Creating and Sustaining Vision, Mission, and Culture in a Time of Significant Growth and Complexity

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CREATING AND SUSTAINING VISION, MISSION, AND CULTURE

IN A TIME OF SIGNIFICANT GROWTH AND COMPLEXITY

by

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A DISSERTATION

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Under the Supervision of Kay A. Keiser, Ed.D.

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Abstract

CREATING AND SUSTAINING VISION, MISSION, AND CULTURE
IN A TIME OF SIGNIFICANT GROWTH AND COMPLEXITY

Teri Lynn Schrag, Ed.D.
University of Nebraska, 2018

Advisor: Dr. Kay Keiser

This exploratory mixed methods study evaluates the process of a Christian school’s expansion and development within the complexity of the school’s culture. The study describes the transition of a non-public school from a K-8 school to a complete K-12 program at Cornerstone Christian School, Bellevue, Nebraska, resulting in a description of the decision-making steps needed for the transition and analyzing the outcomes. The focal point of the study was the importance of maintaining a culture of distinction through this time of significant change while transitioning from an elementary and middle school program to a complete high school program. The process includes creating and sustaining vision and mission in a time of growth and complexity. For the purpose of this research, the transition to a K-12 school is defined and described through the themes of vision and mission, governance, facility, finance, academics, and athletics encompassed within the time of student enrollment growth and instituting a high school program. The outcome of the study explores the implementation of the strategies in the transition. This central question focused on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the culture and central purposes of the school.
Dedication

This is dedicated to my precious family who gave so much as I pursued this work and to the school board, teachers, and staff at school who encouraged me and prayed, but most of all this is dedicated to the One who gave His wisdom and grace for each day.
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Chapter 1 Introduction

The Transition of a K-8 Non-Public School to a Complete K-12 Program

Cornerstone Christian School was established over 30 years ago as a non-public school in the Bellevue/Papillion area, south of the metropolitan area of Omaha, Nebraska. In the past 12 years, the school’s enrollment has increased from 86 students to 368, a 428% increase in enrollment. Concurrent with the significant increase in enrollment and during the 2009-2010 school year, the school board, supported by the faculty, parents, students, and stakeholders, made the decision to expand from a K-8 school to a complete K-12 instructional program and added a pre-kindergarten program in 2016-2017. This decision brought multiple layers of decisions and changes, including curriculum, staffing, facility, and athletics.

The tasks of researching, recommending, coordinating, and implementing expansion to a full K-12 programming within the development structure was central to school leaders. In the preparation stage and throughout the implementation of building a full pre-K-12 program, research, case studies, and mentors were sought for each task. There was very limited material to draw from since in the public school setting, districts have been full pre-K-12 programs for decades and even centuries, and in non-public schools, the process is not well documented, defined nor systematic.

This void of research, and best practice models, within the non-public setting occurs not only in the region, but also across the continental United States. Material from other schools that had made a similar expansion within their program has little published or journaled. In seeking a school that had made a similar transition in the past 20 years, it was common to find that if a school had made this transition, it was not
documented, quantified, nor published. This lack of well-documented processes and recommendations increased the complexity of the decision to build a full pre-K-12 program. It also showed a need for analyzing, evaluating, and documenting the process. After recognizing the significant lack of documented, published research of a transition from a K-8 Christian school to pre-K-12 program, two individuals who played a similar role in a program implementation at their Christian schools were interviewed: a head of school in Missouri, after they implemented a high school program in 2007, and a superintendent in Iowa, who launched a high school program in the early 1990’s. Both spoke of the very individualized nature of the process and the need for prayer and vision (L. Harrelson and B. Stouffer, personal communication). This study endeavored to lay a foundation for other non-public schools that are transitioning from a K-8 program to a pre-K-12 school.

**Background and Purpose of the Study**

Therefore, the purpose of this exploratory study was to evaluate the process of a Christian school’s expansion and development within the complexity of the school’s culture. The study describes the transition of a non-public school from a K-8 school to a complete pre-K-12 program at Cornerstone Christian School, Bellevue, Nebraska, resulting in a description of the decision-making steps needed for the transition and analyzing the outcomes. The focal point of the study was maintaining a culture of distinction through a time of significant change while transitioning from an elementary and middle school program to a complete high school program. The process includes creating and sustaining vision and mission in a time of growth and complexity. For the purpose of this research, the transition to a pre-K-12 school will be defined and described
through the themes of vision and mission, governance, facility, finance, academics, and athletics encompassed within the time of student enrollment growth and instituting a high school program. The outcome of the study explored the question of whether the implementation of the strategies in the transition appropriate, adequate, and able to be replicated. This central question focuses on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the culture and central purposes of the school.

**Research Questions**

The fundamental question of this study is, “Was the school able to sustain the culture, vision, and mission of the school during a time of significant growth and complexity?”

**Sub-question #1**

What are the views of the Cornerstone Christian School board president with respect to vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor, and athletics following the recent transition from a K-8 to a K-12 program?

**Sub-question #2**

What is the rating of the parent satisfaction in reference to the academic and athletic achievement of their students, and the student’s preparedness for college and career decisions? Are parents pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the present school board governance, the academic rigor, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility?
Sub-question #3

What is the parent of an alumni student’s perception of the high school academic and athletic program and their personal preparedness for college and career decisions? What is the parent's perception of the vision and mission of the school as it relates to each alumnus individually? Are parents pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the school board governance, the academic rigor, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility?

Sub-question #4

What is the correlation between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys? Does the understood importance of the themes in the teachers’ perceptions correspond with the stated importance of the themes as demonstrated by the parent survey scores?

Sub-question #5

What are the current levels of performance on national standardized assessments compared to established academic goals?

Significance of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to evaluate the process of a Christian school expansion and development within the complexity of the school’s culture. Embedded into this study is the inquiry if a distinct vision, mission, and culture were created and sustained as the high school program at Cornerstone Christian School was implemented. This objective focuses on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity while sustaining the distinctively Christian culture and academic merit within the school.
A secondary purpose of the study includes determining if the processes and procedures are meaningful and valuable in crafting the high school program, and to define an effective process for other non-public schools who desire to launch a high school. The outcome of the study will answer the question of was the implementation of the strategies in the transition appropriate, adequate, and able to be replicated.

**Definitions of Terms**

**Vision and mission.** The vision statement is a purpose statement that is highly individualized and reflects the school’s deepest core values. A mission statement is a public declaration that describes the founding purpose and major academic commitments of the school, what to do and why to do it.

**Academic rigor.** Academic rigor is the focus on excellence within the academic program of an educational program. Cornerstone Christian School bases its philosophy of education on a truth-focused perspective, acknowledging that each student is created in the image of God and each has a wonderful plan and purpose in life.

**Campus and facility.** The emphasis on campus and facility is correlated with positive educational outcomes and therefore, must be addressed in the expansion to a full K-12 educational program and the subsequent planning for a facility.

**Governance.** A school board must demonstrate the attributes of a high-performing school board in that there is a clear and distinct role in the governance of the school, acting as a unified group in decision-making.

**Finance.** Non-public schools in Nebraska are financially supported through three main funding sources: tuition dollars, donations, and foundational grants. The
procurement and allocation of financial resources are fundamental for the existence of a thriving educational program.

**School culture.** The culture of a Christian school which must be one of distinctiveness in that the school must integrate Biblical truth and academic rigor within a nurturing setting. Although culture is intangible, it is not undefinable in that culture is a shared sense of purpose and values, standards of continuous learning and improvement, and collaborative relationships amongst the stakeholders of the school including the students.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

The most prominent limitation of this study is that each student and parent surveyed has purposefully selected Cornerstone Christian School, and therefore, the primary decision to enroll was already based on an anticipation of satisfaction and even an expectation of college and career preparation. The significance of this is that the parents and students have an assumption of satisfaction for the program and the achievement levels of their students. Other limitations include the small pool of candidates to survey in that being the newest high school in the state of Nebraska, CCS currently has 71 students in high school with only twenty-seven alumni. A final limitation of the study is that due to the natural transition of a school board, only three current members of the school board are from the board as it existed at the time of the decision to create a high school program. To address the limitations, I have included all parents of current students enrolled in the CCS high school and all parents of alumni.

The delimitations of the study are that the primary focus is on Christian high schools in the Midwestern states. These schools are defined as non-public schools that are
operating within the realm of their state’s department of education. The schools that comprise this set are few and the breadth of inquiry was therefore limited.

**Role of the Researcher**

Within this study, it is imperative to consider the role of the researcher. As the primary founder of the high school program, I have been embedded in the process and a good illustration is that my fingerprints are on each aspect of the high school program.

I grew up in the Mali Republic, West Africa, as the child of missionaries, having been born in Ferkesedougou, Côte d’Ivoirè. My parents arrived in Mali just years after its decolonization from France and in the beginning years of a severe famine. My childhood years were spent in a small village, living in a mud brick house with no running water or electricity. We played with the children of the neighboring village, speaking the tribal language of Bambara with our friends and my parents’ national co-workers. For kindergarten, my mother taught me at home while my older sisters attended a school in Bouaké, a boarding school twelve hour’s drive from our village in the neighboring country of Côte d’Ivoirè. We came back to the United States for my first grade and lived with my grandmother in North Dakota while our family visited churches in the Midwest who supported our missionary work. Returning to Mali, I attended the same boarding school as my older sisters in the neighboring country, living away from our parents for three months at a time. The school was a first through twelfth grade school that served missionaries throughout West Africa. The school had high academic standards, but the biggest struggle was being away from home at such a young age. When I was in third grade, my father became the director of the mission organization and our family moved to the capital city of Bamako. My parents
transferred us to an international school opened by the American embassy and U.S. Aid. Although it was not a Department of Defense school, it held similar standards to American schools, hiring both American and international teachers; my French teacher, of course, was French, the kindergarten teacher was British, with a Malian as one of the physical education teachers. At home, we spoke English, but used French with our neighborhood friends and Bambara with our church friends. I attended the International School of Bamako for third through fifth grade when we then returned to the United States for another visit with family. I attended the same public school in North Dakota with very gracious teachers as I adjusted to the American lifestyle and culture. Moving back to Mali after one year in the United States, I attended the international school for one more year before returning to the boarding school in Côte d’Ivoirè for eighth and ninth grade. That summer, our family moved back to the United States due to some health concerns for my mother. We lived in North Dakota for one semester; I attended the local public school before moving to South Dakota where my father became a minister at a rural church. I attended a small Christian school until graduation.

This diverse experience in education, ranging from a Christian boarding school to an international school to a stateside public school to a Christian school brought depth and complexity to my understanding of education. My childhood also brought a distinct perspective and set a diverse tone within my philosophy of education and the human condition.

My childhood, marked by the sincerity, commitment, and generosity of my parents, also played a role in my perspective on teaching and even learning. Growing up in one of the ten poorest nations of the world, a nation where only males were eligible for
a government education in the villages, a nation where having a car was seen as extreme wealth, a nation where half of children did not live to their fifth birthday, greatly impacted my view of people and their value and promise. I understand that each individual has immeasurable worth in the eyes of their Creator and that each has a remarkable plan and purpose. This personal philosophy does and must influence each of my decisions as a teacher, an educational leader, and a superintendent.

As a young teacher, God led me to teach at a small K-12 Christian school in Omaha, Nebraska. This experience became the foundation for me as an educator and leader. It was in this setting that I was encouraged to become as administrator, challenged to take the next step in preparation to be a principal. At this time, I certainly did not see myself as a visionary and saw myself more as a follower and supporter of the vision. In my years at Cornerstone, I have developed into a leader committed to vision and mission. This shift within my own character is a result of learning to listen in times of prayer and then having the courage to walk by faith in response. This is a vital part in establishing a high school program, leading students on missions’ trip to Haiti, and traveling to China and Taiwan to serve at orphanages and teach English. The shy little girl from Mali, West Africa, now moves with purpose and vision through the complexity of not only expanding Cornerstone Christian School to a high school program, but maintaining vision, mission, and culture through a time of complex and significant growth.

**Theoretical Framework**

Within the framework for leading change in the school, a careful consideration of process and progression must be addressed. John Kotter (2007), a leading author and
managing consultant, delineates a helpful model for understanding and managing change. His recommended 8-step process for change management includes establishing a sense of urgency for the stated change, creating the guiding coalition of formal and informal leaders, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the vision, empowering employees for action, generating short-term successes, consolidating gains, and anchoring the new approaches within the culture of the organization (Strategies for managing change.2017). His research suggests that for change to be successful, 75% of a company's management needs to support the change and this was translated into the support of the school board, teaching staff, and parents of the school. The vote of the school board to institute the high school program was unanimous and teachers and parents were requesting the launch of a high school. Within the progression and building the momentum for the implementation of the program, both strong leadership and discernable support from key people within the school community was evident.

**Significance and Implications**

The prevailing significance of this study is demonstrated by the culture of a Christian school which must be one of distinctiveness in that the school must integrate Biblical truth and academic rigor within a nurturing setting. Just as the culture provides the significance within the school setting, a culture of discipleship provides the distinctiveness of Cornerstone Christian School. The distinctive culture of discipleship is a trademark of the school and plays an essential role in the founding of the program. Should this research, analysis, and publication be beneficial to other schools who are implementing a similar program, the vision, mission, and culture of the school must be fully considered.
Conclusion

The outcome of the study will demonstrate that the implementation of the strategies in the high school transition were appropriate, adequate, and able to be replicated. The central focus is on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the culture and central purposes of the school, achieved academic, social, and cultural success in the educational setting of Cornerstone Christian School. The integration of faith is fundamental in all decision-making concerning the vision of a complete pre-K-12 program within Cornerstone Christian School. The strategies and procedures are meaningful and dependable for other schools in their addition of a high school program or in instituting a new pre-K-12 school.

As was noted in the absence and void of research available when this transition to a full high school program was started, the purpose of this study will be to provide effective research and results for other Christian schools who desire to make a similar change. This evaluation model that explores the transition will demonstrate that the strategies are meaningful and dependable, but also, more importantly are able to be replicated in other settings.
Chapter 2 Review of Literature

Creating School Culture within Vision and Mission

The importance of establishing a vision and mission for an organization has been demonstrated in every aspect of our culture. This significance of vision and mission in a business, a school, an organization, or even an athletic club is irrefutable. Becoming the focal point, the target for when the goal is met or the outcome is accomplished, the vision and mission is vital in a school.

One of the responsibilities of a leader is to assist in developing a strong vision and mission statement which can help stakeholders in the school reach a common understanding of the academic achievement expectations. A vision can be seen as the school's goal—where educational and community leaders hope to see the school program and students in the future. The mission provides an overview of the steps planned to achieve that goal. A vision is concise and easy to recall, while a mission is more extensive and explanatory in nature (Edglossary, 2014). In general, a vision statement expresses an anticipated upcoming reality, while a mission statement declares the practical commitments and actions that a school believes are needed to achieve its vision. While a vision statement describes the end goal or the change sought within a school, a mission statement may describe its broad academic and operational assurances, as well as its commitment to its students and community (Edglossary, 2015). The vision and mission of a school must be founded on the values of the school and its community.

Significance of vision and mission within a school district setting.

The vision statement is a purpose statement that is highly individualized and reflects the school’s deepest core values. Vision provides guidance to an organization
by articulating what it wishes to attain, serving as "a signpost pointing the way for all who need to understand what the organization is and where it intends to go" (Méndez-Morse, 1993, p.39). By providing a depiction and direction, vision not only describes an organization's goal, but also the means of accomplishing the objective. The vision guides the work of the organization.

A vision statement is the declaration and affirmation that schools or other educational organizations use to describe their high-level goals for the future—what they hope to achieve if they successfully fulfill their organizational purpose or mission. A vision statement may describe a school’s loftiest ideals, its core organizational values, its long-term objectives, or what it hopes its students will learn or be capable of doing after graduating (Edglossary, 2015).

A mission statement is a public declaration that describes the founding purpose and major academic commitments of the school, what to do and why to do it. A mission statement may describe a school’s day-to-day operational objectives, its instructional values, or its public commitments to the students and community. The mission statement is an extension of the established vision, and both the vision and mission statements must be founded on the values and purposes of the school.

Michael Fullan (1992), an educational leader and researcher, recommends the following eight guidelines for instituting vision and mission within the educational setting. He recommends the following approach to the complex task of working with teachers and the community:

1. Understand the culture of the school before trying to change it.
2. Value the teachers and promote their professional growth.
3. Extend what is valued within the process of vision and mission setting.

4. Express what you value and what the outcomes will demonstrate

5. Promote collaboration with each of the stakeholders

6. Offer options within the process and outcomes, not mandates

7. Use bureaucratic means to facilitate, but not constrain.

8. Connect with the wider environment and community (Fullan, 1992).

**Those who set the vision and those who fulfill and implement the vision.**

Within a school setting, the task of establishing a vision and mission statement results from a collaborative, inclusive development process that may include students, parents, and community members, in addition to superintendents and teachers (Edglossary, 2015). Preparation for the task may include surveys of the school culture, academic evaluations of the current students, a review of former assessment levels, and research on cultural, academic, and behavioral goals that are valued in the community. The value of this team is enhanced by the importance given to the task and implementation the established vision. The superintendent as the educational leader is key to this process, from the inception to the implementation.

Educational leaders must attend to the values, capability, and commitment of those making a purposeful decision as members of the team are invited to participate. Within education, strategic decisions are essential, and therefore the responsibility of the educational leaders. This selection of the team is a critical role of the superintendent and is a strategic decision that is made purposefully with discernment. Leadership must be sustained and prepared for monumental decisions within the educational landscape, and
setting vision and mission become the lynchpin of these decisions (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).

A school should develop its own vision statement instead of simply copying the vision from a neighboring school. Some questions that the team must be asked are:

1. What is the school striving to become?
2. What does it want to achieve academically, socially, and culturally?
3. To what extent will it hold itself accountable for progressing toward fulfilling its vision? (Education World, 2015)

The vision statement is a purpose statement that is highly individualized, therefore reflecting the school’s deepest core values. Unfortunately, many schools seem to take the work of another school and try to implement the exact vision and mission that was previously written without considering the culture of the school, the individualism of the student population, the professionalism of the teaching staff, and the values of the community. With this in mind, the leadership and writing team must take the time to evaluate the ideals and principles of the school as they consider the outcomes and goals that need to be implemented. The process of writing the vision and mission is one that takes deliberation, contemplation, and dialogue. “A vision and mission statement is not something you write overnight, but fundamentally, your mission statement becomes your constitution, the solid expression of your vision and values. It becomes the criterion by which you measure everything else in your life.” (S. Covey, 2015).

**The continuance of a vision.**

“Many mission statements have little practical meaning”, states Mizell (2015) in an interview with *Education World*. “They are posted on walls and in the student
handbook or scheduler, but they rarely guide or challenge the school. They are too safe and too easily forgotten. Even in the best of circumstances, research suggests that vision and mission statements are often one more good intention pushed to the background” (Education World, 2015).

