

Define Mission Achievement in Terms of Measurable Student Learning

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Use the “Close the Gap” Framework

Here’s a four-part framework for closing the gap between the rhetoric of the mission and the reality of the classroom.

1. Define your mission.
2. Define mission achievement.
3. Determine the current level of mission achievement.
4. Define and implement schoolwide improvement plans to close the gap between current and targeted mission achievement levels.

This article addresses part 2.

Your goal is to run fast. You want to achieve your goal. Any questions?

I have two:

1. How far? One kilometer? Ten kilometers? One hundred kilometers?
2. How fast? Five minutes per kilometer? Four minutes per kilometer? Three minutes per kilometer?

Get answers to these two questions, and you’ll have a clearer understanding of what you must do to achieve your goal. In other words, defining achievement helps you know what to do.

Make sure your definition of achievement is specific, measurable, attainable, and relevant. For example,

- Instead of “run fast,” run 400 meters in 51.2 seconds.
- Instead of “play the trumpet well,” earn a rating of 2 at the instrumental solo and ensemble festival.
- Instead of “read and write well,” earn a rating of 3 on the AP test for literature and composition.
- Instead of “get good grades,” earn a 3.3 GPA.

Defining achievement is useful for you—and for your organization. For example, your school has a mission: Equipping students to

make an impact on the world for Christ. You want to achieve it. Any questions?

I have two:

1. For a student to be equipped to make an impact on the world for Christ, what must that student understand, be able to do, and value? Must your students be able to understand and use a biblical perspective of course content? Must your students be able to communicate through writing, speaking, reading, listening, creating graphs and charts, and participating in the arts?
2. For a student to be equipped, at what level must that student understand, do, and value? Below standard? At standard? Above standard?

Get answers to these two questions, and you’ll have a clearer understanding of what you must do to achieve your school’s mission. In other words, to achieve your school’s mission, start by defining mission achievement.

How? By developing student objectives (also known as overarching curriculum standards, schoolwide learning outcomes, expected student outcomes, schoolwide goals, and expected student learning results).

Student objectives define what a teacher should help a student achieve in order for

Table 1: Sample Student Objectives

Responsible Learners who ...

1. Understand Bible stories, the plan of salvation, and a Christian worldview
2. Understand subject content and skills
3. Integrate content and skills from different subjects
4. Value learning
5. Use appropriate learning strategies

Discerning Thinkers who ...

1. Use a biblical perspective
2. Solve problems
3. Organize and use information to support conclusions
4. Make creative products and presentations

Productive Collaborators who ...

1. Respect themselves and others as being created in God's image

2. Work with others

Effective Communicators who ...

1. Communicate through writing, speaking, reading, listening, creating graphs and charts, and participating in the arts
2. Integrate different forms of communication

Faithful Caretakers who ...

1. Serve God and others and care for God's creation
2. Value and maintain physical, social, emotional, moral, and spiritual health

To see additional samples, do a Web search on ESLRs (expected student learning results).

the student to achieve the mission, and they should be written in student-friendly language. An example of a student objective is "Value learning." (See table 1 for a sample set of student objectives.)

To develop student objectives, take the following four steps:

1. Get answers to eight questions regarding process.
2. Determine the criteria you will use to develop your student objectives.
3. Develop your student objectives.
4. Determine the level of student learning needed for mission achievement.

Step 1: Get answers to eight questions regarding process.

1. Who initiates the development of student objectives? *The administration.*
2. Aren't student objectives the province of the board? *Yes and no.* Student objectives define the mission in terms of measurable student learning and resemble "ends" statements, which are the province of the board. However, student objectives are also overarching curriculum standards. Given this, and given that curriculum standards are the province of the administration and that curriculum training and experience are needed to develop effective student objectives, I recommend that the board rely on

the experts it has hired to carry out the mission—that is, the administration.

