

Fully Engaging Your Faculty

By Tim Greener

We all know that the true heartbeat of any school is found in its faculty. Research has shown that the most effective teachers are highly relational and show genuine care for their students. Most administrators agree with both statements, and will go to great lengths to hire the very best faculty and staff. However, we can have a competent, passionate staff and still produce students who fall significantly short of our stated student outcomes. So is there a formula or set of procedures to guarantee positive student achievement and/or spiritual formation?

To answer that question, we must establish the three assumptions underlying this discussion. These three assumptions are critical because, **without clear direction to provide a framework and accountability, staff members will do their own things and go in many different directions.**

1. Your school has an easily understood mission statement that is well publicized, well known, and easily explainable by everyone: students, parents, and staff. Everything you do as a school flows out of your mission statement.
2. Your school has an updated, working, strategic plan, developed by all stakeholders, that flows out of your mission statement.
3. Your school has a written set of measurable student outcomes.

Early in my tenure as superintendent, we decided to evaluate and update our mission statement. Our previous mission statement was several sentences long, difficult to quote, and not well known by staff, students, or parents. To remedy this, our board painstakingly crafted a one-sentence mission statement taken from Luke 2:52: “To develop students with a heart for God who grow as Jesus did in wisdom, stature, and in favor with God and man.” Easy to remember, quote, and explain. We spent a considerable amount of time making sure all our stakeholders were familiar with it by posting it all over campus, putting it on all our publications, and prominently placing it on our website.

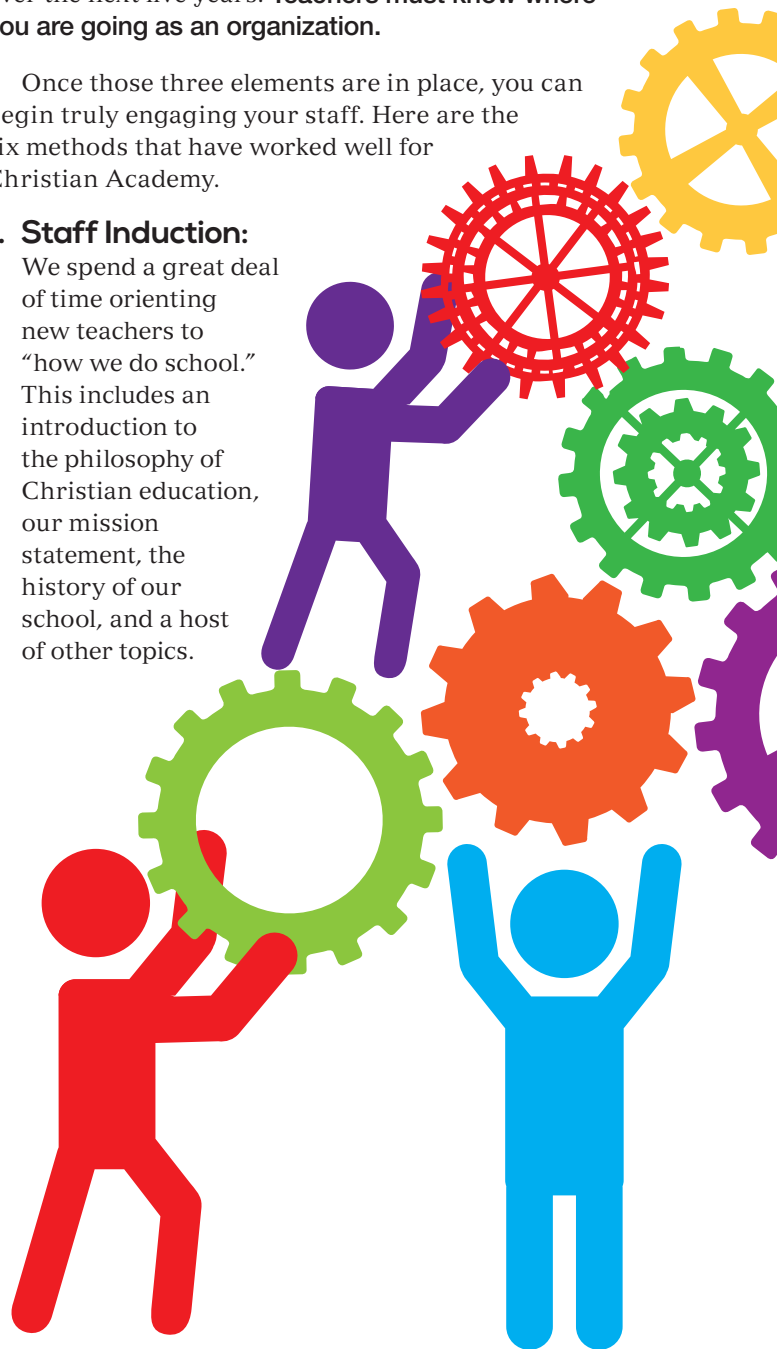
The next step was to develop student outcomes—what graduates should “look like” academically, spiritually, and socially. Trying to formulate what qualities should characterize a graduate of Christian Academy led to some pretty lively discussions and forced us to focus on our mission statement.

