Southern Cross Program
Case Study

School Processes

Flinders Christian Community College
Principals’ Priorities and Campus Goal Alignment

School Description

Flinders Christian Community College was established in 1983 in Tyabb. The Prep to Year 12 school has over 2000 students across three campuses: Tyabb, Carrum Downs and La Trobe City (Traralgon). An inter-denominational school, Flinders Christian Community College provides Christian education by creating and sustaining an innovative learning environment that deals holistically with the educational, relational, spiritual and physical needs of students by exploring Christian principles in all areas of life. The College is committed to a dynamic and responsive curriculum that is developmentally challenging and engaging.

Project

Flinders Christian Community College has five Principals: an Executive Principal, three Campus Principals, and a Principal overseeing education research and development. All five attended the Southern Cross training. The group’s initial impetus for the training was to develop strategies to embed what the college calls Principals’ Priorities into the learning and corporate culture of Flinders.

The Principals’ Priorities, developed by the five principals in 2011 and reviewed annually, cover seven major areas of school operations, including curriculum and assessment, the teaching and learning process, policies, governance resources and leadership. ‘It’s all very well for the team of Principals to understand, own and believe in the Priorities,’ said Executive Principal Jill Healey, ‘but it’s crucial for all the staff to understand and embrace them if we are to improve the learning and corporate culture of Flinders.’

However, the group could see, very early in the Southern Cross training, that there was room to create a collaborative model for its multi-principal structure – the five principals all worked well together, but there was no over-arching documentation.

‘We were side-tracked for about two days, but in a positive way. It was a great opportunity to work together in an uninterrupted space for an extended period.’ (The five principals usually meet monthly.)

Half-way through their four days of training, the team returned to their original goal of developing strategies that would ensure that there were common templates for the Priorities across the three campuses.

Results
The benefits of the team’s first two days’ work on its multi-principal model were quickly evident when a new campus principal joined Flinders Christian Community College a few months after the Southern Cross training. ‘It was quite a seamless introduction for the new Campus Principal,’ said Mrs Healey, ‘which showed that we now had a well-articulated multi-principal model.’

The success of developing strategies to embed the Principals’ Priorities into the learning and corporate culture of Flinders Christian Community College was seen on several fronts: the newly-appointed Campus Principal understood the Priorities and framed strategic goals for the campus accordingly; there is increased understanding of the relationships between Principals within the multi-principal model; an executive leaders’ retreat in October 2012 involving 25 of the school’s leaders saw understanding and buy-in of the Priorities, as did subsequent campus executive leaders’ retreats held in January 2013 prior to the commencement of the school year.

‘The importance of buy-in was one of the key aspects of the Southern Cross training,’ said Mrs Healey. ‘The five of us who attended needed to review, confirm and commit to the multi-principal model and, of course, we were keen to develop strategies to ensure all staff would understand and embrace the Principals’ Priorities.’

Mrs Healey said that these two concepts are very much works-in-progress. ‘They are five-to-ten year projects that are ultimately about changing a whole learning environment.’

She said that initially the team who attended the Southern Cross training were intent on philosophical rather than practical matters. ‘Although we at first diverged from using some of the Southern Cross tools we achieved really good ends. We now have templates and models that will be part of the culture of Flinders in the future.’

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