Vision is more than an image of the future, an unattainable goal. Instead, the vision must be a compelling aspect that serves to inspire, motivate, and engage people. It is a force that provides meaning and purpose to the work of an organization and school. Vision is a compelling picture of the future that inspires commitment, as well as, action (Méndez-Morse, 1993). A vision is the motivation to push forward and to demand diligence, commitment, and amongst each member of the team and each stakeholder. This defines the goals and purposes of the school and its supporting programs.

**The purpose of vision in implementing the mission.**

An effective school leader will emphasize the vision and mission statements at the beginning of the year, as well as throughout the school year, as a means of clarifying expectations and establishing policy and procedures within the school. The intentional communication of the vision and mission of the school to teachers, students, parents, and community members will strengthen the purpose of a specific decision or program change. The statement must be central to decisions made both within the district as well as at the individual campuses (Education World, 2015). Schools should refer to the mission and belief statements when discussing and instituting academic programs and decisions. The vision and mission will focus a school’s academic program on a set of common, agreed-upon learning goals. In schools, teachers may work in relative isolation from one another, and each academic department may operate independently when it
comes to making important decisions about what is taught and how it is taught. Mission and vision statements, therefore, have the potential to focus school leaders and educators in making decisions that are aligned with the vision and mission, that lead to greater curricular coherence, and that use staff and classroom time more efficiently, purposefully, and effectively (Edglossary, 2015). Decisions in school leadership, curriculum selection, retaining teaching staff, and implementing extracurricular activities must reflect the vision, mission, and value statements (Education World, 2015). Therefore, when schools have a mission statement that clarifies purpose, this must be used as the criterion by which decisions are made (S. Covey, 2015).

To assist leaders in developing an appropriate vision and mission, five characteristics are recommended:

- attracts commitment,
- creates meaning,
- establishes a standard of excellence,
- bridges the present to the future, and
- transcends the status quo (Méndez-Morse, 1993).

The benchmark of values within the vision and mission of a school.

"The schools that have been most successful in addressing and increasing the academic achievement of their students have benefited from a clarity of purpose that is grounded in a shared set of core values" (Gabriel & Farmer, 2014, p. 57). The implementation of the vision must attend to the values, capability, and commitment of those making a purposeful decision. Within education, strategic decisions are essential, and the responsibility of the educational leaders. Therefore, this leadership must be sustained and
prepared for monumental decisions within the educational setting. Andy Hargreaves and Dean Fink (2006) state, “Sustainable leadership spreads; it sustains as well as depends on the leadership of others”. Leadership cannot rest on the shoulders of the few; it must have a distributed and shared responsibility. This leadership inspires staff members, students, and parents to seek and create opportunities that contribute to deep and broad learning for all students.

**Leadership and vision.**

Leadership within the school setting is often defined by a title- dean of students, lead teacher, principal, or superintendent, but leadership is far more than a title and an accompanying degree. Leaders are the people who infuse vision into the school and who are focused on the values, needs, and aspirations of others. Leaders create opportunities, clarify problems and solutions, build morale and partnerships, and inspire others (Cronin, 1993). List after list has been compiled of what constitutes a great leader including intelligence, wisdom, integrity, courage, and tenacity. To add to this list, great leaders also have a clear ability to communicate, enthusiasm, good judgment, a sense of humor, and are reflective. They are flexible, confident, innovative and compassionate. Being ethical decision-makers and having a capacity to concentrate on achieving goals is also essential along with the gift of listening.

The task of creating and sustaining vision and mission in this time of significant growth at Cornerstone Christian School as the school expanded to a high school program while student population tripled brought great complexity to the role of the educational leader. It is during this time that the school board and administrator must focus on the purposes and goals of the school educationally, socially, behaviorally, and spiritually in a
new manner. Each decision was based on the school’s vision and mission, communicated with clarity and purposefulness. As a Christian school, the importance of prayer and intercession was vital to the process of decision-making. Each decision was immersed in hours of prayer both as individuals and corporately as a school board.

**Facility**

**Purpose of the facility study.** There is growing evidence of the connection between the adequacy of a school facility and student behavior and performance. Multiple studies conducted over the past three decades have found a statistically significant relationship between the condition of a school and its classrooms and student achievement. Research demonstrates that students attending school in newer facilities score five to seventeen points higher on standardized tests than those students in substandard buildings. Facility components such as building age and condition, quality of maintenance, temperature, lighting, air quality, noise, and color can also affect student health, safety, and sense of self. Research has also shown that the quality of school facilities influences community perceptions of schools and can serve as a point of community pride (Tacir, 2003). Therefore, with the opportunity to build an entirely new campus, the design and planning stage of this process is critical. The components of a quality facility were researched and integrated into the design of the projected campus for Cornerstone Christian School.

The objectives and purposes of the emphasis on facility is correlated with positive educational outcomes and therefore, must be addressed in the expansion to a full pre-K-12 educational program and the subsequent planning for a facility. Some themes that must be addressed include:
1. Age of the Facility
   a. Students have higher achievement scores in newer facilities. Research supports the fact that as the age of the facilities decreased, there was a corresponding increase in scores in mathematics, reading, and composition assessments.
   b. Fewer disciplinary incidents are documented in newer facilities.
   c. Attendance records are improved in new facilities.

2. Condition of the Facility
   a. Higher student achievement is associated with well-maintained schools.
   b. Stimulating environments promote positive attitudes in students.

3. Temperature Factors
   a. Eight of nine studies found a significant relationship between the thermal environment, including temperature and airflow of a classroom, and student achievement and behavior.
   b. There is a consistent pattern of higher achievement in air-conditioned schools.
   c. Excessive classroom temperatures cause stress in students.

4. Visual/Lighting
   a. A causal relationship can be demonstrated between the variables of color and light and students’ blood pressures.
   b. Classrooms with full-spectrum lighting have a positive effect on attendance rates.

Further research supports the statistics as presented. In fact, multiple research studies have linked student achievement and positive behavior to the physical building conditions. Well-designed facilities appear to be a significant condition in student learning and performance (Architecture, 2013). A year-long study by the University of Salford in the United Kingdom and a British architecture firm observed 751 students in 34 classrooms across seven elementary schools for the 2011-2012 academic year. Students were assessed at the beginning of the school year and again at end of the year for academic performance in math, reading, and writing. The classrooms were also rated on environmental qualities such as natural light, acoustics, temperature, air quality and color. The researchers found that classroom architecture and design positively and significantly impacted academic performance. The research implies that the environmental factors studied influenced 73% of the variations in student scores (Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/school-design-student-grades, May 2013).

Multiple studies have linked scholastic achievement to natural lighting, and the use of day light in schools benefits students, as well as teachers, support staff, and superintendents. Other studies show that "daylighting," increasing the volume of natural daylight in a school facility, is linked to higher test scores (Green Schools, 2013). A Canadian study demonstrated that achievement rates are 26% higher in reading and 20% higher in math in classrooms with more daylight (The Green Market Oracle, 2010).
Studies have also demonstrated that classrooms lighted with full-spectrum lighting resulted in students with reduced blood pressure, less off-task behavior, aggressiveness, disruptiveness, and improved academic performance (Asumag, 2009). Natural and daylighting will be implemented into the design of the CCS facility.

When discussing color for the use in school, it is important to approach color choices as functional color rather than from a standpoint of aesthetics, although the attractiveness of the facility is significant as well. Functional color focuses on using color to attain an outcome or consequence such as increased attention span and lower levels of eye fatigue (Engelbrecht, 2003). Recommended guidelines for use of color as an important element in school interiors include such factors as:

1. Relieves eye fatigue
2. Increases productivity and accuracy
3. Supports developmental processes
4. Prevents over-stimulation and under-stimulation
5. Creates positive emotional and physiological effects

Color can enhance or impair learning, morale, and behaviors. Studies have shown that color influences a student's attention span and perception of time and can reduce absenteeism and vandalism. Color helps create a non-threatening learning environment that improves visual processing, reduces stress, and challenges brain development through visual stimulation and pattern seeking (Continuing Education, 2013). According to a 1995 study, visual stimulation can actually rewire the brain, making stronger connections while fostering reasoning, problem solving, and creativity. There is no established color scheme that is right for all schools and classrooms, but
designers do have recommended selections in choosing color in educational settings. The color choices should be based not only on the basic nature of the color itself, but by the age of the students, the purpose of the room and space, as well as the geographic location of the school and its culture (Continuing Education, 2013). The use of color and a variety of saturations will be an important part of the design of the new K-12 campus. The architects and planning committee will also consider the culture of the school and the age range of the students in these decisions.
### Color Observations and Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Red</th>
<th>Color Observations and Recommendation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Captures Attention</td>
<td>Increases Pulse Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Considered Passionate</td>
<td>Promotes Alertness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creates Vitality</td>
<td>Prompts Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages Movement</td>
<td>Stimulates Appetite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generates Excitement</td>
<td>Suggests Strength</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pink</th>
<th>Color Observations and Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considered Tender</td>
<td>Inspires Compassion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveys Delicate Disposition</td>
<td>Nurtures Affection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expresses Feminine Quality</td>
<td>Promotes Healthy Impression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies Innocence</td>
<td>Radiates Caring Attitude</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orange</th>
<th>Color Observations and Recommendation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Considered Fun</td>
<td>Invites Friendliness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages Movement</td>
<td>Playful Attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expresses Emotion</td>
<td>Pleasurable Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gregarious Nature</td>
<td>Suggests Power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies Good Cheer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yellow</th>
<th>Color Observations and Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conveys Lightness</td>
<td>Inspires Creativity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages Spontaneity</td>
<td>Offers Zest and Joyfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expresses Caution</td>
<td>Radiates Warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicates Innovation</td>
<td>Raises Alert Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implies Free Spirit</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Green</th>
<th>Color Observations and Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhances Concentration</td>
<td>Provides Refreshing Atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates Judgment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nurtures Relaxation</td>
<td>Renews Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offers Balance</td>
<td>Suggests Healing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes Security</td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teal</th>
<th>Color Observations and Recommendation</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Balanced Appeal</td>
<td>Inspires Harmony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calming Influence</td>
<td>Nurtures Sensitivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveys Unique Quality</td>
<td>Refreshing Atmosphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicates</td>
<td>Renews Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gracefulness</td>
<td>Soothing Demeanor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expresses Refinement</td>
<td>Suggests Healing</td>
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</table>

**Table 1**

*Color Observations and Recommendation*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color Category</th>
<th>Observations</th>
<th>Recommendations</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Calming Spirit</td>
<td>Provides Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Combats Tension</td>
<td>Provides Introspection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultivates Conservatism</td>
<td>Soothing Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Offers Serenity</td>
<td>Supports Relaxation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Promotes Thoughtfulness</td>
<td>Underscores Devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violet</td>
<td>Promotes contemplation</td>
<td>Intuitive Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contemplative Nature</td>
<td>Sensitive Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conveys Royal Essence</td>
<td>Unique Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expresses Mystery</td>
<td>Intuitive Understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introspective Persona</td>
<td>Sensitive Character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unique Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Whimsical Personality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warm Neutrals</td>
<td>Comfortable Attitude</td>
<td>Promotes Secure Feeling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conservative Nature</td>
<td>Suggests Subtle Warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implies Stability</td>
<td>Versatile Nature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicates Gracefulness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cool Neutrals</td>
<td>Implies Sophistication</td>
<td>Subdues Emotional Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introspective Nature</td>
<td>Suggests Subtle Coolness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Soothing Atmosphere</td>
<td>Versatile Nature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 1 - Color Observations and Recommendation
As part of the planning and design phase, both indoor and outdoor facilities must be designed for the physical education program of the school. A variety of athletic and play areas should be designed into the master plan, both for the facilities to be built at the beginning of the project in phase one, as well as available land for future athletic complexes and fields. Additionally, consideration should also be given to extracurricular athletic activities, after-school programs, and community-based programs that may share use of the facilities. These facilities will share space with the community when the school’s education program and scheduling will allow. Consideration to meet the needs of both students and spectators with disabilities is required by the state and local codes and pertain to the complex and the parking. A variety of athletic fields will be designed based on athletic opportunities already offered at the school, as well as planned additional teams and sports.

Another aspect of the design and plan of the campus includes the outdoor space not allocated to athletic fields. Gardens offer a variety of outdoor learning environments even though the school may be in an urban neighborhood. This garden space allows for a variety of learning activities and experiences for the students and is a valuable resource for exploratory learning (School design Studio, 2010). Studies have shown that elementary school students with either hands-on experience in a school garden or an environmental education curriculum score higher on math, science, and language arts tests, behave better in class, and have better attitudes about school compared with control groups without such programs (Green Schools, 2013).

The beauty of nature rises to an extraordinary level of importance in designing for education, especially in terms of its bright colors and vistas to the outdoors. In response
to a survey asking where students would like to be to alleviate stress, 95% respond that they are most comforted and soothed by being outdoors. Several influential thinkers in education have underscored the importance of nature in relationship to the design of school facilities (Continuing Education, 2013).

A leading voice on the significance of nature and outdoor exploration to childhood and education, Richard Louv (2005), states,

Yet, at the very moment that the bond is breaking between the young and the natural world, a growing body of research links our mental, physical, and spiritual health directly to our association with nature—in positive ways. Several of these studies suggest that thoughtful exposure of youngsters to nature can even be a powerful form of therapy for attention-deficit disorders and other maladies. As one scientist puts it, we can now assume that just as children need good nutrition and adequate sleep, they may very well need contact with nature. The children and nature movement is proving to be one of the best ways to challenge other entrenched concepts—for example, the current test-centric definition of education reform. The children and nature movement has perhaps even greater potential because it touches something even deeper within us, biologically and spiritually. An array of leaders from different religious backgrounds has stepped forward to support the reconciliation of children and nature. Such leaders understand that all spiritual life begins with a sense of wonder, and that one of the first windows to wonder is the natural world.

There is a growing movement in North America to transform the model of playground design in school settings from barren areas of grass, asphalt, and wood chips
with manufactured equipment into naturalized environments for children's play, exploration, and discovery (Children and Nature, 2004). Discovery play gardens are examples of children’s play areas designed to help children reclaim the magic of childhood – the ability to play and learn outdoors through exploration, discovery, and the capacity of their imaginations. Basic components of a naturalized play environment for students may include:

- Water and sand
- Ample vegetation, including trees, bushes, grasses that children can explore
- Animals, turtles, butterflies, bugs, and fish
- Areas to experience the changing seasons, wind, light, sounds, and weather
- Natural places to sit in, on, or under, also to climb and provide shelter and shade
- Different levels such as nooks and crannies, places that offer socialization, privacy, and views of surrounding play areas.

Literature shows that the natural environments have positive effects on the well-being of students, including better psychological health, greater cognitive functioning, fewer physical ailments, and speedier recovery from illness. The benefits of imaginative play in outdoor play areas and fields are demonstrated through research that points to the following:

1. Children with views of and contact with nature score higher on tests of concentration and self-discipline.
2. Children who play regularly in natural environments show more advanced motor fitness, including coordination, balance, and agility, and they are absent less frequently due to sickness.

3. When children play in natural environments, their play is more diverse with imaginative and creative play that fosters language and collaborative skills.

4. Exposure to natural environments improves cognitive development by improving reasoning and observational skills.

5. Early experiences with the natural world have been positively linked with the development of imagination and the sense of wonder. Wonder is an essential and significant motivator for lifelong learning.

6. Play in a diverse natural environment reduces or eliminates anti-social behavior such as violence, bullying, and vandalism (Children and Nature, 2004).

Students benefit significantly when informal play is maximizing and learning opportunities in natural outdoor play environments are offered and our school’s planning and design committee will design multiple natural play areas for the new pre-K-12 campus.

In our community and our nation, planning for school safety is critical. Effective school safety efforts must utilize policies and practices that ensure the well-being of all students. Reasonable school security measures, including locked and monitored doors, well-lit and monitored hallways, and check-in/check-out systems for parents and visitors, are imperative. The teachers’ and students’ perception of safety is not an insignificant consideration given that simply feeling unsafe or insecure in a school hinders learning.
This perception may also inhibit the development of a nurturing, supportive, and welcoming school environment (Safe Schools, 2013). An important factor is the integration of cameras and a monitoring system. The design of safe schools allows for the monitoring of student movement and reduces the risk of crime (School Design Studio, 2010).

Schools must use a variety of practices and procedures to promote the safety of students and staff. Therefore, a school's use of safety and security measures, policies, and procedures must be incorporated into the design of a new school building. The need for safety and security measures within the school facility has evolved over the past two decades, and these changes must be addressed along with anticipated changes to school security in our nation. Emerging as a chief component of this new focus is the theory of crime prevention through environmental design (District Administration, 2011).

Architects must work closely with the principals, teachers, and support staff who will work in the schools so input must be gained from them on the most practical and useful design. This design will facilitate education, supervision, and safety. The strategy in ensuring school safety can be classified under three themes: personnel protection, readiness and emergency management, and building and asset security. Certain practices, such as locked and/or monitored doors, are intended to limit or control access to school campuses, while others, such as metal detectors and security cameras are intended to monitor or restrict both students' and visitors' behavior on campus (Nces, 2014). The design and planning stage of a campus is the most appropriate and cost-effective time to address these specific needs for the facility, and this must be accomplished in conjunction with both the architect and the builder.
Motivation for conducting the research

During a vision-setting meeting in May 2009, the Cornerstone Christian School board made the decision to expand the school which had been a kindergarten through eighth grade school for over twenty years to a complete K-12 program located on an independent campus. This vision had numerous significant threads. First, the school would need to increase its student base, kindergarten through eighth grade. Second, the high school would be created one grade per school year, building to a complete high school within four years. Third, the independent campus would come through the purchase or lease of property, the construction of a school building, dependent on the institution of a capital campaign and foundation for the purpose of financing the project. This extensive and visionary decision was established with significant input from the community members of Cornerstone Christian School including the school board, current students and parents, alumni and their families, donors, prayer partners, and spiritual advisors.

Cornerstone Christian School (CCS) was founded in 1984 as a non-public school dedicated to the education of students from a Biblical worldview. After years of being housed in several leased facilities, the CCS school board in a vision and mission planning meeting determined that the growth of the school required a move to an independent campus. This planned campus will accommodate kindergarten through twelfth grade, combining the current split campuses onto one site. In the past twelve years, the school has transitioned from a K-8 school to a complete pre-K-12 program and has tripled in enrollment. These fundamental changes have resulted in the need for an independent campus; the focus of the planning and design of a campus was accelerated to
accommodate the anticipated growth in student population and development of the academic and athletic program of the pre-K-12 school.

