recalled by the entire school community?
 - Do they have an action focus, based on God's Word?
 - Does the school mission statement foster the development of excellence in education, which will make your school attractive to the members of your community?
2. Examine the attitudes exhibited by the words and actions of your congregation members and called workers.
 - Is outreach a passion? Is it viewed as a necessary task? Is it seen as a burden?
 - How prominent is the topic of outreach in your church and school meetings?
 - Are there fears or concerns associated with outreach?
 - What are the fears/concerns of the lay members? School parents? Called workers?
 - Is there a general excitement about mission work? Evangelism? Outreach?
 - Do your members and called workers exhibit a love for the lost?

PLANNING POINT

1. Is the general attitude toward school-related outreach positive or negative?
2. What attitudes present stumbling blocks for your harvest strategy?
3. Are your key players all on board?
4. What attitudes must be instilled in your people for effective outreach to take place?

Develop a specific plan for developing a mission mindset among your called workers and members, as well as a corporate mission-mindset at your congregation. Your plan should include goals, issues, strategies, and action steps.

BEHAVIOR

A review of your current outreach practices can help you gain insight into your congregation's philosophy of ministry.

1. Who is responsible for conducting outreach in your congregation?
2. What outreach activities are currently being done by your pastor(s)? Staff minister? Your school principal? Your teachers? Your lay members?
3. Does your outreach ministry embody the universal priesthood of all believers?
4. Do you see outreach through your school as a ministry unto itself, or is it part of a comprehensive congregational outreach strategy?
5. Do your members often invite/bring friends, relatives, associates, or neighbors to church? Do they refer these people to your school?
6. Does your school's enrollment policy/practice/process facilitate outreach? Do these discourage outreach (limits on non-member enrollment, unrealistic expectations of unchurched, non-member parents, lack of timely response)?
7. Does your enrollment policy facilitate the enrollment of unchurched students as opposed to children who are already members of other Christian churches?
8. How quickly is your principal able to return the calls of inquiring prospect parents?
9. What opportunities for educating/evangelizing your school's nonmember parents have you created? Do you require parents to attend any classes, workshops, or seminars?
10. Have you identified who is responsible to shepherd nonmember (unchurched) parents if they complete all requirements, but do not join your church?
11. Do you consciously use existing school and church activities to create contact between member families and nonmember families? Are your member families aware of these opportunities? Have they been encouraged or trained to build relationships with your nonmember families?

PLANNING POINT

What behaviors are preventing or reducing the opportunity for outreach through your school? What potential behaviors could enhance outreach opportunities through your school?

Create a plan for eliminating behaviors that reduce outreach and instilling behaviors that enhance outreach. Your plan should include goals, issues, strategies, and action steps.

ORGANIZATION

Your evaluation of current behaviors has likely brought to your attention ways your congregation's and school's organizational structure (governance, policies, practices) can either enhance or reduce opportunities for outreach. This planning guide will assist you in developing policies and practices that are designed for increasing the harvest of souls through your school.

Enrollment Policy

1. Does your enrollment policy flow from your school's mission statement?
2. Does your enrollment policy foster an evaluation of each family's potential as mission candidates?
3. Does your policy establish a priority ranking for prospect families? Is that priority ranking specifically designed to bring unchurched mission prospects into your school?
4. Does your policy clearly spell out all parental requirements and expectations (e.g. BIC, singing in church, etc.)?
5. Does it indicate the conditions and process for reenrollment? Are those conditions designed to focus your school outreach on true mission candidates?

Enrollment Process

1. What steps have you taken to ensure that the person who answers your phone is well prepared to present a friendly, inviting welcome? Have you defined what information is to be shared and what information is not to be shared in the opening call?
2. What will set your information packet apart from other schools' packets? Is there anything about your initial mailing that will catch the readers' interest and convince them to visit your campus?
3. Who will place a follow-up call to the prospect after the information packet has been sent? How long after the initial contact will this call be made? What will be the purpose of the call?
4. Will you encourage prospect parents to visit your classrooms? Who will greet them and introduce them to the teacher? Will the principal be available to meet with them?
5. When will tuition rates be discussed with prospects?