When your mission statement and student outcomes are in place, you can hammer out your strategic plan. For Christian Academy, the strategic plan concerned five key areas: academics, community impact, service, attracting and retaining excellent staff, and responsible stewardship. Each of these five areas comes with a list of goals, timelines, and leaders responsible for achieving those goals. We then shared the plan with our staff so that they would have a vision for where we were going as an organization over the next five years. **Teachers must know where you are going as an organization.**

Once those three elements are in place, you can begin truly engaging your staff. Here are the six methods that have worked well for Christian Academy.

1. Staff Induction:

We spend a great deal of time orienting new teachers to “how we do school.” This includes an introduction to the philosophy of Christian education, our mission statement, the history of our school, and a host of other topics.



This serves to give new folks some context about who we are and where we are going.

2. Staff Development: We incorporate 10 days of PD into every school year. While a majority of that time is used for relevant topics like differentiated instruction, curriculum mapping, and biblical integration, we also take time for discussions like how to engage today's students in a world of electronics and entertainment.

3. Devotions: Your staff will be most effective when their own spiritual lives are in order. What are you doing to lead, nurture, and encourage your staff spiritually? Teachers are most likely to become disengaged when they are discouraged or in a spiritual valley. Be their biggest fan; make sure they know you have their backs.

4. Communication: An engaged faculty is an informed faculty. There is a huge trickle-down effect when it comes to communicating what is important. When we developed our revised mission statement, I took the lead and made sure the principals could recite it from memory. In turn, I asked them to make sure that all teachers could do the same, and the teachers passed it to the students. I knew we had been successful when our accreditation team complimented us on how well *all* of our stakeholders knew our mission statement. This is not a one-time effort! It must be an intentional, ongoing process.

5. Daily Routines:

Big things happen when you do the little things right. Because we have more than one campus, we struggled to do some routine things consistently. For example, some of

our families, who had children at two different campuses, brought up questions about why a grade level teacher at one campus was doing things differently than a teacher of the same grade level at another campus. Good question! We had to discuss grading procedures, homework policies, calendar issues,

delivery of curriculum, among other things. It forced us to really drill down and determine "best practices" in all areas of our school. We became a better school as a result.

How does this impact teacher engagement and student outcomes? When teachers see their leaders giving proper attention to doing things with excellence, it instills a confidence that allows them to concentrate on what they do best: teach and develop positive relationships. When teachers see that PD is carefully planned to be relevant to what they are experiencing every day and helping them to become better at their craft, they engage. **Likewise, when students see a faculty that is fully engaged, caring, professional, and consistent, they will attain lofty goals.**

6. Biblical Integration: Several years ago, an outside team came to our school to do a spiritual formation audit. We knew that we were doing some things right, but wanted fresh eyes to tell us what we could be doing better. One of the significant findings was the direct link between student spiritual growth and an attitude of gratefulness. I started thinking about how we could best instill this attitude and remembered how effective our mission trips were in this area. A mission trip takes students out of their comfort zone; the change in perspective motivates them to greater thankfulness for how God has blessed them. I poured additional resources into this program, and the results have been spectacular. We also spend considerable time and resources teaching our teachers how to do biblical integration; it is time and money well spent. After all, the spiritual aspect of our program should be what makes us distinct from secular education.

I hope these methods help you to develop fully engaged faculty and extraordinary students. In addition to these, I highly recommend the tools ACSI can provide, including the Spiritual Formation Audit, which helped us to improve our spiritual program and student outcomes, and Dr. Steve Dill's Formative to Flourishing School Continuum, an insightful diagnostic for determining the health and performance of your school.

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