As the school board began the planning and design phase, the importance of a well-designed and thoughtfully planned campus became a chief focus. In this process, the board vetted and began to work with a local architectural firm in conjunction with a builder. As the school superintendent and a member of the planning and design committee, I became intrigued by the research on well-built schools with the objectives of student achievement, social behavior, attendance, and cooperative community ownership. The planning and design phase is the most appropriate time to examine the correlation between a well-designed campus and the fundamentals of education.

**Activities to accomplish objectives**

During the spring semester of 2013, the facility committee and CCS school board began to meet with the architecture team from DLR Group and the builder, Boyd Jones. Discussing the vision and mission of the school, we began to establish requirements for the planned facility, addressing the facility needs including, but not limited to classroom space, specialized learning areas, support spaces, cafeteria, food preparation and storage, mechanical and electrical equipment rooms, music and athletic arenas, and custodial space. We also designed the facility with multiple prayer rooms and a variety of play and athletic fields while maintaining Nebraska-themed landscapes.
### Table 2

*Classroom Recommendations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Recommendation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (K-5)</td>
<td>35 square foot per student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle School (6-8)</td>
<td>30 square foot per student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior High (9-12)</td>
<td>25 square foot per student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Retrieved from [https://ed.sc.gov/agency/School-Facilities](https://ed.sc.gov/agency/School-Facilities), January 2013)
Having established themselves as the premier architectural firm in the Midwest for school facilities, the meetings led by the architectural group were focused and beneficial. The CCS facility committee spent considerable time incorporating the vision and mission of Cornerstone Christian School into the phases of the campus construction. We reviewed the academic goals of the school and reflected on the culture of the school and how it impacts the physical structure of the facility. Being a faith-based organization, the meetings began with prayer and the conversations and discussions were interwoven with the importance of faith. Discussion of the vision and mission of the school is critical at this time to identify the various phases of the campus build and to design a campus that meets the needs of our school. This drives the requirements given to the architects during this initial planning phase with an emphasis on the academic rigor of the educational program. Although CCS has not yet acquired land, this preliminary planning is essential to the walk of faith that is part of the school’s culture.

An anticipated and much desired stage in the planning and design for the new campus is the acquisition of land. Cornerstone Christian School is seeking over eighty acres of land in Bellevue or Papillion, Nebraska. CCS is working closely with city planning boards and anticipates purchasing land within the coming years. The campus will be built in three phases, coinciding with student growth and capital campaign donations.

As a Christian school, the spiritual elements of prayer and faith are essential to setting vision and mission and to designing a pre-K-12 campus. The school board and I will continue to spend time in prayer, meet with the architects and builders in planning meetings, and take the next steps for the acquisition of land and financing for the new
Concurrent with the implementation of a high school program and the expansion of our elementary and middle school program, Cornerstone Christian School established a facility committee with a focus on the purchase or possible lease of property for a campus in the Bellevue/Papillion metro area. The committee is responsible for researching available property in the area, working with city and county planning offices, seeking the appropriate financing options for the purchase, in addition to, the build of the campus and athletic fields, setting the budgetary projections for the various phases of the complete campus, and recommending an architectural firm for the school board.

The chair of the facility committee is a board member and the co-chairs are also school board members. The facility committee has been in negotiations with a builder, and an architectural firm, both local Nebraska firms. In the renovations of two transitional campuses, the school has also contracted with two local architects. The committee includes legal counsel, experts in planning and design, parents of the school, and spiritual advisors. The superintendent attended all facility committee meetings and executive session meetings with architects, legal counsel, and real estate agents.

As the school board and I wait for the fulfillment of the vision of the complete campus, we are leasing two facilities for our school. After spending the first 30 years in various leased churches, Cornerstone Christian School is currently leasing two campuses. The pre-school through middle school is accommodated at 1005 Fort Crook Road in Bellevue, Nebraska. The high school is at 16405 Clay Street also in Bellevue. The two campuses are nine miles apart with a ten to fifteen minute transit time between the two
facilities. The preschool through middle school campus is a renovated industrial park that was initially built as a commercial mall. The leased space is over 70,000 square feet and contains two classrooms per grade with classrooms for music and art, a technology lab, a spacious lunchroom that also serves as a chapel and an activity room that is used for physical education as we wait for the build of the gym. The high school is a renovated elementary campus that includes twelve classrooms, a music room, computer lab, a kitchen/lab, and a gym that is also used as a lunchroom and chapel. Both campus locations are the first facilities in which Cornerstone Christian School is the sole tenant and space is not for shared purposes. The Lord’s provision of these campuses is a testament to the clarity of vision and purposefulness of the school.

**Academic rigor as demonstrated in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.**

The formation of the high school was a considerable task, and in conjunction with establishing a complete program scope and sequence, selecting curriculum and resources, adding secondary athletic and activities opportunities, and contracting teaching staff, our team also spent time setting policies and writing student handbooks. The implementation process was completed in close collaboration with the Nebraska Department of Education through regular visits and phone conferences. Currently, Cornerstone Christian School operates in compliance with all rules and regulations of an approved school in the state of Nebraska. CCS is a non-aligned school in Nebraska in that since I have a superintendent’s certificate, the school is independent from the local districts.

Central to educational leadership is effective curricular and instructional practices. Within my years as a school leader, I have purposed to sustain my focus on excellence
and rigor within the academic program of Cornerstone Christian School. CCS bases its philosophy of education on a truth-focused perspective, acknowledging that each student is created in the image of God and each has a wonderful plan and purpose in life. This foundational understanding impacts the selection of curriculum, the development of various programs, the employment of teaching staff, and the implementation of assessment. The educational program is centered on the spiritual, academic, physical, social, and emotional development of each student. As the educational leader, I monitor, evaluate, review, and align all curriculum decisions with the vision and mission of the school. These decisions must offer differentiated instruction and must implement research-based strategies and best practices of effective student achievement.

As an educational leader, it is imperative that I model the values and beliefs that are important to our school, its academic vision and mission. My actions and conversations are interpreted by the faculty, students, and parents as “what is important, valuable, worthy of striving for”. My understanding and modeling of effective pedagogy is essential in establishing an excellent, comprehensive curriculum and instruction practice (Marzano, 2010). As a faith-based school, the curriculum selection enhances the vision and mission, and the teachers are an integral part of the academic excellence of Cornerstone Christian School. I am blessed to serve with a professional and Godly faculty, dedicated to continually developing and enhancing their classroom instruction. High academic standards are established and maintained, scaffolding on curriculum selected to emphasize the vision, mission, and culture of the high school program. A majority of our students test one to two standard deviations above the national norm on standardized assessments and this is a reflection of skilled instruction.
on the part of the teachers, parent participation in learning, and student initiative. Our first graduating class was the Class of 2015 and consisted of six students. Their ACT average score was a 25.3 with other schools in the metropolitan area averaging 22.2, the state average in 2015 was 21.5 with the national average of 21.0 (Retrieved from https://www.act.org/newsroom/data/2015/states.html). The second graduating class of May 2016 has an ACT average of 24.0 and the class of May 2017 had an average score of 22.7. Of our first graduating class, five attended college the fall semester after graduation and three currently enrolled in either a state university or private four-year college with a goal of a bachelor’s degree. The student who did not attend college has enlisted with the Marines and is active duty and the other two are in the workforce. Of the second graduating class of eight, six are attending a four-year college, one is working for a year before joining the Army, and one is participating in a stateside mission organization. The third graduating class of Cornerstone Christian School, made up of thirteen graduates, has ten attending either a two or four-year college, two in the workforce, and one is a Marine.

In conversations with educational leaders, I have discussed how school teams must determine which curriculum and instructional programs will best address the student learning objectives for school. Recommended changes or additions to the high school program are prayerfully considered and at Cornerstone Christian School, we align all programs, curriculum, courses, and assessment with the established vision, mission, and purposes of CCS. As a small school, CCS appreciates the collaboration and assistance of other local Christian schools and I have also reached out to multiple non-public schools nationally as we instituted and implemented our new high school.
Expanding into a high school has certainly offered the school an opportunity to focus on academic excellence within the development of a complete pre-K-12 program, building on the academic expectations and proven outcomes of the K-8 program.

An integral part of any school is the teaching staff, and a fundamental part of building a new academic program is selecting quality, experienced, and dedicated teaching staff. The teacher must display extensive knowledge of the important concepts in the content area and how these relate to other disciplines. The teacher must demonstrate an understanding of prerequisite connections among topics and concepts and recognize the link to reasoning and understanding that ensures student learning. The teacher’s plans and practice must reflect familiarity with a wide range of effective pedagogical methods in the academic discipline (Danielson, 2013). Teachers who reflect the school’s mission for academic excellence, strong and supportive relationships, and commitment to service are sought, hired, and nurtured (Frost, 2010). This nurturing and cultivating of the culture of the teachers is integral to the nurturing and cultivation of the students as well. At Cornerstone Christian School, teachers link the academic vision and mission to the educational needs of the student and integrate the foundational understanding that all disciplines will be taught from the Truth of God’s Word. Within the school setting, we establish collaborative conversations, teacher groups to discussion setting academic expectations and establishing a culture of excellence in learning. These discussions are purposely instituted and maintained within the school year.

Effective teachers use the established scope and sequences of the curriculum plan and identify outcome behaviors, create learning experiences that target the identified objectives, and determine measures of student achievement (Nason, 2002). The teachers
of Cornerstone Christian School integrate Biblical principles and Godly character into the rigorous, differentiated instruction. The academic expectations reflect the culture, vision, and mission of the school.

In the selection of teachers, we employ teachers with a strong commitment to the Lord and a dynamic grasp of the content area, and we also seek teachers who understand the individual needs of students. This understanding includes:

1. The knowledge of child and adolescent development. This includes understanding that students learn differently at different stages of life.

2. The knowledge of the learning process. This encompasses the understanding that learning requires active intellectual engagement.

3. The knowledge of students’ skills, knowledge, and language proficiency. This incorporates the understanding of what students are able to learn at any given time as influenced by their level of knowledge and skill.

4. The knowledge of students’ interests and cultural heritage which includes striving to understand how the students’ backgrounds influence their learning.

5. The knowledge of students’ special needs (Danielson, 2013).

Most non-public schools are not able to offer resource support for students with an educational need. This is due to the financial obligation on the budget that comes with resource, speech, physical or occupational therapy. With a tuition-based school budget, the addition of resource and speech services substantially increases the budget. Therefore, non-public schools must rely on the services that are provided by the local public school district through an equitable service plan, and in Nebraska, Rule 51 monitors the requirement of providing services for a student with a verified educational
need. The local public school district can determine how the services are provided and many offer to transport the student to their neighborhood school for the services. As a school with two campuses, Cornerstone Christian School receives services through the two public school districts that the campuses lie within. Both districts previously determined that they will provide both resource and speech to students within our buildings whether through an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or Equitable Service Plan (ESP). Both districts have stated that this will terminate in the upcoming school years. With this in mind and with an understanding that each student is created in the image of God who has a wonderful plan and purpose for each child, Cornerstone Christian School seeks to provide a full educational program for all learners. Therefore, the school has incorporated into the annual budget a full program for resource and speech Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and 504 Plans for students with a verified academic need. This will expand the educational program for all learners and maintains the vision, mission, and culture of the school. We have a full-time resource teacher and part-time speech language pathologist on staff and will expand to multiple teachers and paraprofessionals as the need arises and as the budget is expanded for these additions.

The selection of the teaching and support staff defines a school, so in this selection much attention is paid to the intimate nature of teaching and learning in the classroom setting. At times, educators are so focused on performance and standards that educational leaders typically overlook the ways teachers and pupils alike go about their business in the classroom- how teachers teach and how pupils learn (Stigler & Hiebert, 1999). At CCS, we purposefully focus on the human side of teaching, learning, and achievement with the understanding that each student is created with a specific purpose
and plan that is best developed within an academically challenging program. The intimate nature of teaching and learning also strategically and purposefully addresses the culture of faith and Biblical truth within the school.

During the past twelve years in my role at Cornerstone Christian School, I have served as the educational leader of the school and continue to work at expanding my understanding and knowledge in pedagogy and instruction. New research and tested practices must be integrated into the existing curriculum and instructional applications and I appreciate the assistance of the CCS teachers in the curriculum review cycle and the collaboration offered by the other superintendents within the metropolitan Christian schools. Each aspect of this process brings a renewed realization of my need of continual learning, reliant on research and best practices. Surrounding myself with knowledgeable advisors and participating in educational communities are two methods of developing as an educational leader. At this time, I substitute teach at the middle school level and serve as a guest speaker in both elementary and high school classes. By staying in the classroom setting, I have the ability to test and experiment with new teaching methodology and initiatives. It is a personal goal to be continually learning and developing as a teacher and an educational leader.

A fundamental focus of our school is the spiritual development of the student within each program, class elective, athletic team, and club activity. The integration of faith is pivotal in all decision-making concerning the vision of a complete pre-K-12 program within Cornerstone Christian School. Both academic achievement and faith-based learning is essential to the application of the vision, mission, and goals of the school and CCS is defined as a “discipleship” Christian school, one dedicated to bringing
the Lord honor and glory in every aspect of the school, its academic and its athletic and activities program.

At Cornerstone Christian School, discipleship is not just a program added to the curriculum. Discipleship is at the very core of the school. It is a responsibility taken up by teachers in the classroom, students in the hallways, coaches at games and practices, families at special events, and administrators in how the school is managed and operated. Discipleship cannot be separated into an add-on program, because it permeates everything we do. Our interest is in helping students become true disciples of Christ — not just adults who have a Christian worldview.

While we believe that discipleship happens in every area of our school, there are specific programs created at CCS to help facilitate this kind of transformation. Our goal is for every person-faculty, staff, student, board member, administrator, coach-to be actively discipled in some way. Service opportunities are built into the school day. High school students serve on mission’s trip both locally and internationally with teams serving at orphanages in Haiti and Puerto Rico. Students may also participate in after-school clubs focused on serving the community. A recently introduced club is P.U.L.S.E., a service oriented club that was student initiated, with a focus on community needs including the Alzheimer’s unit at a local veteran’s home, a shelter for the homeless in our city, and an educational center for students in a neighboring community.

At Cornerstone Christian School, the teachers envision a school where a student is inspired to do his or her very best in response to his or her love for God. Whether it is in academics, athletics, or fine arts, a student’s principal motivation should be to commit all of his or her might to doing the best that he or she can as a means of expressing his or her
love for God. A good example at Cornerstone Christian School is academics. Since students realize and understand that their minds are more than a storage unit for information, they become life-long learners of truth. Academics become more than scores on assessments and transcripts for successful completion of high school, the necessities for entrance to college. In this learning environment, the mind is not “checked-at-the-door” for mere religious instruction, but rather articulate, concise, and defined knowledge is looked upon as a tool for better understanding the Truth of God’s Word.

Interwoven into this relentless pursuit of excellence is a heartfelt passion for others. As a means of expressing their love for God, students recognize, appreciate, and seize the opportunities to meet the needs of others. Upon completion of high school, students have had the opportunity to reach out and touch lives locally, nationally, and internationally. Students are able to begin to shift the focus from “What does this world have to offer me?” to “What do I have to offer this world?” Students entered the world after graduation better knowing what gifts and talents they possess and how they can apply these in their careers. What will the impact of a CCS student on the world be? With this in mind, Jesus’ words of “Come, follow me” in Mark 1:17 takes back its original meaning. This is the potential of the discipleship program at Cornerstone Christian School.

During my early years as the CCS administrator, I proposed the following standard indicators as guidelines and goals, knowing that by stating my educational goals for the school I was holding myself accountable for the advancement of the school academically. The document was presented to the school board and as is presented to
the teachers annually, holding me accountable to the rigors and responsibilities that I see as part of my walk of faith in this calling. These standards are a benchmark for academics and an approach in decision-making for me, in that each state my responsibility as an educational leader.

**Curriculum and Instruction Standard Indicators**

The indicators are a benchmark and a measurement of the roles and responsibilities of the administrative team in the process of creating and implementing the high school program.

The Administrator:

1. Implements curriculum scope and sequence guidelines.
2. Monitors, evaluates, and reviews curriculum that is in place.
3. Modifies curriculum as assessment and review deems necessary.
4. Aligns curriculum, instruction, practice, and assessment to promote student achievement and in cooperation with the Nebraska Department of Education guidelines.
5. Offers differentiated instruction based on students’ needs.
6. Focuses on scientifically research-based strategies and best or proven practices of effective student achievement.
7. Provides a variety of learning opportunities within the school day.
8. Integrates technology as a tool for delivery of instruction and for monitoring student progress.
It is through the commitment of the educational leader to each learner that the teachers and staff grow in their commitment to the vision, mission, and culture of the school. My role in this is instrumental for the development of the high school program, academically, athletically, and spiritually.

**Governance and Communication with school community**

Many non-public schools are independently established and instituted under the supervision of a foundation, charter, church, or synagogue. Cornerstone Christian School was founded by a husband and wife team who saw the need for a Christian school in the Papillion area. Over thirty-three years ago, they established the school and perhaps never imagined the impact this decision would have on the community and the lives of children. Initially, they set the policies for the school with the guidance of the Nebraska Department of Education, and the governance of the school rested with the founders and lead teachers. After three years, the school moved to another location, a church as a leased facility, and maintained the governance style with the addition of a benefactor. In the summer of 2001, the church requested that the school move due to an increase in the church’s programs and their need for the entire facility. Just weeks before the start of the school year, CCS moved to another leased facility within a church. At this time, it was decided that the school would move to a “traditional” school board governance. A school board was established, policies and by-laws were adopted, and this shift in governance transformed the school. I joined the school in August 2006, only ten days before the school year started.

The school board of Cornerstone Christian School is a self-sustaining board, composed of parents and community members. Membership is maintained by current
members recommending, inviting, vetting, interviewing, and approving new members. The new members can be from within the parent population or may be community members. The advantage of a self-sustaining school board is that when a school has a quality, engaged, and balanced board, this school board culture is maintained. Certainly, in this governance paradigm, a poorly managed school board may also be sustained to the detriment of the school.

The school board of a non-public school is similar to the composition of any school board in the nation, but the structure of a board at a Christian school must have some clear distinctives. A Christian school is not solely an educational enterprise; it also has a spiritual nature. Therefore, the school board must also exemplify the same distinctives. Personal holiness and a commitment to Godliness is the primary prerequisite for serving on the Cornerstone Christian School board. The requirements that are true in the selection of the teaching and support staff are also true in the acceptance of school board members. This is essential as the board seeks the knowledge of the Lord’s will in every decision. Such knowledge requires an understanding of Biblical principles, a willingness to pray about each decision, and the faith to believe God for all things. The school board of Cornerstone Christian School is one committed to the Lord, His plans and purposes for the school and its impact on the community and the world. The culture and mission of a school is impacted by its governance and policies, and superintendents of non-public schools need to be mindful of the state of school board affairs before accepting a leadership role within the school (Lundgren, 2006). My attentiveness to the organization of the school board brought me to a deeper appreciation
of the governance of CCS, my school board leadership, and my responsibilities within the school board setting.