6. When are prospects given a school handbook? An application form? Who will give these to the parent?
7. Are all the steps for the application/enrollment process clearly defined? Are they printed in your school handbook?
8. Will you accept students into all grade levels?
9. How will the principal evaluate the application? Will copies of academic information (test scores, previous reports cards, etc.) be required? Will an investigative call be placed to the principal of the previous school? What criteria will be used for enrollment decisions?
10. Will the principal meet with the prospective parents to discuss the application? (This is strongly suggested—we recommend the visit be made in the applicants' home.)
11. Will there be a follow-up visit by the pastor? If so, what will be the purpose of the visit?
12. Will there be a readiness screening for incoming kindergarten prospects?
13. Will there be academic screening for incoming transfer students?
14. Who will make the final decision as to whether or not a student should be enrolled?
15. Will there be a probationary period on new enrollments?
16. Who will inform the prospective parents of the enrollment decision?
17. How will new families be welcomed into the school family upon acceptance?

Parental Education (both introductory and ongoing)

1. Is there a requirement for one or both parents to take a Bible Information Class?
2. Are there requirements or expectations of parents to participate in other educational opportunities offered by the church/school (e.g. annual parenting classes, etc.)?
3. Is there a clear method for inviting and addressing parental concerns and questions? How will this method be explained to new parents?
4. Does the teaching staff possess a culture of loving patience when facing "teachable moments" – be they "negative" and/or positive – with parents?

5. Do you honor the God-given responsibility of parents to provide spiritual training for their children by involving them in the students' religious studies? How can you do this with unbelieving parents?

The Shepherding Plan

1. What will be the extent of your responsibility in shepherding non-member parents?
2. Will non-members view you as their spiritual care-givers, even if they are not inclined to join your church? Will you discuss this during the enrollment process?
3. What impression will you make upon non-members if you only provide spiritual care to those who join the church?
4. How will you show genuine Christian care to members of other Christian churches, without being guilty of sheep-stealing?
5. Which members of your mission team will have shepherding responsibilities toward non-members? What will be their specific roles?
6. Will your enrollment process provide an opportunity for a focused witnessing session? (God's Great Exchange or similar) Should it? For all prospects? If so, who will carry it out?
7. How will your teachers present the topic of baptism? What will be the process for discussing baptism with those (students and parents) who express an interest? Will there be expectations attached to baptism? Should there be? If so, what will they be?

Curriculum and Program Adjustments

1. How would the curriculum of a school with an outreach mission differ from that of a school with a nurture mission?
2. In the competitive market of private education in America today, what will set your school apart from the crowd? How will you emphasize the strengths of your school?
3. What is your intended ranking for your school among the competition? Will you "set the standard?" Will you have average school? Will the mindset regarding your "rank" enhance or detract from opportunities to share the Gospel?
4. How does your school compare with local public schools in academic achievement levels? with other private schools?

5. How does your school compare with local public schools in program offerings? with other private schools?
6. How does your school compare with local public schools in curriculum? (Do you meet state standards?) How does your school compare with other private schools?
7. If you have identified any shortcomings, is there a defined school improvement plan? If not, who will develop this plan?

Public Relations

1. Has the flow of information to your contacts been carefully planned?
2. What training has been provided to those who take initial phone calls?
3. What information can and should be shared by the clerical staff?
4. What is the purpose of primary mailing? Is it designed to carry out that purpose?
5. How will you avoid information overload—giving prospects enough information to turn them away before you have an opportunity to witness to them?
6. Do you have a plan for cultivating referral business? (How will the members of the mission team relate to school parents—especially non-members who, whether you realize it or not, are often your front-line team of recruiters?)
7. Do the members of your congregation see school recruitment as a personal ministry? Have you equipped them for this work (spiritually and materially)?
8. Does your yellow page advertisement convey your mission?
9. Is your school—personnel as well as facility—recognizable in your community? What opportunities exist to become more visible in the community?
10. If you employ other modes of advertisement, are they part of a comprehensive plan?
11. Do you analyze how your contacts come to you? (Measure of effectiveness—focus of emphasis)?
12. Do you have a plan for documenting contact with prospects?