3. What is the board's role in the development and approval of the student objectives? *Policy.* Rather than playing a direct, hands-on role, I recommend that the board develop a policy for student objectives and hold the administration accountable for adhering to this policy.
4. Whom should the administration involve in the development of student objectives? *Students, parents, staff, and board members.* This is what the Western Association of Schools and Colleges suggests.
5. What process can the administration use to develop student objectives? *Roundtable discussion.* This is an effective way for students, parents, staff, and board members to collaborate on developing student objectives.
6. Is it mandatory that we develop our own distinct set of student objectives? *No, nor is it necessarily wise to do so.* Using an established set of student objectives from another school is an example of relying on an outside resource.
7. Doesn't using another school's student objectives diminish our distinctiveness? *No, I don't think so,* any more than using denominational creeds, hymns, and procedures diminishes your church's distinctiveness.

8. If we start with another school's student objectives, do we need to modify the process? *A little bit.* If you do this, remember to verify that this set meets your board's policy and to train community members in the nature and function of student objectives.

To learn more, please visit <http://classes.caj.or.jp/messenburg>, and download "The_Rhetoric_Reality_Gap.pdf."

Step 2: Determine the criteria you will use to develop your student objectives.

For example, consider the following set of criteria for student objectives:

1. Define the mission in terms of measurable student learning. Write objectives in terms of what students will do (not what teachers will do) and what will be measured using classroom assessments. If you use policy governance, make sure your student objectives are consistent with board ends statements.
2. Create Christ-centered student objectives that promote the development and application of a biblical worldview. Your student objectives should be true to Christian faith commitments; true to the creation-fall-redemption-restoration motif; and true to the cultural mandate (Genesis 1:26-28), the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), loving God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39), and being part of the Church (Ephesians 4:16).
3. Base your student objectives on sound, current research and practice. Your student objectives should be based on a combination of a Christian philosophy of education and current research and practice.
4. Make sure your student objectives are for all students. Your student objectives should define what you want all your students to achieve.
5. Address the whole person through your student objectives. As a package, your student objectives should address the spiritual, intellectual, aesthetic, social, emotional, physical, and moral domains.
6. Develop student objectives that are interdisciplinary—not subject specific. Subject-area standards identify what a student must achieve in a given subject in order to achieve the student objectives.
7. Be sure to make the student objectives attainable. Your students must be able to meet your student objectives. Don't list

Student objectives are part of the **MOSAIC** curriculum framework.

The **MOSAIC** curriculum framework aligns the mission, curriculum, and student learning.

Mission: A school mission statement is a 15- to 25-word statement that identifies the school, its purpose, and possibly its constituency.

Objectives (also known as expected student outcomes, schoolwide goals, and expected student learning results): Student objectives define your school mission in terms of measurable student learning.

Standards define what students must achieve within a given subject in order to achieve the schoolwide objectives.

Assessments are ways that students show their achievement of the standards.

Instructional strategies are ways that teachers prepare students for assessments.

Children: In class, a teacher helps children prepare for assessments so that they can demonstrate achievement of the standards, and consequently of the student objectives and mission.

To learn more, please visit <http://classes.caj.or.jp/messenburg>, and download "MOSAIC_curriculum_framework.pdf."

objectives you or your students cannot achieve.

Want to consider additional criteria? Please visit <http://classes.caj.or.jp/messenburg>, and download "SMART_Equipment.pdf."

Step 3: Develop your student objectives.

Use your answers to the eight questions and your criteria to develop a set of student objectives. I recommend that you create 10-15 items. The sample set of student objectives (see table 1) has 5 categories and a total of 15 items. To learn how Christian Academy in Japan developed and revised its student objectives, please visit <http://classes.caj.or.jp/messenburg>, and download "Development_Revision_of_SO.pdf."

Step 4: Define the level of student learning needed for mission achievement.