Working with a non-profit board as exists at Cornerstone Christian School, it is important for the school board to clearly identify their role at the school. Serving on a Christian school board is a holy calling, a ministry unto the Lord and the school community that deserves the best-informed effort of each member (Lowrie & Lowrie, 2004). A distinctive within Christian education is that every board member must be a mature leader committed to thinking Biblically and modeling these precepts in the boardroom, the school, and the community. Seeing their responsibilities through the lens of a spiritual perspective, the school board understands that their decisions are not just for the academic setting, but also the spiritual characteristics of the school, its teachers and students. The school board must also see their dependence on prayer as the stepping stone of each decision.

The school board of Cornerstone Christian School considers the twelve basic responsibilities within school board governance to be:

1. Determine the school’s mission, vision, and purpose.
2. Select the chief executive, the superintendent, and principals.
3. Provide proper financial oversight and ensure adequate resources.
4. Maintain standing policies on all aspects of governance.
5. Certify legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability.
6. Ensure effective organizational planning.
7. Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance.
8. Enhance the school’s public and community standing.
9. Determine, monitor, and strengthen the school’s programs.

10. Support the administrative team and assess performance.

11. Evaluate and improve the governing board (Board Source, 2007).

The Cornerstone Christian School board demonstrates the attributes of a high-performing board in that the board has a clear and distinct role in the governance of the school and acts as a unified group in decision-making. Monthly meetings are well-planned and well-managed. New school board members are carefully selected, oriented, and trained. With deliberate and prayerful effort, new members with appropriate motivations, values, experiences, and skills are brought onto the board, allowing the board to reach new levels of excellence. The CCS board maintains accountability within the role of the school board, but also to the teachers, staff, families, and students. The board provides proper financial oversight of the annual budget and the planning of a budget for the planned facility build. With the transition to two new facilities, the school board has been integral to the planning and completion of the renovations.

The fiscal oversight of a school board is achieved and maintained dependent on the following administrative tasks:

1. Prayerful construction of an annual budget
2. Control expenditures to align with the approved budget
3. Set a tuition rate to ensure the balancing of the budget
4. Accurately project future enrollment, finances, and facility needs
5. Request annual external audits
6. Establish reasonable phases in facility and staffing expansion
7. Review financial reports presented by the superintendent
8. Trust completely in God for the finances needed to grow  
(Lowrie & Lowrie, 2004)

I have been blessed by a diverse, yet unified school board who are supportive of the teachers and administration, and who are balanced in decision-making. The superintendent answers directly to the school board and supervises the principal, the athletic director, the secondary and elementary staff, and the admissions’, custodial and financial office staff. As with any school, the superintendent oversees and directs the entire school entity.

The superintendent plays a significant role in the governance of the school and in the relationship with the school board. The superintendent as an educational leader must:

1. Build a shared vision of student academic achievement.
2. Champion and support instruction and assessment that maximizes student learning and progress.
3. Manage and develop teachers’ professional skills and practices in order to promote student learning and achievement.
4. Cultivate a caring school community dedicated to each student.
5. Coordinate resources, time, structures, and roles effectively to build the instructional capacity of all teaching staff.
6. Engage families and the community to promote and support student success.
7. Administer and manage operations efficiently and effectively.

(Ccsso, 2015)
The relationship between the administrative team and the school board is critical to the success of the school and one that is built on trust and integrity (Schimmer, 2002). The relationship between the superintendent and the school board president is crucial and must be founded on ethical, prudent, and respectful interactions. This effective, supportive relationship is strengthened with regular communication, purposeful planning, and honest exchanges. Within this relationship, agreement is not always in the best interest of the school, and disagreements must be kept at the objective level. The strength of this partnership is reflected in the strength of the school and its commitment to the vision, mission, and culture and I am grateful for his leadership and trust. The current school board president has served in his role for six years and we have a strong and productive relationship; one that is founded on trust, respect, and a commitment to prayerfully considering all decisions for the school.

Communication with the Cornerstone Christian School community is a fundamental piece in the advancement of the vision and mission as established by the school board and administration. Setting the initial vision of the high school program was conducted through advisement with the many community aspects of the school, but continued communications is also crucial for the advancement of the individual components of the vision (Daugherty, 2006). Frequent and deliberate communication has been integral to the progress of our vision and goals. The school board has conducted regular “townhall” meetings. The purpose of these meetings includes updating the school community on progress in property quests, financial benchmarks, and school related information. These “townhall” meetings have also incorporated a time for community questions and answers and prayer. At the “townhall” meetings, the majority
of the meeting is conducted by the school board president, with presentations by the facility, capital campaign chairs, and the administrative team. Questions that are related to academic or athletic programs are passed on to the superintendent and principal, and the school board does ask for response with factual comments as needed during community questions, although most questions are directed to the facility and capital campaign committees. These “townhall” meetings are conducted separate from the monthly school board meetings, and are scheduled on an “as needed” basis.

Besides communicating the vision and goals to the school community, the first strand of communication must be to the faculty and staff. The school board has tasked me, as the superintendent, the role of communicating the vision and mission to the teachers, and to continue to construct the scaffolding for the teachers to accomplish the goals of academic achievement and faith-based learning. The fundamental elements of the vision can only be realized when the community, especially the teachers, are committed to the development and achievement of the goals. I am blessed to serve with professional and Godly teachers, dedicated to their students.

When I accepted the role of administrator at Cornerstone Christian School, the K-8 enrollment was 86 students and the concept of growing to a complete pre-K-12 school on an independent campus was not even part of my interview. The decisions that moved toward setting and implementing such a significant vision, including the addition of a complete high school program and the planned purchase and build of the necessary campus, was far beyond my expectations and experience when I first accepted the position. But the need for a faith-based pre-K-12 school in the community and the possibility of the expansion of CCS was quickly set as my first years at the school
progressed. Pivotal to the introduction of this vision and mission which would include years of planning, fund-raising, and complex decision-making was a prayer and faith-filled decision. Through this process, I realized the purpose of my role as the administrator of the school. I am the fourth leader of the school, counting the founder. This vision of a complete high school on an independent campus had been part of the original dream by the founder of the school, but had been not pursued until my arrival. Through this experience of dreaming, planning, designing, and implementing a complete pre-K-12 non-public school in Nebraska, I have learned that I am a visionary leader who enjoys communicating the vision and mission to the school community.

Working to enhance the communication and implementation of the vision, mission, and goals of the school has allowed me to develop as a leader and cultivate my governance and communication style. Collaborating with the school board, facility committee, and capital campaign committee permits me to affirm the benefits of the existing culture of the school and to encourage the change needed to implement the set vision (Meyers, 2010). Throughout the complex process of expansion, the school must continue to implement an exceptional academic and athletic program; therefore, as the superintendent, the tasks of instructional leadership and school governance must both remain a priority. My responsibilities at the school are hinged on continuing to lead the academic program towards student achievement, concurrently with functioning as a visionary leader. This crucial role as the superintendent is one that must be developed and enhanced as the project itself grows and is developed. Each new phase will bring a new level of leadership responsibility.
Some responsibilities of the educational leader in reference to the school and community culture includes:

1. Promoting a culture of academic excellence.
2. Supporting a safe and orderly environment conducive to student learning.
3. Maintaining an equitable code of discipline that supports the student’s understanding of expectations of reasonable behavior.
4. Building nurturing relationships with students and families.
5. Celebrating student achievement.

Finance

The non-public schools in Nebraska are financially supported through three main funding sources: tuition dollars, donations, and foundational grants. In neighboring states, the legislatures have formatted other funding means for non-public schools including charters, non-taxable organizations, and the offer of vouchers, but these funding sources have not been made available in Nebraska (Ed Choice, 2012). The only tax-related dollars available within a non-public school are tied to special services offered to individual students as established within an individualized education plan. Therefore, Cornerstone Christian School is funded via the sources existing within the state guidelines. The annual school budget is 90% funded through the tuition dollars that come from student enrollment with the remaining moneys coming from charitable giving and donation dollars. Cornerstone Christian School is a 501(c)3, a federal non-profit which allows the school to apply for private foundation grants and at this time, the grants
that have been awarded to the school are minimal, making up about 0.15% of the annual budget.

A strong sense of vision, mission, and culture form the basis of strategic long-range planning and financial forecasting and academic planning must precede financial planning (Roth, 2002). A Christian school is both a spiritual ministry and a business venture, not for profit, but for financial stability. Allowing the school programs to progress and succeed, good business planning is essential. The school’s resources are for the purpose of fulfilling the vision and mission of the school as the teaching and coaching staff craft instruct and train each student and team.

The concept of stewardship must be addressed within any conversation about finances and budgets in a Christian school. The tuition dollars and charitable donations must be seen through the lens of stewardship and not ownership; both sources of funding are God’s resources and must be allocated with wise stewardship and practical planning (Roth, 2002). The allocation of resources within a Christian school is another opportunity to demonstrate a reliance on God’s vision and provision for the plans and purposes for His school.

Student enrollment and the corresponding tuition drives the annual budget forecast. During the twelve years that I have been the administrator at the school, the enrollment has increased by 428% while the staffing has increased by 355%. During my first three years at CCS, donations and fund-raising moneys were used to fill in the gap between incoming tuition and needed budgetary expenses. During the following three years, the tuition was sufficient to cover the entire expense budget, and all donations and fund-raisers were designated for expansion, capital campaign, and tuition assistance.
Currently, the fund-raisers are again used to fill the gap between incoming and outgoing budget costs. As the school continues to expand, not only in student enrollment, but also in the acquisition of property and construction of a campus, the financial discussions have and will take a new perspective. The school board does rely on the annual budget projections submitted by the superintendent, but recommendations and decisions in the purchase and build of a campus are also presented by the facility committee and the capital campaign committee with a final decision by the school board. As a Christian school dedicated to good stewardship for all tuition moneys and donations, each decision in setting the annual budget and moving forward in any financial aspect is committed to prayer.

Setting tuition rates is as much of a spiritual decision, one acted upon in faith, as a fiscal decision. This is not to say that the good fiscal resolutions and reasonable projections are not accessed and analyzed, but that the tuition rates of a Christian school are determined by the stated vision and mission. If the school’s mission is to serve the wealthy of the community, tuition rates are determined solely by financial need within budget projections. If the mission is to serve all portions of the community, tuition rates and even teacher salaries are set according to a reasonable rate which is manageable within a median income for the community, and tuition assistance programs are built into the annual budget. Cornerstone Christian School was founded to minister to the families within all aspects of the community, so the tuition rates are set at the most reasonable rate. Currently our tuition rates are about two-thirds of the tuition rates of the other Christian schools within the metropolitan area and the high school is about one-third of the rate of the local Catholic high schools.
CCS participates in a national tuition assistance program, the Children’s Scholarship Fund (CSF), that requires parents to submit an application to the organization and if the family qualifies, as determined by the financial statements submitted to CSF, the organization sets the amount of tuition assistance given to the school for the student. If a family has a need, and yet does not qualify for the CSF funding, the school board has implemented an in-house tuition assistance program that is funded through one major fund-raiser and through allocated giving from donors. Annually, 24% of the CCS families are on tuition assistance that ranges from a reduction of cost of 10% to 50% between these two funding streams. In addition to the tuition assistance programs, I do also solicit additional donations throughout the school year for families if they have a temporary need during the school year due to a job termination or unexpected medical bills. The Lord has blessed our school with generous donors and each year the needs have been met for these families.

Within this fiscal year, CCS maintains a balanced budget in the midst of finalizing the lease of a new campus that will include the elementary and middle school programs as well as the new pre-K program that will be launched in August. The 10% gap between tuition income, financial aid from the Children’s Scholarship Fund, and minimal grants received is filled with the annual fundraiser. CCS runs a donor-based request format that includes a day of fun activities for the students including a walk-a-thon, lunch, and carnival. This fundraiser is incorporated into the annual budget and targets the income versus expense gap. Even this event is conducted with an understanding of the need of prayer for the necessary income to balance the budget.
this day, the values, vision, mission, and culture of the school are communicated and highlighted.

**Challenges and Opportunities**

The culture of a Christian school must be one of distinctiveness and significance in that the culture of the school must integrate Biblical truth and academic rigor within a nurturing setting. Culture can be defined as the essence of the values, beliefs, and the core meaning of the organization (Sergiovanni, 2000). A school’s culture can provide the norms by which the students, teachers, and community members interact with one another. It serves as a framework for how interactions and learning provide meaning and understanding. Just as the culture provides the significance within the school setting, a culture of discipleship provides the distinctiveness of Cornerstone Christian School. The distinctive culture of discipleship is a trademark of the high school program and is a significant reason for student enrollment and retention.

One of the clear challenges and opportunities of a Christian school is maintaining the culture of academic rigor while sustaining the distinctiveness of a discipleship emphasis. It is the commitment of the administrative team, the school board, teachers, parents, students, and school community that grants for this close integration of academic excellence and Biblical discipleship. The vision, mission, and culture of CCS demonstrate an integration and balance of these two concepts.
Chapter 3 Methodology

The study describes the transition of Cornerstone Christian School, a non-public school from a K-8 school to a complete K-12 program using a mixed methods study resulting in a description of the decision-making steps needed for the transition and analyzing the outcomes. The focal point of the study is the importance of maintaining a culture of distinction through this time of significant change while transitioning from an elementary and middle school program to a complete high school program. For the purpose of this research, the transition to a K-12 school will be defined and described through the themes of vision and mission, governance, facility, finance, academics, and athletics encompassed within the time of significant student enrollment growth and establishing a high school program. This central question will focus on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the culture and central purposes of the school.

The value of this study will be the practical nature of identifying the process for other non-public schools seeking to expand a K-8 program to a K-12 program or schools that are at the very beginning stages of a high school program. The purpose is for the data, analysis, and procedures to be transferable and valuable to other schools and educational programs, informing and guiding school leaders within their own process of development and growth. The perspective, significance and singularity of the experience will be analyzed, interpreted and communicated.

Research Design

The format of this study will be most valuable in addressing the suitability and comprehensiveness of the steps of the transition while maintaining a culture of
distinction. This method of analysis would also be beneficial to subsequent schools that may want to use similar strategies in their planning and implementation in a K-12 transition.

Addressing this transition will best be viewed through an exploratory case study, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data. Case studies are particularly valuable for understanding how different elements are integrated, fit together, and how different elements have produced the observed and documented results. Some elements presented will include implementation, context and processes.

The research for this study will be defined as “the systematic study of designing, developing and evaluating instructional programs, processes and products that must meet the criteria of internal consistency and effectiveness" (Ritchie, 2016, p. 46). This study involves an analysis of the transitional and development process and is described, analyzed, and evaluated as an essential part of the final product. Evaluations respectively ask these questions, “What needs to be done? How should it be done? Is it being done? Is it succeeding? The responses to these questions will both help guide decision making and strengthen teaching and support staff effort (Stufflebeam, 2003, p. 24). This process emphasizes that evaluation’s most important purpose is not to prove, but to improve (Stufflebeam, 2003, 77).

Implementing a mixed methods study within the program evaluation research model is the most effective design to address the paradigm of change within the transition of the Cornerstone Christian School K-12 educational program. A blend of both qualitative and quantitative data will best reflect the information, assessing both the outcomes of the study as well as the process of the study (Creswell, 2012). The most
substantial benefit of a mixed methods study is the ability to collect multiple streams of information to explain the process, but more importantly to balance the quantitative data with the intrinsic nature of the qualitative data. This study requires extensive data collection and analysis.

Part of the purpose of this study is to generalize the outcomes and determine if the strategies are appropriate and adequate, and can to be replicated. This evaluation can report if the practices within the program have been working well, is therefore likely to work well in the future, and should be continued (Better Evaluation, 2017). The vision, mission, and culture of the school are analyzed to determine if the initial goals are working well and should be continued within the school. This purpose is also to be able to generalize the strategies within other academic settings and schools. These generalizations and resulting recommendations are vital to the outcome of this research.

Since I am currently the superintendent of Cornerstone Christian School and I was embedded in the crafting of the high school program. Therefore, it is imperative to state that I cannot be untangled from the experience. This paradigm of entanglement understands that the study is defined by the meaning that I, the researcher, expresses and this certainly describes the beginning of the CCS high school program. One of the roles of the researcher in this is to analyze the data by synthesizing and reducing the information to significant statements and combining the statements into themes (Creswell, 2006). As the researcher, it is my goal to develop a documented description of the experiences of the school board members, parents, teachers, and students and to convey a global principle or essence of the experience while understanding that my
perspectives and attitudes of the study are painted with my own experiences within this transition.

Because of the nature of this study, the research and accompanying descriptions were guided by the following tenets:

1. Be encompassed by a defined worldview and philosophy.
2. Have a personal orientation.
3. Occur in the natural setting where the experiences are the object of exploration and investigation.

The researcher will:

1. Be the primary instrument of data collection.
2. Be immersed in the setting (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).
3. Explore the perspectives and experiences of the phenomenon of growth within Cornerstone Christian School to a complete K-12 program.
4. Describe the process of maintaining a culture of distinction throughout the transition from a K-8 to a K-12 program.

The methodology of this study sought a perspective that defines a complete description of this transition, addressing the values, vision and mission, and policies that are important to the school. Such research necessitates patience, honesty, courage, tenacity, imagination, consideration, and self-discipline (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The nature of this study demanded that the research is value bound as the themes deliberately address contextual conditions of the school within the formation of the high
school program. The level of complexity in this transition demands careful attention to values, vision, and mission while acknowledging the vulnerability of the researcher due to the embeddedness of my role in this transition.

Research Questions

Question #1: What are the views of the Cornerstone Christian School (CCS) board president with respect to vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor, and athletics following the recent transition from a K-8 to a K-12 program?

   a. What role did you play in the implementation of the high school program?
   b. Describe your understanding of the processes and methods within the transition?
   c. What do you see as the most important role of the school board in the creation and implementation of a high school program?
   d. What are your perceptions of the school’s vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor and athletics as understood from your role as a school board member?

These questions were presented to the current school board president who has held the role for seven consecutive years, and began his time on the board about six months before the vote to institute the high school program.

Question #2: What is the rating of the parent satisfaction in reference to the academic and athletic achievement of their students, and the student’s preparedness for college and career decisions? Are parents pleased with the established vision and mission of the
school, the present school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility?

a. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.

b. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.

c. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions.

d. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.

e. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.

f. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school.

g. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student participated in during his/her past years.

h. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student. Please include the activities that your student participated in.
i. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.

The parent survey was measured on a four point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. It will be distributed to all current parents.