Funding – Tuition Philosophy/Policy

1. How is the school funded and why?
2. How does the congregational leadership (pastor and elders) view the school from a financial angle? Use the continuum of the negative view of a “financial drain” to the positive view of a “great investment.”
3. How does the congregation as a whole view the school from a financial angle? Use the same continuum as in number two.
4. Have you critically studied your funding philosophy recently?
5. How will your current funding philosophy address the challenges/opportunities of utilizing the Lutheran school as an outreach tool?
6. Is tuition part of your funding philosophy? Why or why not?
7. If utilizing a tuition system, are there “safety nets” (i.e. tuition assistance) for member families?
8. Will you want to offer tuition assistance to any nonmember families?
9. Where will you place yourself in the tuition market? Bottom? Middle? Top? What will that placement say to prospective parents? If you feel a need to make an adjustment, how will you implement the change taking into consideration your current school population?

Time Requirements

1. Given all the considerations of the above outreach components, how much time has been allotted to the called-worker members of your ministry team for conducting this work?
2. Is it reasonable to expect called workers with other full-time responsibilities (teaching) to serve as outreach ministers?
3. If you see your teachers as having non-school specific ministry responsibilities (Bible classes, VBS, Sunday School, outreach, family ministry) are you evaluating the time required to conduct this ministry faithfully? Have you provided time for your called workers to faithfully serve their families as well as the church?
4. What time has been allotted specifically to your school principal for his outreach and administrative responsibilities?

5. Do the competitor Christian schools in your market have full-time principals? If so, how will your school compare if you do not have a full-time principal?
6. If your school does not need a full-time principal from a purely academic standpoint, does the additional ministry goal of outreach/evangelism require the efforts of a full-time principal?
7. Do you have adequate clerical staff to handle such tasks? Would the additional of more clerical staff enable your principal to better devote his time and energy the administration and outreach ministry of the school?
8. If you choose not to provide additional release time for your principal to conduct your school outreach ministry, who will be responsible for this work? Does that person need additional time for this responsibility?

PLANNING POINT

Create specific plans for addressing the various organizational issues covered by this discussion guide. The strategies and action plans you create should address the goals and issues you have identified in the attitude and behavior sections of this planning process.

Remember to include in your plans a time dimension. Many of the issue identified can only be addressed over time through consistent and intentional effort.

Guidelines for Using the Lutheran Elementary School as an Outreach Tool

We Believe- Therefore We Speak. David J. Vallesky, NPH (1995), p. 209-210.

1. Be properly motivated.

It is not the numbers or the financial assistance that tuition students bring that should lead a congregation to open the doors or the school to the unchurched, but rather a concern for souls who could benefit from the message of salvation the school is privileged to teach.

2. Emphasize your philosophy, aims, and purposes.

Make sure that they are written in your school handbook and carefully go through them with the parents of prospective students.

3. Present the message of salvation to the family.

Do this for two reasons: Out of concern for the souls of the family and to make clear the basic Bible message their children will be learning.

4. Discuss doctrinal differences.

Be completely open with people so they know what their children will be learning and that we will not permit children in the classroom to argue for other home-taught views regarding baptism, creation, etc.

5. Do careful screening.

Often parents seek out a private school solely because their child hasn't been able to get along anywhere else or has certain needs that require teachers with specialized training. Our schools may not be equipped to handle some of these students.

6. Make clear the way the school operates.

People need to know right at the outset how our schools are administered, the place of the school board and the principal, the way to handle grievances, how children are disciplined, etc.

7. Expect church and Sunday school attendance on the children's part.

Make it clear that the exhibition of little involvement in church and Sunday school is grounds for re-evaluation of enrollment for the next year.

8. Secure agreement to participate in the Bible information class.

We cannot expect that all people will join upon completion of the class; but we can expect them to attend it. Failure to do so is also grounds for re-evaluation of enrollment for the next year.

9. Specify and annual enrollment.

Make it clear that all non-members' children are enrolled on an annual basis only. Possible grounds for dismissal: failure to attend Bible information class, non-existent or extremely poor church and Sunday school attendance, or severe discipline and/or academic problems in the classroom.