While student objectives define *what* the mission means in terms of student learning, schools also need to define the *level* of student learning needed to achieve the mission. To define this level, schools can develop a **SMART** goal, which is **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ttainable, **R**elevant, and **T**ime-bound.

Here's an example: Not later than Thursday, June 11, 2009, each student objective will have an achievement rating of 90 percent of high school students at or above standard. The scores will be taken from a complete set of end-of-course department assessments.

Using student objectives has helped Christian Academy of Japan define mission achievement and make progress toward mission achievement. Would using assessments help your school? If so, what step will you take this week?

Here are five options:

1. Talk for 15 minutes with a colleague about this article.
2. Talk with the school administration about how student objectives can help your school achieve its mission.
3. Collect sample student objectives. Do a Web search on ESLRs.
4. Develop a set of criteria for developing your student objectives, or use the set of criteria listed in this article to evaluate

your existing student objectives.

5. Visit <http://classes.caj.or.jp/messenger/>, download an article, and read it ("The_Rhetoric_Reality_Gap.pdf," "MOSAIC_curriculum_framework.pdf," "SMART_Equipment.pdf," or "Development_Revision_of_SO.pdf").

Would using student objectives help you achieve your mission?

Find out by responding yes or no to these five statements:

- ____ 1. I want to close the gap between our mission and the reality of our classrooms.
- ____ 2. I want to know how well we're achieving our mission.
- ____ 3. I want to connect mission, student learning, curriculum, and school improvement planning.
- ____ 4. I want our parents to better understand and support our mission.
- ____ 5. I want our students to catch the vision for Christian education.

If you answered yes to any of the five statements above, read on. At Christian Academy in Japan (CAJ), we answered yes to all five, and using student objectives helps us with all five areas. Here's how:

1. Using student objectives helps close the gap between the mission and the reality of the classrooms. A mission statement defines overall purpose, but it does not define what a student must know, be able to do, and

What would happen if ...?

1. Your school defined the mission in terms of measurable student learning by developing student objectives (also known as expected student outcomes, schoolwide goals, and expected student learning results)?
2. Your board members asked your administrators to report for 15 minutes at each board meeting on achievement of student objectives?
3. Your administrators used 15 minutes at each faculty meeting to analyze achievement of student objectives?
4. Your teachers assessed student achievement of the objectives?
5. Your students assessed their learning in terms of the student objectives and used their assessment results to develop SMART goals?
6. Your parents helped their children achieve those SMART goals?
7. All your stakeholders focused on a SMART goal related to increasing achievement of student objectives?

If some or all of this happened, would you be closer to proving the value of Christian education? Would you be closing the gap between the rhetoric of the mission and the reality of the classroom?

From the January 15, 2006, entry on Michael Essenburg's blog: <http://michalessenburg.blogspot.com>.

Is the process of developing student objectives helpful?

Here's what one Christian school principal thinks:

The very process of working through developing the outcomes [or student objectives] has helped us better define who we are and what we are about. It has helped us see the relevance of our daily activities (the stuff of lesson planning) to the overall goals that we desire to achieve. It is helping to provide a grid by which we judge the relevance and priority of what we do every day.

Outcomes have helped us project an image of the student we would like to produce so that teachers know and agree upon the picture they are trying to paint. This has already been useful in making curricular and programmatic decisions....

In general, this process has helped us understand the relationship between our Ends, Core Values, Imperatives, and Strategic Plan with our delivered curriculum. It has helped us develop a framework for working in unison toward the overarching goals we really believe in but were in reality just hopeful that we met. Now we will be able to intentionally target specific aspects of these goals at each level along the way. No more wishful thinking! We will know what we are doing and why and how it all fits together! —*Erin Wilcox, Middle School Principal at Colorado Springs Christian Schools, Colorado Springs, Colorado*

value. This results in a gap between the rhetoric of the mission statement and what teachers and students are accountable to achieve in the reality of the classroom.