**Question #3:** What is the parent of an alumni perception of the high school academic and athletic program and their personal preparedness for college and career decisions? What is the parent’s perception of the vision and mission of the school as it relates to each alum individually? Are parents of alumni pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility?

a. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.

b. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.

c. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions.

d. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.

e. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.
f. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school.

g. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student participated in during his/her past years.

h. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student. Please include the activities that your student participated in.

i. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.

The survey questions are measured on a four-point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

**Question #4:** What is the correlation between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys? Does the understood importance of the themes in the teachers’ perceptions correspond with the stated importance of the themes as demonstrated by the parent survey scores?

**Question #5:** What are the current levels of performance on national standardized assessments, compared to established academic goals in scope and sequence documents with reference to demographics of students?

Two data points were considered and analyzed. The first was the senior class averages of the ACT assessment and the second will be the tenth grade Terra Nova results for the past years. These are the primary assessments implemented at
Cornerstone Christian high school. The school’s scores will be compared to both state and national averages.

**Setting**

Cornerstone Christian School is non-public, non-aligned school operating within the guidelines of the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE). The school employs teachers with a current Nebraska teaching certificate and complies with the curriculum and attendance guidelines as stated by the NDE. Cornerstone Christian School was established over thirty-three years ago as a non-public school in the Bellevue/Papillion area, south of the metropolitan area of Omaha, Nebraska. In the past twelve years, the school’s enrollment has increased from 86 students to 368, a 428% increase in enrollment. Concurrent with the significant increase in enrollment and during the 2009-2010 school year, the decision was made to expand from a K-8 school to a complete K-12 instructional program with the first graduating class in May 2015. The focus of the study is creating and sustaining vision and mission in a time of growth and complexity.

**Study Participants**

The participants of this study include current Cornerstone Christian School (CCS) high school alumni, parents, and the school board president. Being the newest high school in the state of Nebraska, the CCS student count is currently 72 with 27 alumni. The primary participants in the study are the parents of current high school students and alumni with a secondary focus on the Cornerstone Christian School board president. I have used a personal interview for the school board president. With parents of students and alumni, I have implemented a mixture of surveys and personal interviews. Since the current high school is only 71 students, all parents of current students are included in the
survey and the surveys were mailed during the summer holiday by means of an anonymous survey. The school board president is the sole interview focus.

Each parent participating in this study expressed his or her consent and received a form that explained the purpose of the study and the steps that were taken to keep all information confidential. Included with the survey was the letter confirming the CCS school board's consent and permission to conduct research in this manner as approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The survey participants were able to be candid in their responses, helping ensure the genuineness of the data that they provided. The surveys given to each group of participants are found in Appendix I.

A focus group made up of six teachers was also implemented. This was a voluntary group of teachers made up of three females and three males. Three teachers have their masters’ degrees, one is working on his masters, and the other two have a bachelors’ degree. Their years of experience in the classroom range from six years to forty-four years and their teaching assignments range from science, history, foreign language, math, religion, and music. The teachers independently completed a ranking of the survey questions on personal time, giving scores to each question, determining what they believe are the most important aspects of the school as asked within the survey questions.

Data Collection

Three specific types of instruments have been utilized: interviews and surveys. The two instruments vary in that the interview with the school board president focused on the decision-making process, and the interviews with parents have more of a practical approach to satisfaction of the product, their student’s academic and athletic
achievement. The student surveys have a theme of their perceptions of the high school academic and athletic program and their personal preparedness for college and career decisions. Due to the nature of the study, the interview questions and the interview process had a semi-structured protocol.

Observations are also a mainstay of the qualitative data collection. My position within the school and my role in this transition does allow for both a depth and breadth of observation. Document and artefact review is also essential and critical in the study. This brings a complexity, vulnerability, and subjectivity not only to the collection, but also the interpretation and analysis of the data. It is with this understanding that the product is necessarily biased because it is grounded in individual perceptions of the experience (Savin-Baden, 2013).

I have implemented a general survey for parents of current students and alumni, and formulated most of the questions for the interviews based on the specifics of the program. I patterned some survey questions that are published in the book, Quest for Excellence, by Clifford Daugherty, Tate Publishing & Enterprises (2006), using themes from his experiences and integrating the experiences of our school board and our parents during this transition (See Appendix A). My interview with the school board president was in person.

The permission to survey the school board president and parents of students and alumni was sought through a proposal to the current Cornerstone Christian School board.

Data Analysis

The nature of this study demands that the research is value bound as the themes focus on the contextual conditions of the school within the formation of the high school
program. The level of complexity in this transition demands careful attention to values, vision, and mission while acknowledging the vulnerability of my role as the researcher due to my responsibilities and tasks as the educational leader. One of the roles of the researcher in this is to analyze the data by synthesizing and compiling the information into significant statements and combining the statements into themes. The analysis explored a perspective that defines a complete description of this transition, addressing the values, vision and mission, and policies that are important to the school.

Critical to any study is the examination of the reliability and validity of the published data analysis. A study’s reliability is the extent to which the experiment, test, or measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials. The question of validity is answered in that both the survey and interview questions are relevant, logical, and meaningful in determining that the processes and procedures are effective in crafting the high school program. The outcome of the study examined the question of was the implementation of the strategies in the transition appropriate, adequate, and able to be replicated.

Another key component in presenting reliable, dependable research is establishing the credibility of the methodology, data, and findings (Rice, 2016). This is also seen in the interpretation of the data through honest evaluation and analysis. In a study of this nature, the trustworthiness and credibility of the survey is founded on the students’ engagement in the creation of the high school program. In light of this strong motivation by the participants for the high school program to be successful, the need for objectivity is addressed within the interpretation and analysis.
The core of the study is to understand the creating and sustaining of the values, vision, mission, and culture in a time of growth and complexity. This study is the integration of many themes, interwoven over time as the hues of change are observed and documented. The transition of Cornerstone Christian School to a pre-K-12 school is defined and described through the themes of vision and mission, governance, facility, finance, academics, and athletics encompassed within a time of significant student enrollment growth. This study focuses on the creation of meaningful vision, mission, and culture in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the culture and central purposes of Cornerstone Christian School.
Chapter 4 Results

Presentation, Analysis, and interpretation of data

This exploratory mixed methods study evaluates the process of Cornerstone Christian School’s expansion and development within the complexity of the school’s culture. This transition of a non-public school from a K-8 school to a complete K-12 program defines the decision-making steps needed for the transition and analyzes the outcomes. Maintaining a culture of distinction through a time of significant change while transitioning from an elementary and middle school program to a complete high school program is the focal point of the study’s description. The process includes creating and sustaining vision and mission in a time of growth and complexity. The transition to a K-12 school is defined and described through the themes of vision and mission, governance, facility, finance, academics, and athletics encompassed within the time of significant student enrollment growth and instituting a high school program. To grasp the complexities of this transition, the role of the school board president and the role of the parents and teachers will be addressed, as well as an analysis of standardized and normed assessments.

Role of the school board president in the transition to a full high school program

One of the most important relationships in this transition was the exchanges between the school board president and the administration. The school board president has served for over eight years, critical years in building the high school program, renovating a campus, and setting goals for the school as a whole. In his career, he is a graduate of the Air Force Academy, an Air Force colonel who commanded a bomber squadron, and now in retirement serves in Command and Control Architecture and
Modernization. His military background has greatly influenced his management of the tasks while serving as school board president. His leadership and understanding of protocol and the importance of procedure has been a benefit to the school. He and his wife had one son attend CCS through eighth grade before the high school was established and their second son was in the first graduating class.

Within my role as superintendent, he and I have had hours of conversation for the purpose of planning, setting vision, and evaluating past decisions as new decisions are faced, and praying. This connection has strengthened a sense of trust and transparency which is vital to a good working relationship. In the interview, questions were posed that answered the question, “What are the views of the Cornerstone Christian School (CCS) board president with respect to vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor, and athletics following the recent transition from a K-8 to a K-12 program? His responses were insightful, contemplative, humble, and at times, humorous.

a. What role did you play in the implementation of the high school program?

He joined the school board one year before the vote to launch the high school program. He was an engaged member of the school board, but not necessarily very active in the primary discussions, but he became very engaged as the process neared a vote. Looking back, he sees his role in the implementation as responsible to only move forward with the decision after prayer and understanding that it was God’s will for the school’s next step. He sees the decision to launch the high school program as very purposeful, carefully considered from multiple aspects, and very orchestrated by the Lord.
b. Describe your understanding of the processes and methods within the transition?

Through his actions and words, he demonstrates that he trusts and relies on the administration to research, plan, and implement each step within the process of developing the high school program. As the school board president, he did not micromanage the process nor did he withdraw from the important discussions and decisions. He verified that the process for Cornerstone Christian School was not the normal progression with study groups, case studies, and research models, but “our processes and methods for the transition to any next step was literally on our knees in prayer. We asked the Lord and He answered” (Personal communication, 2017).

c. What do you see as the most important role of the school board in the creation and implementation of a high school program?

Within the interview, he listed four essential roles for the CCS school board not only in the implementation of the high school program, but for every aspect of the school. “First, we are to cover everything in prayer and learn to recognize the voice of God. Second, we are to make sure that the implementation is exactly as the Lord has purposed. Third, the school board is never to compromise God’s vision and mission for the school, and fourth, we have learned to depend on and trust the people that the Lord has brought into leadership” (Personal communication, 2017). As I have worked alongside him, I have observed his commitment to these roles within
governance of the school. He does not cling to personal reputation or personal gain within leadership, but rather humbly and boldly serves.

d. What are your perceptions of the school’s vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor and athletics as understood from your role as a school board member?

Throughout the interview, he reiterated again and again his support of the vision and mission of the school and affirmed his reliance on the Lord, encouraging the school board members to listen in prayer and then direct and support the administration to fulfill the decisions. Certainly within the constraints of leadership and the rhythm of governance, there will be disagreement and tension in decision-making. At these times, the school board president will pause the meeting and will ask for school board members to pray both individually and corporately, and then wait for God to lead. It is amazing how the Lord gives clarity and discernment during these decisions. With the current facility, we saw how the Lord directed and gave the resources and provision at our time of need. The school board led by him was a good steward of the school’s finance and resources and demonstrated remarkable clarity in each decision.

The topic of academics and athletics is one that is prominent for any conversation with a school board member; this being central to the purpose of any school. His response was insightful and discerning. “We want to provide the children with every opportunity to follow the path that the Lord has for them. We do not want to hold any student back and we must treat each one
as an individual to accomplish God’s plans and purposes.”  (Personal communication, 2017) On athletics, he responds, “Sports teaches leadership, because they learn to follow and lead together as a team and this transfers to the community and to their world.”  As a former athlete in high school and college and as an Air Force pilot is quite competitive, but understands the importance of athletics is not in winning tournaments and titles, but in the question that is asked by our CCS coaches, “And today, did you play for Jesus?  Did you represent Him well?”

Role of the parent and teachers in the transition to a full high school program

An extensive range of questions were included in the survey of the parents of current Cornerstone Christian School students and parents of CCS alumni. These questions were presented to gain understanding of the parents’ perceptions of the school’s vision and mission, the school board governance, the adequacy of the current facility, the stability and expenditure of finances, the academic expectations, and the athletic program choices and growth.

Question #2 of the research was addressed to the parent of a current students which included 35 families. Only one survey was sent to each family and 19 of the 35 families responded which is 54.28% of the possible respondents. The survey was mailed to the families during the summer holiday and the response rate may have been higher if the survey was sent during the school year. The survey was anonymous, but the parent had the opportunity to include their name should they choose, and 10 families gave their name on the survey which is 34.48% of responding parents.
The questions separated out the themes of the research and gave the parents an opportunity to share their perceptions and perspectives.

a. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student is excellent.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.421, \sigma = 0.748. \)

b. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student is prepared for college decisions.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.316, \sigma = 0.798. \)

c. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student is prepared for career decisions.  \( n = 19, \mu = 2.895, \sigma = 0.718. \)

d. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.684, \sigma = 0.465. \)

e. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.579, \sigma = 0.591. \)

f. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.684, \sigma = 0.567. \)

g. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student is currently participating in or has in the past years.  \( n = 19, \mu = 2.889, \sigma = 0.567. \)

h. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered are ones that meet the interests of my student. Please include the
activities that your student is currently participating in or has in the past years.  \( n = 19, \mu = 2.889, sd = 0.567. \)

i. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.222, sd = 0.128. \)

The parent survey is measured on a four-point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. It was distributed to all current parents.

Question #3 addressed the parents of an alumni, their perception of the high school academic and athletic program and their personal preparedness for college and career decisions. The data speaks to the parent’s perception of the vision and mission of the school as it relates to each alum individually. The questions look at the alumni parents and if they are pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility.

A survey was sent to each family of an alumni and 12 of the 27 families responded which is 44.44% of the possible respondents. The survey was anonymous, and the parent had the opportunity to include their name should they choose and 11 of the 12 parents gave their name which is 91.66% of the parents who responded.

a. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.833, sd = 0.373. \)

b. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.833. sd = 0.373. \)
c. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.75, sd = 0.433. \)

d. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.75, sd = 0.433. \)

e. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.583, sd = 0.493. \)

f. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.818, sd = 0.386. \)

g. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence.  Please include the athletics that your student participated in during his/her past years.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.333, sd = 0.624. \)

h. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student.  Please include the activities that your student participated in.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.50, sd = 0.645. \)

i. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.167, sd = 0.687. \)

The survey questions are measured on a four-point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.
A focus group of six high school teachers was utilized for the analysis of the nine survey questions. The teachers volunteered their assistance and completed the ranking scale on personal time, independently completed a ranking of the survey questions giving scores to each question, determining what they believe are the most important aspects of the school as asked within the survey questions. The scores were analyzed using the Pearson Correlation Coefficient, a linear equation describes the relationship between the responses of the parents to the survey and rank level of importance as determined by the teachers within the focus group. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys of current students demonstrated the value of $R = 0.8373$ which reflects a strong positive correlation. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys of alumni demonstrated the value of $R = 0.5806$ which reflects a moderate positive correlation.

The teacher focus group independently ranked the nine survey questions by their understanding of the vision and mission of the school and their perception of importance within the school culture. The teachers gave a nine to the question that they perceived as the most important to the creating and sustaining of the high school program, an eight for the next, etc. The scores were then averaged and applied in a geometric analysis to demonstrate a correlation between the teachers’ perceptions and the parents’ responses. The teacher rankings are as follows:

a. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent. 6.83 out of 9.
b. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions. 5.33 out of 9.

c. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions. 4.50 out of 9.

d. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students. 6.33 out of 9.

e. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students. 7.66 out of 9.

f. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school. 5.67 out of 9.

g. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. 2.50 out of 9.

h. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student. 2.17 out of 9.

i. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student. 4.0 out of 9.

According to the rankings of the focus group of teachers, the most important themes within the implementation of the high school program include school board governance, the school’s vision and mission, and academic rigor. The school governance and leadership certainly influences the established vision and mission of the
school which therefore impacts the academic rigor and excellence. As understood, the leadership significantly effects the implementation of the vision and mission as demonstrated in the teacher rankings and their understanding of the outcome on academic rigor.

According to the rankings of the teacher focus group, the least important themes within the implementation of the high school program include the athletic programs and extracurricular activities. This was very similar to the responses of the parents of both current students and alumni who see athletics and activities as beneficial, but whose value is of not as much weight within the creating and sustaining of the high school program as other themes.

**Role of analyzing assessment in the transition to a full high school program**

The use of a standardized and normed assessment can be beneficial in evaluating the academic achievement of individual students and the school corporately. The ACT is used throughout the United States and internationally and is therefore, a useful metric in evaluation. The ACT standards are empirically-derived descriptions of the essential skills and knowledge base that helps in determining if students are career and college ready. As stated by the ACT College and Career Readiness organization, the ACT scores on the determined subject-area tests represent the level of achievement required for students to have the best academic experience at the college level (Retrieved from http://www.act.org/content/research.html, 2017). Researchers and educators have come to rely on the ACT benchmarks as a means of predicting college success and as a guide to inform curriculum decisions within the classroom. The ACT standards are understood to describe essential classroom skills and knowledge high school students need in
preparation for both college and career, and serves as a connection between what students have learned and what they are ready to learn next.

The ACT assessment is committed to validity research with the first category of validity research being content validity, designed to answer the following question: Does the test measure what it aims to measure? This research involves the validation of the ACT College and Career Readiness Standards, which is founded on empirical data. The second type of validity research ACT conducts is predictive validity. This research uses data about actual course performance to answer a second question: Does a test predict performance in a reliable way? (ACT, 2017).

The high school students of Cornerstone Christian School have taken the ACT assessment over the course of four years as the high school was built one grade at a time, beginning with just a freshmen class and graduating our third class of seniors in May 2017. Throughout these years, the school has seen remarkable test scores and, as we have students on current Individualized Education Plans (IEP), some students have scored significantly lower than their peers. Comparisons are demonstrated by publishing the averaged national scores, local state scores, and the scores of CCS students. National and state scores are listed reflecting the corresponding years.
Table 3 - ACT Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Mathematics</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Composite</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>National 2015</strong></td>
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<td>20.8</td>
<td>21.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>21.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>21.6</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cornerstone 2015</strong></td>
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<td>25.6</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>21.3</td>
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<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>State 2016</strong></td>
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<td>20.8</td>
<td>21.8</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cornerstone 2016</strong></td>
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<td>22.1</td>
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<td><strong>National 2017</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Cornerstone 2017</strong></td>
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<td><strong>National 2018</strong></td>
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<td><strong>State 2018</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Cornerstone 2018</strong></td>
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(https://www.act.org/content/dam/act/unsecured/documents/Nebraska., 2017)

* Denotes that the state scores are not yet published.
Since implementing the high school program, Cornerstone Christian School has had three graduating classes with the recent May 2018 class as the fourth. As demonstrated by the ACT scores, CCS seniors scores significantly better than their peers at the state and national level. The first class was a class of six, five male and one female. The second graduating class was eight, four males and four females, the third graduating class was thirteen with seven males and six females. This was the first class with graduates with a verified learning need with two seniors on an IEP and one on a 504 Plan. This statistic may have been reflected in the scores of the graduating class of 2017 with their class average a bit lower than the former two classes.

Cornerstone Christian School conducts the Terra Nova in the tenth grade year during the spring semester. The Terra Nova is a norm-reference nationally standardized achievement test, published by McGraw-Hill. As with any achievement tests, the Terra Nova includes content, processes, and skills that students may not have been explicitly taught, but that they should be expected to have mastered according to their cognitive ability.