10. Take care how you advertise.

Don't give the impression that you need students. Make it clear you are selective, that non-members' children may be enrolled only if they meet the criteria we set. People should clearly realize that they are not doing us a favor, but that we are doing them a favor by enrolling their children in our school.

11. Keep non-member families informed about church events.

A chief concern should be to attempt to draw the unchurched mission families into the congregational fellowship. Keep them informed about congregational functions (special services, etc.) through mailings, notes from school, articles in the school newsletter, etc.

12. Maintain a close relationship with the pastor and/or evangelism committee.

When the principal makes calls on unchurched mission families who have applied for enrollment, he should make sure he records a summary of his call and gets it into the hands of the pastor and/or evangelism committee who then can make follow-up calls.

13. Remember these are souls for whom Jesus died.

This may be the one way that they will be brought into contact with the message of salvation. Therefore, we will want to look upon these children and their parents as wonderful opportunities the Lord places before us and do all we can to lead these children and their parents out of darkness and into God's wonderful light.

Appendix 1 – Sample Introductory Letter to Prospective Parent(s)

Dear Parent(s):

Thank you for your interest in our school. We have adopted an admissions policy that opens the school to families who understand and are supportive of philosophy, objectives, and standards of education, and whose children meet our enrollment standards. Our purpose is to serve families who desire not simply a private education, but a distinctively Lutheran education for their children.

Before applying for admission to our school, please read the Student Handbook provided in this introductory packet. The Student Handbook will introduce you to many of the school's policies, procedures, and expectations for both parents and students.

The Handbook explains our religious purpose, mission, and beliefs. All subjects in our school will be taught from the perspective of, and in accordance with, the Word of God as revealed in the Holy Scriptures. If you do not agree with the beliefs and values that will be taught in our school, enrolling your child will likely cause him or her confusion. This internal conflict could drive a wedge between you and your child, cause your child to negatively judge you as a parent, or force your child to choose between our teaching and what he or she learns at home. We respect your desire to place your child in the best possible learning environment, but if you are uncomfortable with what your child will be taught, it will be best for all concerned if you do not enroll your child at our school.

Biblical principles are integrated into every subject taught at our school. Our staff is committed not only to academic excellence, but also to teaching students how to apply the truths of God's Word to every aspect of life. We pray that what we teach complement the beliefs and ideals your child is taught at home. We look forward to partnering with you to educate your child in God's truth.

In our Savior's Name,

Signature

Appendix 2 – Sample Handbook Agreements for Parent(s)

Parents: Please read the following statements carefully and sign below to indicate your agreement.

I hereby affirm that I have read the Student Handbook and discussed its policies with my student.

I certify that I consent to and will submit to all governing policies of the school, including all applicable policies in the Student Handbook.

I agree that, as a parent, I will not knowingly and/or actively endorse, promote, advocate, or support practices or activities that are not consistent with the doctrine and teaching of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

I understand that the standards of the school do not tolerate profanity, obscenity in word or action, dishonor to God and his Word, disrespect to the personnel of the school, or continued disobedience to the established policies of the school.

I understand that the services of the school are engaged by mutual consent, and that either the school or I reserve the right to terminate any or all services at any time.

I understand that this Handbook does not contractually bind [School] and is subject to change without notice by decision of [School]’s governing body.

Admission to the school is a privilege, not a right, and admission for one school year does not guarantee automatic admission for future school years.

Signature of Mother (or legal guardian)

Date

Signature of Father (or legal guardian)

Date

***A similar agreement could be required of students of high school age**

Appendix 3 – Sample Standards for Evaluating Prospective Students

A. Spiritual Considerations

- Spiritual commitment of parents and student.
- Willingness of parents and student to be supportive of the school's Lutheran philosophy of education.
- Willingness of parents and student to support the administration and faculty in carrying out the goals and programs of the school.

B. Behavioral Considerations

- History of acceptable citizenship in previous school experience.
- Agreement of student to abide by the behavior standards established by the school.

C. Academic Considerations

- Documented record of acceptable grades in previous school experience.
- Acceptable scores on achievement tests.

D. Personal Considerations

- Student's special interests, talents, and skills.

School makes no distinction in its admission policy on the basis of race, color, or national and ethnic origin.