Student objectives define the mission in terms of specific, measurable student learning. Consequently, they help close the gap between the mission and the classroom. For example, our mission is to equip students to make an impact on the world for Christ, and one of our student objectives is that students will use a biblical perspective. Consequently, in all subjects at all grade levels, teachers are accountable to teach a biblical perspective and assess student use of a biblical perspective.

2. Using student objectives helps us know how well we're achieving our mission. To know how well we're achieving our mission, we need to define what mission achievement means in terms of measurable student learning, and student objectives do so. We use student objectives to determine academic standards, and we then assess student achievement of the standards.

The result? Assessment data provide information on the standards and, consequently, the student objectives and the mission.

At CAJ we've taken this process a step further. Our mission and student objectives define *what* must be achieved. To define the

amount of learning that must be achieved, we have developed a goal: Each student objective will have an achievement rating of 90 percent of high school students at or above standard. The scores will be taken from a complete set of end-of-course department assessments.

Knowing how much our students need to learn helps us know how we're doing—as points on a scoreboard help a basketball coach and team know how they're doing. By looking at student objective achievement data, we learn the "score." That helps us make effective decisions to reach our SMART goal.

3. Using student objectives helps us connect mission, student learning, curriculum, and school improvement planning. To connect these things, we need to define the mission in terms of student learning, and student objectives do so. Next, we need to develop a curriculum that is designed to help students achieve our student objectives, and this curriculum in turn clarifies what our teachers must teach and assess. Finally, we can use student-objective assessment data as the basis of our school improvement planning, thereby targeting increased student-objective achievement and, consequently, increased mission achievement.
4. Using student objectives has helped our parents better understand and support our mission. Mission statements are global.

Get answers to four questions:

Christian schools work hard to achieve their missions. The following are four key questions to consider regarding mission achievement:

1. What is the mission?
2. What is the definition of mission achievement?
3. To what extent is your school achieving its mission?
4. How will you close the gap between current and desired achievement?

Answers to these four questions are powerful tools in helping your school achieve the mission.

Just imagine the impact of having 100 percent of your school's staff understand the following:

1. Mission: To equip students to make an impact on the world for Christ.
2. Definition of mission achievement: 90 percent of students at or above standard on all student objectives.
3. Current level of achievement on all student objectives—for example, 69 percent of students at or above standard on applying a biblical perspective of course content.
4. Strategic steps they need to take to close the gap between current and targeted achievement levels—for example, giving students six assessments per year that require them to connect course content, life experience, and a biblical perspective.

Need a place to start? Define mission achievement in terms of student objectives.

From the April 28, 2006, entry on Michael Essenburg's blog: <http://michalessenburg.blogspot.com>.

Mission statements do not give parents a specific handle on what their children will learn or on how that learning is connected to the mission. Student objectives define the mission in terms of student learning. We have successfully used our student objectives to help our parents have a clearer picture of how our school will help their children. Each year, for example, parents collaborate with their secondary student to develop a growth plan that targets increased achievement of the student objectives.

5. Using student objectives helps our students catch our vision for Christian education. A key reason our students did not sufficiently catch the vision of Christian education is that Christian education was not defined in terms of what they had to learn. When we define the vision of Christian education in terms of what our students learn, they increasingly catch the vision. In a recent

school publication, our high school student council president is quoted as saying, "CAJ is focused on helping kids achieve the student objectives." When revising our student objectives, our first graders voted 20 to 2 to retain the category "caretakers" instead of changing to "stewards."

Using student objectives can help you in a variety of ways. What one thing can you do to move toward developing student objectives for your school?



Michael Essenburg, MA, serves as coach, consultant, and catalyst at Christian Academy in Japan. He is available on a time-permitting basis to consult with ACSI international/MK schools. To learn more, please visit <http://classes.caj.or.jp>, visit his blog at <http://michalessenburg.blogspot.com>, or email him at mbessenburg@caj.or.jp.