Three values will be analyzed within this assessment. First is use of the mean scale score (MSS). A Scale Score is a score on an even-interval numeric scale that spans the complete range of kindergarten through grade 12. Range in value from approximately 100 to 900, the Terra Nova, Scale Scores are “level independent,” meaning that these scores overlap test levels. Scale Scores within a content area are compared over time within a group of students or across grade levels to determine trends and patterns (ACSI, 2017).
The second value is the National Percentile (NP). A National Percentile score ranks test performances from 1 to 99. For example, a National Percentile score or rank of 68 means that the student’s score is higher than the scores of 68 percent of the students in the norm group for that grade and time of year. The National Percentile is a non-equal-interval scale, so the distance between two NPs has different meanings at different points on the scale. For example, the distance between 9 NP and 10 NP is much larger than the distance between 50 NP and 51 NP. Thus, NPs cannot be treated arithmetically and adding or subtracting NPs can sometimes be misleading when describing gains or losses in test scores (ACSI, 2017).

A third comparison is the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE). The NCE was established to compute averages and calculate differences when comparing test scores. Like NPs, NCEs range from 1 to 99, but unlike NPs, NCEs are an equal-interval scale and can be treated arithmetically. Thus, NCEs are useful in determining trends, calculating gains and losses across scores within a content area (Retrieved from https://pdp.acsi.org, 2017).
Table 4 - Terra Nova Composite Scores

<table>
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<th>Terra Nova Composite Scores</th>
<th>2015</th>
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<th>2017</th>
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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students tested</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS Mean Scale Score</td>
<td>702.0</td>
<td>726.4</td>
<td>724.0</td>
<td>706.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS National Percentile</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCS Normal Curve Equivalent</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>72.4</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>61.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cornerstone Christian School’s Terra Nova data for four consecutive 10th grade classes demonstrate that our students are scoring at a competitive rate with other sophomores who have taken the Terra Nova within the nation. Within each class are several students who are on a 504 Plan or on an IEP, and one example is a sophomore class who took the test in 2017 with one student scoring a 99 for the Normal Curve Equivalent and a classmate on an extensive IEP who scored 19 for the NCE. This wide range of achievement is demonstrative of the CCS culture that each student has immeasurable worth in the eyes of their Creator and that each has a remarkable plan and purpose that is not necessarily dependent on a nationally normed assessment. While assessments and scores are important benchmarks, CCS will continue to set a high academic standard, simultaneously supporting a struggling learner while encouraging all students to do their best for God’s glory and honor.
Chapter 5 Conclusions and Discussions

Recommendations for Research and Implications for Practice

The outcome of this study answers the question of was the implementation of the strategies in the transition to a full K-12 program in the addition of a high school appropriate, adequate, and able to be replicated. This central question focuses on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the distinct culture and central purposes of the school. The transition to a full high school program is defined and analyzed through the themes of vision and mission, governance, facility, finance, academics and athletics. The data demonstrates that the parents of enrolled high school students and alumni are very satisfied with their students’ progress in fulfilling the vision and mission of the school. The results of the surveys of parents of current students and parents of alumni demonstrates a high level of satisfaction and the school has an average retention rate of 94% annually within the high school students. The published retention rate of many Midwest Christian schools is significantly lower than the 94% retention of CCS, and private schools often see that the mark and threshold of a great school, a premiere school, includes a retention rate of 90% or higher. Research demonstrates that the key to effective retention is in a strong commitment to a quality education and the building of a strong sense of inclusive educational and social community on campus (ACSI 2017). At the same time, parents must believe in the difference the school makes in the lives of their students, educationally, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. I believe that the data confirms this understanding and that the CCS parents see this value, Cornerstone
Christian High School makes a difference in the lives of the students, and in particular their student.

**Question a:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student is excellent.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.421, sd = 0.748. \)

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.833, sd = 0.373. \)

The parent, besides giving marks on the Likert scale for each survey question, had the opportunity to give input and comment on each of the question.  The median score of 3.42 from current parents and 3.83 from parents of alumni demonstrates the considerable satisfaction of the parents for the academic rigor of the high school program. On the topic of the academic rigor as experienced by the student, parent comments included the following:

- A very difficult, but comprehensive curriculum.
- Our son was one of 300 accepted in his age bracket to be part of the Naval Academy STEM program.
- I believe the school has a strong academic basis to succeed in college.
- 18 months at CCS helped him catch up as he was behind in public school.

Key to these scores and the ratings is the concept of a robust context of scholarship, academics, and experiences.  As a Rule 14 school, Cornerstone Christian School is non-public, non-aligned school operating within the guidelines of the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE).  Within these guidelines, CCS sets graduation requirements that exceed the rules within the NDE, including that addition of Bible
classes within each year of high school. The Nebraska Department of education recommends a diverse class selection and as the high school program was build one year as a time, and CCS added not only the required classes for each grade as needed for graduation, but offered such classes as Music Theory, Robotics I and II, European and American Art History, Psychology, Anatomy and Physiology, Sports Medicine, Family Consumer Science, and Personal Finance. As a Christian school, students are required to take a Bible class for each year enrolled at Cornerstone Christian School. Students transferring in during the high school years are not required to make up the classes so a student enrolling his junior year is only required to have 20 instructional units in Bible before graduation. CCS students on an IEP or a 504 Plan are offered a specialized track for math, and modifications and accommodations as appropriate per the student’s IEP are implemented within the regular high school classes.

Cornerstone Christian School has purposely set graduation requirements that exceed the instructional units set by the Nebraska Department of Education as is supported by the school’s vision and mission and the skill and expertise of the teaching staff. The student outcomes are a reflection of the expectations and opportunities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Nebraska Department of Education - Rule 14</th>
<th>Cornerstone Christian School</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language Arts</td>
<td>40 instructional units</td>
<td>40 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Science</td>
<td>30 instructional units</td>
<td>35 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>20 instructional units</td>
<td>30 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>20 instructional units</td>
<td>30 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible</td>
<td>0 instructional units</td>
<td>40 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual and Performing Arts</td>
<td>10 instructional units</td>
<td>10 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career and Technical Education</td>
<td>40 instructional units</td>
<td>40 instructional units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Health and Physical Education</td>
<td>10 instructional units</td>
<td>10 instructional units</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5 - Required courses for graduation
Cornerstone Christian School has also set a grading scale that is rigorous and meticulous in determining achievement and scholarly progress within the high school program. The grading scale reflects the academic expectations of the school’s vision, mission, and culture and the nature of the teaching staff.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grading Scale</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Grade Point</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A+</td>
<td>100-99</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>98-96</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>95-94</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>93-92</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>91-87</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>86-85</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>84-83</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>82-78</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>77-76</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>75-74</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>69 or below</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6 - CCS High School Grading Scale

Honors classes are calculated at 1.025 of the grade point average. Advanced Placement classes are calculated by adding one grade point (1.0) to an earned A, B, and C grade and an earned D+ remains as 1.2 and a D as 1.0.

Of course in any academic setting, the achievement of their own student is the natural focus of the parent. High ACT scores, scholarship opportunities, and astounding grade point averages of another family’s student is a good marker for the school, but of little interest to a parent whose student is also enrolled and not having the same academic success. Therefore, it is essential to define success for the individual student. This is dependent on the student’s scholarly ability, their motivation and diligence, what is
valued by the parent, and the student’s own personal academic standards and grit. Success is defined within the nuances of an individual student and are changeable within the span of the four years of high school. One of the blessings of Cornerstone Christian School is the purposeful focus on the human side of learning and achievement with the understanding that each student is created with a specific purpose and plan that is best developed within an academically challenging program. The intimate nature of learning is rooted in the culture of faith and Biblical truth within the school.

The clear purpose of Cornerstone Christian School is to help our students understand that all truth is God’s Truth and we are called to live in obedience to His Word in all aspects of life. CCS teaches a love for God’s Word with a comprehensive Biblical worldview and believes that academic rigor must be central and for God’s Glory. With the premise that all truth is God’s Truth, the CCS academic standard is one of excellence and commitment to the Truth of God’s Word (CCS student handbook, 2018).

A review of the scores given by the parents reinforces that the CCS teachers are central to accomplishing the goals of academic achievement and faith-based learning. Committed to the vision, mission, and culture of the school, the teaching staff is remarkable in their understanding of the individual nature of each learner and setting expectations that reflect academic rigor and excellence. In fact, research indicates that the most significant influence on learning is not the environment nor the curriculum, but the teacher (Danielson Group, 2016). Scripture gives the ultimate objective of a teacher: “but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher.” (Luke 6:40) CCS parents consider the teacher and his/her influence on their student as an important factor within the program.
A school board member whose son is a 2017 graduate described the school in the following manner, "I need to give credit to our teaching staff for their support and inspiration. The God that we serve is embodied in every one of them" (Personal communication, 2017). Our high school is comprised of Godly teachers who love the Lord and their students and seek to follow Him, praying for their students daily. This is a blessing to each student and parent as the teachers instruct with excellence!

Within the mean score of 3.42 is also the parents’ expectations of their students’ potential within standardized testing. Although, the ACT can be a useful and valid measure of predicting college success and is seen as a reflection of student achievement and academic rigor of a school, ACT scores are a small measure of lifelong success and accomplishment in work, family, and community. I believe that the parents fully grasp the importance of academic rigor balanced by the understanding that there is more depth and breadth to student success than solely a grade point average and standardized test score.

**Question b:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student is prepared for college decisions.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.316, \sigma = 0.798 \).

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.833, \sigma = 0.373 \).

**Question c:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student is prepared for career decisions.  \( n = 19, \mu = 2.895, \sigma = 0.718 \).
As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for career
decisions.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.75, sd = 0.433. \)

The question of college and career readiness is the looming question for any high
school program and the essential question to be asked of any new high school program.
When the high school was so new that it only consisted of freshmen and sophomores as
we built the program, a mother asked, "So how can you promise that my daughter will be
ready for college and will be accepted and offered scholarships?"  Of course, that
question was one that I was not able to answer with certainty, but I could answer with
great assurance.  At that time, there was no data to point to, no ACT scores to quote, no
statistics on scholarships offered, not even a tradition at graduation to reference.  The
parent of each student was taking a remarkable step of faith.  So now only five years
later, the parents of current students give a significantly confident score of 3.32 for
college readiness and 2.89 for career readiness.  The parents of the alumni give a mean
score of 3.83 for college readiness and 3.75 for career readiness.

An intriguing aspect of these numbers is that the parents of alumni report a higher
satisfaction rate for college and career readiness than the parents of current students.
This may be reflective that the alumni have already made college and career decisions
and students who are fifteen and sixteen years of age not only have not made a conclusive
decision, but have many choices and experiences yet to come.

A parent of an alum from the first graduating class often recalls the challenge that
his son had in his high school classes, but then shares of the success he has had during his
college years.  His average high school grades wavered between B’s and C’s.  This was
a diligent student and one who was very gifted musically, who served on the worship
team for chapel and participated in two sports, but classroom learning was a challenge for him. His music teacher encouraged him in his musical ability and he applied to a state university. Each college semester, and he is now a senior, he has made the dean’s list and has begun to consider several universities out-of-state for his master’s degree. This example demonstrates both the academic rigor and the influence of teachers in preparing students for college readiness which is embedded into the Cornerstone Christian high school program.

Parents’ comments on this topic can be best summed up by the following. First, a recommendation for further development of career choice coaching as a benefit for some students. Second, an overall statement that the parents are "very happy with CCS". The theme of college and career readiness and the strategies for preparedness vary according to the individual student and also must adjust with the changing pace of academia. It is essential that CCS continue to address the individual student in the choice of college and career and to support this important decision for each student.

Question d:

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.  \( n = 19, \mu = 3.684, sd = 0.465 \).

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.75, sd = 0.433 \).
Question e:

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students. $n=19$, $\mu=3.579$, $sd=0.591$.

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students. $n=12$, $\mu=3.583$, $sd=0.493$.

Parents of current students and alumni were asked to rate if they believed that their student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students. The median score of 3.68 from current parents and 3.75 from parents of alumni exhibits the considerable satisfaction for the manner in which Cornerstone Christian School prepares the students to have life that aligns with the stated vision of the school. The median score of 3.58 from both current parents and parents of alumni correlates with the stated mission.

CCS Vision Statement: Cornerstone Christian School seeks to be families’ first choice for Pre-K-12 education, known for:

- Academic excellence
- Active faith-based learning
- Competitive athletic and extracurricular programs
- Strong commitment to community
- Ideal teacher-student ratio
- Financial independence
- Always bringing glory to God!
**CCS Mission Statement:** Cornerstone Christian School educates children to become learners – equipped with Godly character and Biblical Truth.

We achieve our mission by:

1. Focusing on the student’s love of the Lord and a personal relationship with Him
2. Integrating a Christian worldview into all academic and extracurricular areas
3. Encouraging a life of service to our community, our world and our Lord
4. Celebrating student’s progress and achievement

The data demonstrates that the parents of enrolled high school students and alumni are very satisfied with their students’ progress in fulfilling the vision and mission of the school, and I believe that this question also encompass the parents' commitment to the vision and mission of the school and how they reinforce the concepts and beliefs in the home setting. Parents play an integral role in how the student incorporates the school's influence into their personal lives and the parents can either encourage and support the ideals or minimize the school's vision and mission. The parents of Cornerstone Christian School have a deeply held belief in the purposes of the school, reflected in only a small way in their survey responses and demonstrated in a powerful way through conversations at school events such as basketball games and concerts, emails in response to classroom discussions, and updates from alumni parents.

Another aspect of this data and ratings is that no student or even adult completely lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision and mission of the school. Each student fails at not focusing on his or her personal relationship with the Lord, not striving for academic excellence, not living a life of authentic and generous service to others, and not
bringing glory to God. And how do I know this? Because at times, I fail to keep the Lord central in my daily life; I do not pursue excellence; I do not humbly serve others; and therefore, I do not give glory to God. It is my prayer that not only do the students understand the vision and mission, but more importantly that it is lived out daily in their lives at school, at home, and in the community.

One poignant example of the CCS students and families living out the mission of Cornerstone Christian School is that in the past twelve months, three CCS parents have passed away, one a young mother of three to cancer, a single mother of a middle school student who had an aneurism, and a father of two who had a heart attack. The second passings were sudden and unexpected. The father was a Major in the United States Air Force and a training center on Offutt Air Force base was subsequently dedicated in his honor. The base asked if CCS would assist in creating the sign for the training center and a family who is skilled in wood working crafted the sign and attended the ceremony with the family. His wife’s words exemplify her appreciation of this act of kindness on the part of the other CCS family, “Thank you so much! It was a wonderful ceremony and very fitting for the Major. He would have been very honored and touched by the celebration.” The parent who created the sign responded in a similar manner, “It was our honor to show respect to him in any way we can. He worked with an amazing group of people and we were able to see that with the emotion his commander displayed today. We are truly blessed to be part of the ceremony.” Crafting a sign to honor another CCS parent is a small, but impactful example of living a life of service for the community.

One significant and impactful part of the Cornerstone Christian School program is the annual mission’s trip. The purpose goes beyond serving in the local ministries, and
working in neighboring states or an orphanage in the northern district of Port au Prince, Haiti, it has a three-fold purpose. First, I pray that each student grows in his or her love for the Lord, a passion for Christ. Second, I pray that the student grows in his or her love for others, a compassion for people, and third, that they allow the Lord “to break their hearts for what breaks the heart of God” (Pierce, 2016). The annual mission’s trip, part of the academic program, is an essential component of fulfilling the vision and mission of the school. Prior to a trip, an alumnus sent the following letter to the CCS students:

Dear Haiti team, Let me start by saying how incredibly excited I am for all of you as you embark on this journey to Haiti. This is an experience that will change your life in ways that you can’t even imagine. God has been eagerly waiting to teach and show you things that He wouldn’t have been able to without you going on this trip. Your eyes will be opened to so many things, both good and bad. You will see the brokenness and despair of a nation who has been ravished by poverty and corruption. But more than that, you will see the faithfulness of a God who cares not only about you, but about the people of Haiti. Each and every one of you is on this trip for a reason, and I pray that you realize that. I pray that you would not be distracted, but that you would be focused on God and what He is speaking to you. I encourage you to look for God everywhere. From the mountains (which are gorgeous, by the way), to “your kid” who never seems to leave
your side, and even in the tent cities where it seems like His presence does not exist. Look for Him in those places; He is there! I am praying for you this week that you would be focused on God. I am also praying that you would remain consistent even after you return. I know how hard it can be to be so “on fire” for God when you’re in Haiti, and to just go back to “normal” once you get back to America. I encourage you to fight against this as best you can. Use this trip as a stepping stone to greater things in your relationship with God. I am praying Philippians 1:6 over you, “that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ.” I love you all very much, and I am so excited for you to experience this life-changing trip. And hey, who knows, maybe one of you will be called to missions during this trip just like I was three years ago. Be open to anything! Well again, I love you all, and I am so excited to hear all of your stories when you get back!

Love, alumni, class of 2015

**Question f:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school. $n=19, \mu=3.684, sd=0.567$. 
As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school. \( n=12, \mu=3.818, sd=0.386. \)

An average score of 3.68 has been given by the parents of current students and a 3.82 score by the parents of an alumni. This demonstrates that the parents of both current students and alumni believe that the present school board governance is consistent in fulfilling the vision and mission of the school. The parents’ sense of trust in the CCS school board demonstrates that they have observed that the school board exhibits the attributes of a high-performing school board in that there is a clear and distinct role in the governance and they are trusted in decision-making. Demonstrating their confidence that the school board is dependable and reliable, the parents believe that the school board executes the vision and mission of Cornerstone Christian School. Although the school board is a self-sustaining school board and not elected by the parents, the parents exhibit a connection with and a trust of the governing school board.

Three other observations must also be considered. First, the implicit nature of governance also suggests that there may be some parents who do not have a strong sense of the workings of the school board, but are generally satisfied and therefore, do not inquire or examine past a surface level of understanding. Second, that unless there is a specific concern by a parent that is unaddressed by the administrative team and they have sought an audience with the school board, they have not had interactions with the members in a structured school board setting and have only interacted with them in a social or informal setting. Third, in all my personal conversations with parents, teachers, and students, I speak respectfully and highly of the school board, setting a tone of honor
for and confidence in the school board. I believe that my estimation of the school board impacts the perception of others as well. These are important aspects to consider.

**Question g:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student is currently participating in or has in the past years. \( n = 19, \mu = 2.889, sd = 0.567. \)

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student participated in during his/her past years. \( n = 12, \mu = 3.333, sd = 0.624. \)

The aspect of athletics is one that is not only of interest for families, but is a vital part of a high school program. Certainly, participation in athletics does increase student fitness, improve academics, promote teamwork, develop leadership skills, and encourage wise time management (Public School Review, 2017), but at Cornerstone Christian School, it is more than winning tournaments and having personal accolades for a student athlete, it is that the field, the court, and the track is our mission field.

Throughout the years, CCS has added multiple athletic teams in a purposeful and determined manner. In the first year of high school with only six students, track was the best option with a very, very small team. Within the past six years, cross country, volleyball, basketball, cheer, dance, Winterguard, and archery have been added as the student population grew and the Lord brought amazing coaches. Currently, the high school has fourteen athletic teams with junior varsity and varsity teams competing in the Nebraska School Activities Association (NSAA). For a sport where CCS did not have
enough players to field a team such as football and soccer, a cooperative program has been established with a local Catholic high school.

