

LASSCA PANEL PRESENTATION

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The LASSCA planning team asked me to offer some reflections and practical thoughts on the topics of succession planning and balancing financial viability and service of the poor from my perspective as the Director of the Office of Education for the San Francisco District.

Succession Planning: Why it is so important?

With regard to succession planning, it appears that all the business and organizational research tells us that the viability of an organization is directly related to the health and strength of the organizational leader. After several years in my role, I am clearly convinced that school health is directly related to the strength of the president and principal. When I am asked why the schools are doing so well, I am generally quick to say, "We have great school leaders."

I have seen wonderful turnarounds in schools. I see schools thrive, schools with engaged students and satisfied parents, and schools which are financially viable. I witness great creativity to advance the mission with strong and mission focused leaders.

I have also witnessed the pain and distraction in a school community when the wrong leader is in place. A school's mission is compromised, good people struggle, others are distracted; there can be significant negative financial consequences, and the amount of time and energy that goes into repairing this damage is enormous. I know it from my position well – the phone calls and complaints can be continuous, but it is almost as if these complaints stop overnight when the right leader is in charge.

This is why identifying the right leaders for a school is my top priority. I am committed to investing significant personal time upfront to help boards and presidents find the right people, which means providing resources, personal support, and guidance. We put in place the **Discerning Leaders Program** to build the bench of future candidates for these positions. It is beginning to pay off. We have 17 participants in this third cohort. I am convinced that these investments pay significant dividends.

Succession Planning: The responsibility of the President and Principal

Currently, I am directly involved with or overseeing in some way three president searches and one principal search. The first questions most frequently asked by board members after the announcement of a search are:

- Do we have anybody?
- Who do we know who could do the job?
- Do we have any one in house?

Here are the questions I have found myself asking presidents these days:

- Who do you need to approach about your position?
- Who should you encourage to apply for your position?
- Who have you prepared?

We know that the president or principal cannot select his/her successor, but one of the most valuable roles a president or principal can play is to identify and, if possible, prepare and intentionally train individuals to be ready to step in. Of course there are other factors that provide for a good succession:

- Have your school's house in order.
- Make sure that the administrators work as a team so no one person knows everything.
- Keep team members knowledgeable of the school's vision and current activities so there is no vacuum.

I believe, most importantly, each president and principal should have at least one person, and possibly an idea of two to three people who could succeed him or her. For presidents, this will make the board's work much easier. For principals, this will make president's work much easier. You are doing a disservice to the school, the board, and your own legacy, if you are not doing this.

Succession Planning: Who we should be looking for?

The following is a message from Brother John Johnston to the delegates at the 44th General Chapter, May 2007:

"A number of you represent areas that are blessed with vocations. Others of you have had few or even no vocations in the last decade or several decades. What is your plan? Do you intend to turn the schools over to others who will conduct them without direct reference to the Lasallian heritage? Or are you in the process of creatively, dynamically, courageously creating new structures that will assure that our institutions continue as Lasallian - with Brothers we hope, but without Brothers if necessary."

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Last year Brother Dennis Malloy spoke to the board members at this LASSCA conference about seeing their responsibility on the board and school leadership as apostolic – in line with carrying on the work of Jesus and the apostles. I would go a step further and ask the board and school leaders to recognize our responsibility to carry on the work of De La Salle and the Brothers who have gone before us.

In this spirit, I encourage us to identify and advance people into first line positions who see their work as apostolic and, I will argue, with experience in the Lasallian mission and charism who have had some time to live within the mission, time to absorb the mission, who understand the Gospel through the lens of the Lasallian charism and mission, and individuals who have some demonstrated connection and history with the heritage. As someone said to me, "Not a shallow understanding, but someone alive with the mission, whose blood is boiling over with enthusiasm for this charism."

So I encourage you to do whatever you can to identify your successor, individuals who will sustain the charism and advance the mission.

Succession Planning: Balancing financial viability, tuition, and serving middle class and the poor

The schools across the Region face a similar situation as other Catholics secondary schools in the United States today. Common issues that Catholic schools face include:

- Catholic secondary school tuition has doubled in the last 10 years.

- In serving the poor, traditional schools are designating a major portion of their tuition assistance to families from below the poverty level;
- Middle class families are being squeezed out. Some have called this the hour glass or Martini glass effect. A real issue today is finding ways to serve the middle class.
- The tuition and fundraising model is unsustainable into the future.

I want to offer to you some creative responses I have observed to meet these challenges. They fall under three categories and include the following examples:

1. The third leg of the stool or third rail to tuition and development: Creative revenue streams.
 - Christian Brothers High School , Sacramento, has budgeted revenue of \$467,000 from their international student program for next year;
 - Justin-Siena High School, Napa, is working on a long term lease for six acres of their property;
 - La Salle High School, Yakima, has purchased a fruit warehouse.
2. Creative fund raising: Partnerships with individuals, organizations, businesses.
 - Several schools have developed partnerships with individuals and organizations to fund or adopt students.
3. Financial Modeling and recruitment strategies.
 - Financial modeling is a strategy which was introduced to me by Denise Jones, President of La Salle in Portland. I have learned that financial modeling is applicable to all schools. It is not dependent on having extra land or being in proximity to the wine industry.

All of this takes us back to school leadership - finding leaders who will work hard, be creative, people who will not take no for an answer, and be willing to partner with other like-minded, committed people and organizations.

What has been helpful is the goal set by the Brothers at a District Chapter in 1999 that all schools would have at least 5% of their students from below the poverty level. This created some consternation when it was first announced but today District wide, we are at 11%, excluding the new schools. Several schools pushed right past the 5% goal. The directive forced a certain urgency and creativity.

Finally, we have to look and study more closely government support opportunities: School or Family Choice, Charter schools, etc. For example, San Miguel High School in Tucson has budgeted \$1-1.3M in income from the Arizona tax credit program for next year.

I would like to conclude with a practical idea for LASSCA. I encourage you to consider holding a summit on financial sustainability. It could be part of LASSCA conference or a separate event. You might bring in speakers, but what I think would be most valuable would be to bring your best ideas, the sharing of the creative ideas and initiatives taking place in the schools of the Region, your best practices on this subject. I know some of what is going on in the San Francisco District, but this is just 20% of the schools in the Region.

You might consider inviting other Catholic secondary school presidents. It could well be an opportunity for us to demonstrate leadership and be of service to Catholic secondary school leaders in this country who do not enjoy the support and networking we have here.