Each one of us may recall that one teacher or coach who influenced our lives for the better. A student spends about 1,200 hours each year in the classroom with athletics adding another 200-300 per sport. Those hours are central to student development and achievement. Just as the CCS academic program emphasizes excellence, the athletic program does as well; coaches strive to guide and mentor their athletes to play for God’s glory.

From the parent surveys the following comments clearly demonstrate that the parents grasp the importance of an athletic program that represents the vision and mission of the school, as well as the purposefulness of growing an athletic program simultaneously with an academic program. The only mark for success is not a winning record or a state title, but the essence of seeing the court, the field, and the track as a mission field.

- While I understand that the competition level at a larger school might benefit my child to a certain degree athletically, I firmly believe the discipleship relationship he has with his coaches far outweighs any perceived benefit.

- Comment on the use of the word "excellence" in the question. Depends on the definition of excellence. Which takes priority in a coach in a Christian school, integrity of the individual or knowledge of the sport?
• I think that as the school has grown in size it has tried to continue to provide quality athletic programs, but also takes on new things as they are able, not just adding sports to say they have them.

In conversations with students and parents, the athletic teams and coaches are described as influential and a blessing to their students. A parent comments, “As a former coach, I have great appreciation for the coaches at Cornerstone. They understand their craft well. As the mother of an athlete, I have even more appreciation. I am tremendously grateful that our Cornerstone coaches care more about my son as a person than as an athlete. They have been important mentors for him.”

**Question h:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered are ones that meet the interests of my student. \( n = 19, \mu = 3.222, sd = 0.128. \)

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student. \( n = 12, \mu = 3.50, sd = 0.645. \)

The scores of the parents of current students represent satisfaction rated at 3.22 and the parents of alumni at 3.50. There are several opportunities within structured activities, clubs, and organizations for students including the National Honor Society, PULSE club, pep band, and worship team. Participation in some of these organizations are quite structured such as the National Honor Society, others dependent on skills sets such as pep band, and others based interest such as PULSE. The PULSE club, People United Loving and Serving Everyone, is an acts of service club started by several students with the purpose of serving the community. Meeting weekly during homeroom, they plan trips to the Veteran’s Home to play board games with the residents and take
Alzheimer’s patients for walks in the gardens, send work teams to the Abide ministry in Omaha to assist with neighborhood clean-up days, and create crafts to sell at a local bazaar to raise money to purchase Christmas gifts for families in need. This club is one of the most popular clubs at school with almost forty percent of the high school students participating. The club is completely student-led and of this club a parent commented within the survey, “My students enjoy volunteer activities. They love the environment of the school and friends.”

Another dynamic extra-curricular activity is the high school worship team. This team serves as worship leaders at the weekly chapels. Currently about 24% students participate in the worship team, giving up two homerooms a week to spend time in prayer, select songs, and practice. Setting up the instruments and sound system, preparing the PowerPoint for the songs, and of course, leading worship each week are all part of this activity. This team is an integral part of weekly chapels and being a discipleship Christian school and demonstrates both notable leadership and service.

Four times each year, both campuses come together for an all school worship chapel led by the student worship team. After a recent worship chapel, a parent who attended sent a note to the office email. “It was an incredible blessing to worship together at the first all school chapel of the school year. Mrs. Schrag closed us out with the prayer that our worship would not just be words on a screen, but our hearts’ cry to a God who loves us relentlessly.” Both parents and students understand the importance of these worship chapels and the impact on the school.

As with any aspect of school, some students choose not to participate in an extra-curricular activity. This may be dependent on an after-school job, family responsibilities,
or even personal choice. Representing only 10% of the student population, these students are not necessarily disengaged with the school activities, but rather are busy in other settings.

**Question i:**

As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that current high school campus facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.  \( n = 19, \mu = 2.947, sd = 0.759. \)

As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.  \( n = 12, \mu = 3.167, sd = 0.687. \)

As with any school setting, the physical aspects of the campus are important. Certainly, Cornerstone Christian School abides by the state and local codes and guidelines for a campus, but in this study, it was essential to understand the parents’ perspectives on the campus and facility. The question was posed to the parent, “As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.” The score of 2.95 reflects the current parents’ satisfaction with the campus with the parents of the alumni giving a mean score of 3.17. There is an unstated parental expectation that their students will not only be supplied with an adequate facility, but also one that exceeds the current need as well. This tension between satisfaction and wanting more space, especially for a larger gym, is demonstrated in the parent comments:

- I think the current high school campus is a good start until the high school continues to grow and funds are available to find a larger facility
- I would love to have a more adequate gym (21% of those surveyed mentioned gym space in this question).
• Surpasses expectations in light of no government and public funds backing.

• I’m praying for larger academic building and gym and ball fields.

A very interesting aspect of these responses is that the parents of the alumni were part of the very beginning of the high school launch which had a small beginning in two rooms within the K-8 grade campus, expanding to the lease of a basement of a church where the location was quite inadequate, and yet their scores are higher than the parents of current students. I believe that this can be explained that the current campus, renovated and adequate, is the new normal for a benchmark in the comparison and these parents did not have to walk through the years of struggle in an inadequate campus. The level of normalcy of the physical aspects of the campus has risen, therefore, the perception and expectation of adequacy has also risen. This is a reasonable and natural progression in a time of growth that at each level the expectation rises built on the previous experiences and settings.

A focus group of six high school teachers was utilized in the analysis of the survey questions. The teachers volunteered their assistance and completed the ranking scale on personal time. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys of current students demonstrated the value of $R= 0.8373$ which reflects a strong positive correlation. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys of alumni demonstrated the value of $R= 0.5806$ which reflects a moderate positive correlation.
Examining Educational Practices and Expectations

One of the many factors to consider is the implications of this study for application and practice. Throughout the complex process of expansion to a full high school program, the school must continue to implement an exceptional academic and athletic program and therefore, the tasks of instructional leadership and visionary leader must both remain a priority. My responsibilities at the school are hinged on continuing to lead the academic program towards student achievement, concurrently with functioning as a visionary leader. This crucial role as the superintendent is one that must be developed and enhanced as the project itself grows and is developed. Each new phase brings a new level of leadership responsibility, and the daily execution of the tasks becomes the adversary and rival of strategy, vision, and perseverance (Pue, 2016). The daily tasks and the amount of effort necessary to keep the day-to-day momentum of the school on pace compete with the time, resources, energy, and attention to the strategic goals and visionary pursuits. It is essential in this time of creating and sustaining the high school program that this tension is identified and acknowledged. It is certainly important that the daily vortex of the urgent not become an excuse for failure to accomplish strategic goals or academic initiatives. Therefore, it is imperative that time is given to reflection, prayer, and refocusing on the vision and mission. This may be on an individual level, as a teaching team, and as a corporate school board.

Within this vortex of the urgent is also the tension to not take the time to listen and ask questions. During this time of significant change, it is vital to learn to ask questions, hard questions, and then truly listen. The leader’s willingness to ask questions that address the constraints, assumptions, and beliefs of the stakeholders is
essential and then the most important and truly the most difficult response is needed, to listen. Listening with a quiet and receptive spirit is a mark of leadership and must not be overlooked as a practical implication. Listening skills were among the foundational skills, critical to effective communication and the skill of listening must be learned, practiced, and achieved in leadership. This research and resulting data are simply statistics to be complied, numbers to be charted, and assumptions to be printed, all useless, if the core of the matter is not addressed by a humble leader who listens.

The outcome of this study answers the question that the implementation of the strategies in the transition was appropriate and adequate, and can to be replicated. This central query focused on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity, while sustaining the culture and central purposes of the school. Within this study, I do believe that the vision, mission, and culture of Cornerstone Christian School was maintained and even broadened as the Lord continued to reveal the next step for the school. The replication of this growth and progression is dependent on so many variables and, I believe, the most critical aspect is the school leadership’s dependence on the Lord and His plans and purposes.

Contextual Framework

Within the initial planning for the expansion into a high school program, particularly Cornerstone Christian high school, a significant contextual framework emerged, an intersection of three themes- the intrinsic nature of human participants, the four phases within the change process, and an understanding of noteworthy paradigms.

The primary theme of the contextual framework addresses the very character of school and embraces the intrinsic nature of human participants. The participants, the
stakeholders, are comprised of teachers, students, support staff, school board and the community members. School is about, for, and because of people. Therefore, the role of the participants, the stakeholders, the learners, is essential in the process of educational change, especially in the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity while sustaining the culture and central purposes of the school. The intrinsic nature of the participants is reflected in the culture as a shared sense of purpose and values and collaborative relationships amongst the stakeholders of the school including the students (Fullan, 2001). These shared experiences are the interweaving that draws and binds the change-makers together. Whether positive or negative experiences, whether joyful or sorrowful experiences, whether mundane, routine, and common or exciting and extraordinary experiences, these work to draw those involved in the school into a shared experience, building a shared sense of purpose and value (Fullan, 1993). This purpose and value is at the root a moral purpose which is not a learned behavior, but rather is a natural pursuit. Moral purpose can be seen in striving to improve the quality of how the change makers interact and move forward together (Sergiovanni, 2000). At Cornerstone Christian School, this moral purpose is founded on the intrinsic value of the individual who has been created in the image of God with an understanding that each student has immeasurable worth in the eyes of their Creator and that each has a remarkable plan and purpose.

Within the school setting, moral purpose can be seen as an agreed set of principles that creates and leads the vision for the school, stimulating reflection and review, and spurring and supporting action. A school’s moral purpose acknowledges that there is a need for the students to be both challenged and supported. Understanding the
significance of those involved in the implementation of the high school program and the intrinsic nature of each member involved is integral to understanding the moral purpose. And within this theme is the importance of leading with moral purpose which means having a commitment to make a difference in the lives of students as a result of their daily experiences at school (Bezzina, 2007). This theme of moral purpose is based on purposeful deeds, intentional strategies - “that is to say, moral purpose is about deeds and actions, not only words” (Webster, 2018). Within each phase of the implementation of the high school program, the central moral purpose of the intrinsic value of the individual student was considered and steps were purposefully and intentionally taken to maintain this focus; a natural pursuit that reflects the vision, mission, culture and values embedded into the essence of Cornerstone Christian School.

The intrinsic nature of human contributors to the implementation of the high school program demands that each member of this process is invested in the effort. Each member is one of influence whether an incoming freshman, a Physics teacher, a custodian, a resource specialist, or a volunteer, each is vital to the success of the school. In a conversation with a parent, Cornerstone Christian High School was described as a school where no one is forgotten or overlooked. He went on to describe his son’s experience at the high school and how he was welcomed, accepted, and integrated into the culture of the school. This is a remarkable illustration of the intrinsic value of each member involved in creating and maintaining the high school program- no one is insignificant, overlooked, forgotten, unnoticed, or irrelevant. And it is my goal that this statement is true not only in this implementation process, but throughout the years to
come. The most important person is the individual student as seen through the eyes of God.

A second theme within the contextual framework can be described as the four phases of the change process. The following chart best represents the contextual framework of the four phases within the change process and these phases are proposed by Fullan (1991, 1999) as initiation, implementation, continuation, and outcome. Within the process of creating the high school program at Cornerstone Christian School, the phases of initiation, implementation, and continuation are clearly defined and the final phase of outcome is on-going and blended within the continuation phase. The initiation phase is an intersection of research and prayer, while the implementation phase is marked by both external and internal forces. Establishing procedures concurrently as continued changes are enforced is seen in the third phase of continuation with the fourth phase, the outcome phase best described as “already and not yet”. This “already and not yet” description of the outcome phase defines the dissonance between the reality that within a school setting an outcome is never complete, yet at the same time, the outcome can be seen in stages within the school, its program, and its students. Therefore, the outcome which is evidenced already is not yet wholly accomplished.
The four phases within the change process

Figure 1 - Four phases of the change process
The decision to open a high school was not the official start to the initiation phase, but rather it began during the times that the Lord first spoke the vision for the high school. It was in small conversations with parents, suggestions by the teachers, questions from a peer, but most importantly in moments of prayer as the Lord revealed His purposes for the school. It was after the school board decision was made that the official initiation phase began.

I believe that the initiation phrase can best be demonstrated as an intersection of research and prayer. Systematic and comprehensive research was performed, data was collected, statistics were analyzed and all the while, each decision and each step of the initiation phase was interwoven with prayer. Without prayer, the initiation phase would not have been as effective nor successful although the research and analysis were critical and needed. As the high school was created, planned and developed, the intersection of research and prayer could not be separated or disconnected, research and prayer in this phase was not an either/or but instead a both/and. Research then prayer and prayer then research were interwoven as a critical component of the initiation phase.

Prayer was essential in the initiation phase as it is in every phase of the change process. Oswald Chambers (1917), an early twentieth-century Scottish author, evangelist, and teacher, summed up the very perspective of Cornerstone Christian School when he stated, “Prayer does not fit us for the greater work; prayer is the greater work.” At CCS, prayer is the work of the school all the while creating, building, maintaining, and improving the high school program. A good example was found in a recent conversation with a student and her parent. The conversation was in reference to how a certain curriculum was selected for a class. As the conversation was progressing, the
student leaned forward and stated, “Oh, I know how Mrs. Schrag made the decision. She prayed about it.” This is a small, but insightful comment by a student. Yes, each decision is prayerfully considered and then acted upon.

Moving forward in the initiation phase, the stakeholders, parents, teachers, students, and school board committed to fervent prayer. Understanding that ”God does nothing except in response to believing prayer” the often quoted words of John Wesley, a 1700’s English cleric and theologian, were not only a starting point of prayer, but a sustaining line as the school moved through each phase of the change process. As the research was dutifully performed, data was meticulously collected, statistics were precisely analyzed, the sustaining and undergirding was in prayer- fervent, daily prayer.

As has been demonstrated, there was not a published road map, a standardized strategic plan for starting a Christian high school, building from a K-8 program, so each part of the process was carefully considered and implications were taken into account. And although there was not a set path forward, rigorous preparation, sound decisions, and deliberative planning was established and this set the stage for a successful implementation phase.

Following the initiation phase, the implementation, the application phase was put into place. This phase was impacted by both external and internal factors. The external factors range from the economy of the community which impacts enrollment, to the availability of leasable space for a campus, to policies handed down from the Nebraska Department of Education. The internal factors included the currently enrolled students, the existing school board, teaching staff, and support staff, and the parents and guardians within the school community. Each external and internal factor was
interacting with the next and each was connected to the other, associated and supplementary to the implementation phase.

Two themes from John Kotter’s work in “Leading Change” can be traced within the implementation phase. First, the theme of forming a powerful, guiding coalition and second, empowering others to act on the vision (Kotter, 2007). These themes can be seen both in the external and internal factors in the implementation phase as the external factors acted on the internal factors setting the parameters of how the internal factors could or should progress. An example is an external factor of the guidelines within Rule 14 of the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE), stating the classes that must be offered which then mandated the addition of internal factors, teachers. In this situation, the NDE became a powerful, guiding coalition, but then the teachers that the school employed, trained, and nurtured also became an equally powerful, guiding coalition.

Another “Leading Change” theme illustrated in the implementation phase is to empower others to act on the vision (Kotter, 2007). In particular, stakeholders were encouraged to take risks and implement nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions. An external factor was the available leasable space for the second and third years of the high school program. With limited space within a church facility, the high school teachers invented clever ways to conduct class like the science teacher who rigged a sink and plumbing system for science labs. High school teachers were encouraged and supported in their creative, innovative, nontraditional ideas. This implementation phase was one of dreaming, daring, and developing.

A heartfelt example of the commitment of the teachers can be seen in a recent note sent by a parent of an alum. “I can’t tell you how blessed I am to be a part of our
Cornerstone family. The teachers and staff’s dedication to serving the Lord through ministering to the students is beyond compare. God has really impressed on my heart lately how wonderfully loving the teachers and staff of Cornerstone are. It warms my heart to see teachers who do not even have students they are currently teaching- and there are always teachers there cheering on the different teams and participants and activities, as well as those teachers giving their time to oversee these events. Although I can no longer be as involved on a regular basis with Cornerstone, I still am confident that this is the absolutely best place for my children to be to not only gain an academic education but more importantly to grow spiritually into the Godly young adults He would will for their lives.”

Upon the transition from the implementation phase to the continuation phase, the continuation phase was marked by the balance between establishing procedures which became standard protocol to continued changes that were always being adjusted to bring needed change and purposeful adjustments. Two additional “Leading Changes” themes were evidenced in the continuation phase, institutionalizing new approaches and consolidating improvements along with producing more changes (Kotter, 2007). As the new approaches and methods were institutionalized, new norms and shared values were established which also developed coherence within the change process. This coherence brought unity and reason and soundness (Fullan, 1999). And as improvements were consolidated, the change process was invigorated and the vision and mission gained credibility. An good example of this can be seen in the manner that the first teachers in the high school were willing to work collaboratively with each other and willingly integrate new teaching staff as the school grew, strengthening the partnership and
collaboration which in turn strengthened the academic rigor of each department. Another example is the willingness of the staff to accept changes and additions to programs and policies, welcoming the changes instead of being resistive to the adjustment. The teachers embraced the vision and mission of the high school program, understanding that the continuation phase included both establishing procedures and continued adjustments as needed.

The outcome phase is one that is best described as "Already and not yet". Following the initiation, implementation, and continuation phases, the outcome phase is one phase with an undefined beginning and does not have an end. As with any organization whose primary focus is people, the outcome is an ever moving target, even after a student graduates, the outcome is not complete. This phase is therefore best described as "already and not yet" in that the outcomes may be partially evident although the completion is not yet. This is best expressed as a paradox, a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true. This paradox of the outcome being visible within the school program and yet in many areas, the outcome is yet to be seen. A good example is seen in the student that has been enrolled for his freshman and sophomore year and demonstrates a passion for the Lord and a compassion for others while still struggling with certain portions of the academic program due to not applying himself diligently to his studies as needed. The “already” is seen in the student’s character and the “not yet” is evidenced in the fact he does not yet demonstrate the studiousness needed for his own personal academic success. Another example is the practical nature of the current campus. The “already” is seen in the acquisition of the current leased space of 70,000
square feet for the elementary and middle school campus. This is a wonderful campus with adequate space and bright classrooms. The “not yet” is in the fact that the campus does not include a gymnasium nor a football field. What the school has experienced is that this paradox of “already/not yet” is a perfect motivation to be reliant on the Lord and His timing and grace. He uses this in the lives of students and teachers to build our trust in Him and His plans and purposes for the school.

The third theme within the contextual framework is the understanding of two noteworthy paradigms. First that operating on the edge of chaos is part of the process, but the chaos must be seen as a complexity, and even this is beautiful and purposeful. And the second paradigm is that change is a journey not simply a destination (Fullan, 1999). Neither of these paradigms can fit neatly into a flowchart chart, a strategic plan, organizational policy, or established blueprint, but instead both paradigms are critical to understanding this process of creating, sustaining, and maintaining the culture, vision, and mission of the school during a time of significant growth.

The term “the edge of chaos” is originally a scientific term to define a phenomenon within systems. This term is used to denote the transition space between order and disorder that is hypothesized to exist within a wide range of systems. This transition zone between the two systems is known as the edge of chaos, “a region of bounded instability that engenders a constant dynamic interplay between order and disorder. This point or interface between the two is hypothesized to be a locus for maximum complexity and the dynamics driving evolution” (Complexity Labs, 2018). This scientific term is a wonderful description of the change process within schools and specifically Cornerstone Christian School as the school developed the high school
program in response to the prompting of the Lord. This transition space between order and disorder as each part of the high school program was added, developed, and improved may have seemed chaotic at times, but it also brought an important dynamic to the change process. Therefore, this edge of chaos must be understood as complex, and beautiful and purposeful. Of course, it must be understood that change can neither be managed nor controlled completely, but it can be led (Webster, 2018) and this edge of chaos concept is a wonderful example of leading in and through the chaos of change.

The second critical paradigm to understand is that change is a journey not simply a destination (Fullan, 1999). This paradigm aligns with the “already/not yet” concept in the outcome phase. Within creating and sustaining the vision, mission, and culture of the CCS high school program is the understanding that building the high school program would not primarily be about a completed high school program, but more about the processes, the progression, the journey of this venture. This is seen in how programs, classes, athletics, and activities were added, the timeline and the structure of the high school program, and the implementation of each next step. The change process was not only seen as a journey, but one that was adventuresome, challenging, and even fun. Each next step was planned, deliberated, and coordinated, but also fervently prayed through and steps were taken in faith in this journey.

The question of this study centered on if the strategies and procedures are meaningful and dependable for other schools in their addition of a high school program or in instituting a new pre-K-12 school. This study does demonstrate that these strategies are meaningful and dependable, but also, more importantly that they are able to be replicated in other settings. This study also demonstrates that a path forward in faith
is one of phases, next steps, and acts of great reliance on prayer and the Lord’s clarity and direction.

As was previously demonstrated within this study, I do believe that the vision, mission, and culture of Cornerstone Christian School was maintained and even broadened as the Lord continued to reveal the next steps for the school. The replication of this growth and progression is dependent on so many variables and, I believe, the most critical aspect is the school’s dependence on the Lord in prayer for His plans and purposes- for His glory!
Chapter 6 Defining Success

Embedded into this study is the inquiry if a distinct vision, mission, and culture was created and sustained as the high school program at Cornerstone Christian School was implemented. Focusing on the creation of a meaningful vision and mission in a time of significant growth and complexity while sustaining the distinctively Christian culture and academic merit within the school, this objective has been addressed through a qualitative and quantitative interpretation, but these aspects give only a glimpse of the outcome. Numbers, statistics, data, and standard deviations are a small fragment of any authentic and lasting outcome of the addition of the Cornerstone Christian high school program. Researchers and educators can compare numbers, analyze statistics, make predictions of growth and success, but the critical analysis and authentic investigation is in the individual student, the alumni, and even in the teachers. This chapter will address the tension in defining success and truly understanding the definition of success in the life of a student and alumni. A true analysis of success, a valid definition of success, and an accurate description of success must come down to the level of just one individual student. This study can present the various steps taken to expand the program, to increase enrollment, to expand the facility and campus, and to encourage academic excellence, but the tension must be recognized that the most important aspect is the change in the life of each and every student.

At CCS, we purposefully focus on the human side of teaching, learning, and achievement with the understanding that each student is created with a specific purpose and plan that is best developed within an academically challenging program. The intimate nature of teaching and learning also strategically and purposefully addresses the
Cornerstone Christian School is best described as a discipleship Christian school whose focus is to bring honor and glory to the Lord through every aspect of the school. Just as the culture provides the significance within the school setting, a culture of discipleship provides the distinctiveness of Cornerstone Christian School. This distinctive culture of discipleship is a trademark of CCS and plays an essential role in the founding of the high school program. This distinct culture is mirrored in the annual mission’s trips that are not only about service in the community and internationally, but focus on allowing the Lord “to break our hearts for what breaks the heart of God” (Pierce, 2016). This culture of discipleship is reflected in high school seniors volunteering to give up a Sunday afternoon to clean the home of a recently widowed father of two elementary age students. It is demonstrated in the junior student who selected a younger student with severe learning needs as her partner for the carnival fundraiser. It is seen in the alumnus who texts from his deployment in Japan to say he is praying for the students as they depart for the annual mission’s trip and in the alumnus who writes a letter to say she is praying for the graduation ceremony. These examples
are small and may seem meaningless in the scope of ACT scores, number of AP classes taken, and scholarships offered in college, but these are of more significance, are more valuable, and are utterly treasured.

The complexity of the decision to add a high school program, building a full pre-K-12 program, allowed me to focus on the significance of each decision. Each decision was based on the school’s vision, mission, and culture, and each decision was immersed in hours of prayer both individually and corporately with the school board. As a Christian school, the importance of prayer and intercession was vital to the process of decision-making. Early in my time at Cornerstone, I began to seek the Lord’s heart for the school. I would ask the founders of the school to come in and meet with me. My agenda for these meetings was always the same. They would sit down across the desk from me, I would lean forward and say, “Tell me the story. Tell me the story again. Tell me of how the school was started.” They would recount days of struggle, prayerful planning, laborious hours, joyful results, and then many more arduous days. In my first years of serving at CCS, I would walk through the halls and barter with God, offering a life of service in exchange for His blessing. And He would draw me into His truth that He has a specific plan for the school, not because we had substantial enrollment and significant growth, nor had influence, but because He loved us. He chose us not because of who we are, but because of who He is and He called us to obedience. “For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but it is because the Lord loves
you. Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations. You shall therefore be careful to do the commandment and the statutes and the rules that I command you today.” (Deuteronomy 7:6-8a, 9 and 11, ESV) The Lord also reminded me that He goes before me in each decision and task, and is always with me. “It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.” (Deuteronomy 31:8, ESV) With these promises, I stepped out in faith and action, building the high school program using best practices in education, sound educational research, and trusted advice from mentors.

This journey of creating and crafting a high school is not only one of research-based strategies, best practices for effective student achievement, analysis of data points, comparisons of graduation rates, examination of course options and electives, it is about lives changed, demonstrating what it truly means to be a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is more than transcripts for successful completion of high school classes and requirements for entrance to college. It is relentless pursuit of academic excellence; it is a heartfelt passion for others; it is a school that educates children to become learners—equipped with Godly character and Biblical Truth. The distinctive culture of discipleship is a trademark of the school and plays an essential role in the founding of the high school program, and therefore it demands that this distinctiveness must be part of the creating and sustaining vision, mission and culture in a time of significant growth and complexity. Essential to the purpose of the Cornerstone Christian High School program is the understanding that each student has immeasurable and remarkable worth in the
eyes of their Creator and that each has a remarkable plan and purpose— to the glory of God.

For this reason, I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Ephesians 3:14-21
Appendix I Research Surveys

Research Questions

Question #1

What are the views of the Cornerstone Christian School (CCS) board president with respect to vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor, and athletics following the recent transition from a K-8 to a K-12 program?

e. What role did you play in the implementation of the high school program?

f. Describe your understanding of the processes and methods within the transition?

g. What do you see as the most important role of the school board in the creation and implementation of a high school program?

h. What are your perceptions of the school’s vision and mission, governance, facility planning, academic rigor and athletics as understood from your role as a school board member?

These questions will be presented to the current school board president who has held the role for five consecutive years, and began his time on the board about six months before the vote to institute the high school program.

Question #2

What is the rating of the parent satisfaction in reference to the academic and athletic achievement of their students, and the student’s preparedness for college and career decisions? Are parents pleased with the established vision and mission of the
school, the present school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility?

j. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.

k. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.

l. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions.

m. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.

n. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.

o. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school.

p. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student participated in during his/her past years.

q. As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student. Please include the activities that your student participated in.
As a parent of a current CCS student, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.

The parent survey will be measured on a four point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. It will be distributed to all current parents.

**Question #3**

What is the parent of an alumni perception of the high school academic and athletic program and their personal preparedness for college and career decisions? What is the parent’s perception of the vision and mission of the school as it relates to each alum individually? Are parents of alumni pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility?

j. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.

k. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.

l. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions.

m. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated vision of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.
n. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student lives up to the fulfillment of the stated mission of the school as demonstrated in the outcomes and perceptions of parents and students.

o. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the present school board governance is consistent with the fulfilling the vision and mission of the school.

p. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the athletic program offered is one of excellence. Please include the athletics that your student participated in during his/her past years.

q. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the extra-curricular activities offered were ones that meet the interests of my student. Please include the activities that your student participated in.

r. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that current high school campus and facilities are adequate for the needs of my student.

The survey questions are measured on a four-point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

**Question #4**

What is the correlation between the scores of a teacher focus group ranking the level of importance of each theme and the scores on the completed parent surveys? Does the understood importance of the themes in the teachers’ perceptions correspond with the stated importance of the themes as demonstrated by the parent survey scores?
Question #5

What are the current levels of performance on national standardized assessments, compared to established academic goals in scope and sequence documents with reference to demographics of students?

Two data points will be considered and analyzed. The first will be the senior class averages of the ACT assessment and the second will be the tenth grade Terra Nova results for the past years. These are the primary assessments implemented at Cornerstone Christian high school. The school’s scores will be compared to both state and national averages.
Research Questions for Parents of Cornerstone Christian School Student

The purpose of this survey is to determine the rating of parent satisfaction in reference to the academic and athletic achievement of their students, and the student’s preparedness for college and career decisions? Are parents/guardians pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the present school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility? The parent survey will be measured on a four point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Please answer honestly and all responses are considered confidential and anonymous unless otherwise stated.

a. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student is excellent.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

Comments:________________________

b. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student is prepared for college decisions.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

Comments:________________________

c. As a parent of a CCS student, I believe that my student is prepared for career decisions.

Strongly Agree       Agree       Disagree       Strongly Disagree

Comments:________________________
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Comments

Our Vision

Cornerstone Christian School educates children to become learners-equipped with Godly character and Biblical Truth.

Our Mission

1. Focusing on the student's love of the Lord and a personal relationship with Him.
2. Integrating a Christian worldview into all academic and extracurricular areas.
3. Encouraging a life of service to our community, our world and our Lord.
4. Celebrating student progress and achievement.

Our Theme

"With Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Ephesians 2:20

Optional information:

Grade of student: __________________________

Parent name: __________________________
Research Questions for Parents of Cornerstone Christian School Alumni

The purpose of this survey is to determine the rating of parent satisfaction in reference to the academic and athletic achievement of their student, and the student’s preparedness for college and career decisions? Are parents/guardians pleased with the established vision and mission of the school, the present school board governance, the athletic and extra-curricular activities offered, and the adequacy of the facility? The parent survey will be measured on a four point Likert scale, designated: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. Please answer honestly and all responses are considered confidential and anonymous unless otherwise stated.

a. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that the academic rigor of the high school program as experienced by my student was excellent.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

   Comments

b. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for college decisions.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

   Comments

c. As a parent of a CCS alum, I believe that my student was prepared for career decisions.

   Strongly Agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly Disagree

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Our Theme

"With Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone." Ephesians 2:20

Optional information- Parent name:
November 14, 2016

RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

To the School Board of Cornerstone Christian School and Mr. Bartels,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study at your school, Cornerstone Christian School, Bellevue, Nebraska. I am currently enrolled in the Educational Administration College at the University of Nebraska-Omaha, and am in the process of writing my dissertation. The study is entitled: Creating and sustaining vision, mission, and culture in a time of significant growth and complexity.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit from the school to anonymously complete a questionnaire (questions enclosed). Due to the nature of the study, I hope to recruit the parent or guardian of these students to anonymously complete their own questionnaire (copy enclosed). Interested students, who volunteer to participate, will be given a consent form to be signed by their parent or guardian (copy enclosed) and returned to the primary researcher at the beginning of the survey process. Parents who volunteer to participate will also be given consent forms to be signed and returned to the primary researcher (copy enclosed).

If approval is granted, student participants will complete the survey in a classroom or other setting on the school site such as a study hall or homeroom. The survey process should take no longer than fifteen minutes. Parent participants would complete the survey at home. The survey results will be pooled for the dissertation project and individual results of this study will remain absolutely confidential and anonymous. Should this study be published, only pooled results will be documented. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. I would be available to answer any questions or concerns that you may have at that time. You may contact me at my email address, tlschrag@ccsnebraska.org or by phone (402)578-8519.

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form in the enclosed self-addressed envelope. Alternatively, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution’s letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your school.

Sincerely,

Teri Lynn Schrag

Enclosures

cc: Dr. Kay Kieser, Ed.D., chair

Approved by:

Print name and title: ________________________________
Signature: __________________________ Date: 11/14/2016
Appendix II CCS Vision and Mission Statement

Cornerstone Christian School

Mission Statement:

Cornerstone Christian School educates children to become learners – equipped with Godly character and Biblical Truth.

We achieve our mission by:

- Focusing on the student’s love of the Lord and a personal relationship with Him
- Integrating a Christian worldview into all academic and extracurricular areas
- Encouraging a life of service to our community, our world and our Lord
- Celebrating student’s progress and achievement

Vision Statement:

Cornerstone Christian School seeks to be families’ first choice for Pre-K-12 education, known for:

- Academic excellence
- Active faith-based learning
- Competitive athletic and extracurricular programs
- Strong commitment to community
- Ideal teacher-student ratio
- Financial independence
- Always bringing glory to God!
Appendix III Write the Vision

Cornerstone Christian School

“….with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.” Ephesians 2:20

Submitted to the Cornerstone Christian School board, December 2009

In response to the prompting of Scripture reading, my mentors, and intercessors, I will document the vision that the Lord has been giving me for Cornerstone Christian School. In my eight years as the administrator, the Lord has been drawing me deeply into His Word and into prayer. Enclosed are the precious whispers of the Lord, the gentle prodding of His Spirit, and the bold statements of His Truth.

“Then the LORD replied: “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.” Habakkuk 2:2

Academic Goals and Vision:

Cornerstone Christian School educates children to become learners-equipped with Godly character and Biblical Truth. We accomplish this goal by:

1. Focusing on the student's love of the Lord and a personal relationship with Him.
2. Integrating a Christian worldview into all academic and extracurricular areas.
3. Encouraging a life of service to our community, our world and our Lord.
4. Celebrating student progress and achievement.

The clear purpose of Cornerstone Christian School is to help our students understand that all truth is God’s Truth that we are called to live in obedience to His Word in all aspects of life. CCS teaches a love for God’s Word with a comprehensive Biblical worldview and believes that academic excellence must be central and for God’s Glory. With the premise that all truth is God’s Truth, the CCS academic standard will be one of excellence and commitment to the Truth of God’s Word.

• And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. Colossians 3:17
• The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge. Proverbs 1:7
• Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to acknowledge him. Hosea 6:3
• Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Deuteronomy 6:4-6
Athletic Goals and Vision:
Just as our academic program emphasizes excellence, the athletic program does as well; coaches guide and mentor their athletes to play for God’s glory. The track, court, and field are the mission fields of our student athletes. Not only do they play well, striving to win; they play for the glory of God. Athletic programs will be structured and new sports will be added to the department with this goal as our focus.

- Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. Matthew 28:19-20
- Or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. I Corinthians 10:31
- Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go. Joshua 1:9
- The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there. Zechariah 8:5

Spiritual and Kingdom Influence:
Cornerstone Christian School has been called and kept for the Lord’s plans and purposes in this community, our nation, and our world. Founded by a husband and wife team, Byron and Lucinda Kustka, who saw the need for Christian education for this community, CCS is a discipleship Christian school. We desire to bring the Lord glory through each part of our school. In the past years, we have seen enrollment almost triple along with the expansion to a full kindergarten through twelfth grade program. The Lord has been demonstrating His calling to the school board, our teaching staff, and our students with their families. This mission and vision includes the call to a walk of obedience and faith. This obedience and faith will result in a Godly influence on our community, our nation, and our world- for His Glory!

- He has shown you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8
- The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors....Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. Therefore, take care to follow the commands, decrees and laws I give you today. Deuteronomy 7:7, 9, and 11
- Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west. I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’ and to the south, ‘Do not hold them back.’ Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth—everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. Isaiah 43:5-7
Facility and Campus Goal and Vision:

Early in 2010, the CCS school board introduced the concept of laying out a Gideon fleece as it related to the school and its future. The vision presented at that time was to expand the elementary and middle school program while adding a high school. The school board, both corporately and individually, seeks the Lord’s guidance in each step of this process and spends much time in addressing all the pieces and dimensions of this vision. The next piece of this vision is a campus with a facility sufficient to host multiple classrooms per grade and a complete high school program. The campus will also include comprehensive athletic and playground facilities. Bringing the Lord glory even amongst our architects, contractors, and crews is essential to our vision. The implementation of any plan will require much prayer.

- And I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty. ‘The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘And in this place I will grant peace,’ declares the LORD Almighty. Haggai 2:7-9
- The day for building your walls will come, the day for extending your boundaries. Micah 7:11
- Then the LORD said to Moses, “See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts. Also I have given ability to all the skilled workers to make everything I have commanded you. Exodus 31:1-6
- And it will be said: “Build up, build up, prepare the road! Remove the obstacles out of the way of my people.” Isaiah 57:14
The complete campus will include the following:

1. Prayer rooms for staff and students
2. Two game gyms and 4 practice and physical education gyms
3. Fields and courts for football, baseball, softball, soccer, and tennis
4. Swimming complex
5. Auditorium to seat 1,800 to 2,400 with stained glass
6. Photography, videography, and recording labs
7. Band and choir rooms
8. Industrial tech, family consumer science and medical technology labs
9. Chemistry and biology labs
10. Multiple libraries by grade level (elementary, middle, and high school)
11. Storage and supply rooms for office, athletic, art, and reading supplies
12. Outdoor science exploration fields
13. Extensive playground
14. Capacity and equipment for special needs education

Prayer for the students of Cornerstone Christian School:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:14-21

The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. I Thessalonians 5:24

See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. Isaiah 49:16

Some will say, ‘I belong to the LORD’; others will call themselves by the name of Jacob; still others will write on their hand, ‘The LORD’s,’ and will take the name Israel. Isaiah 44:5
References


Harvey, Stephanie and Goudvis, Anne. (2000). *Strategies that work; teaching comprehension to enhance learning*. York, ME. Stenhouse Publishers.


