# Grow and Expand
## A Development Growth Process

Penn Christian Academy currently serves 335 students in Preschool through 6th grades. There has been a 140% increase in enrollment since the fall of 2006 (over a 5-year period) resulting in the need for more space. This project is designed to:
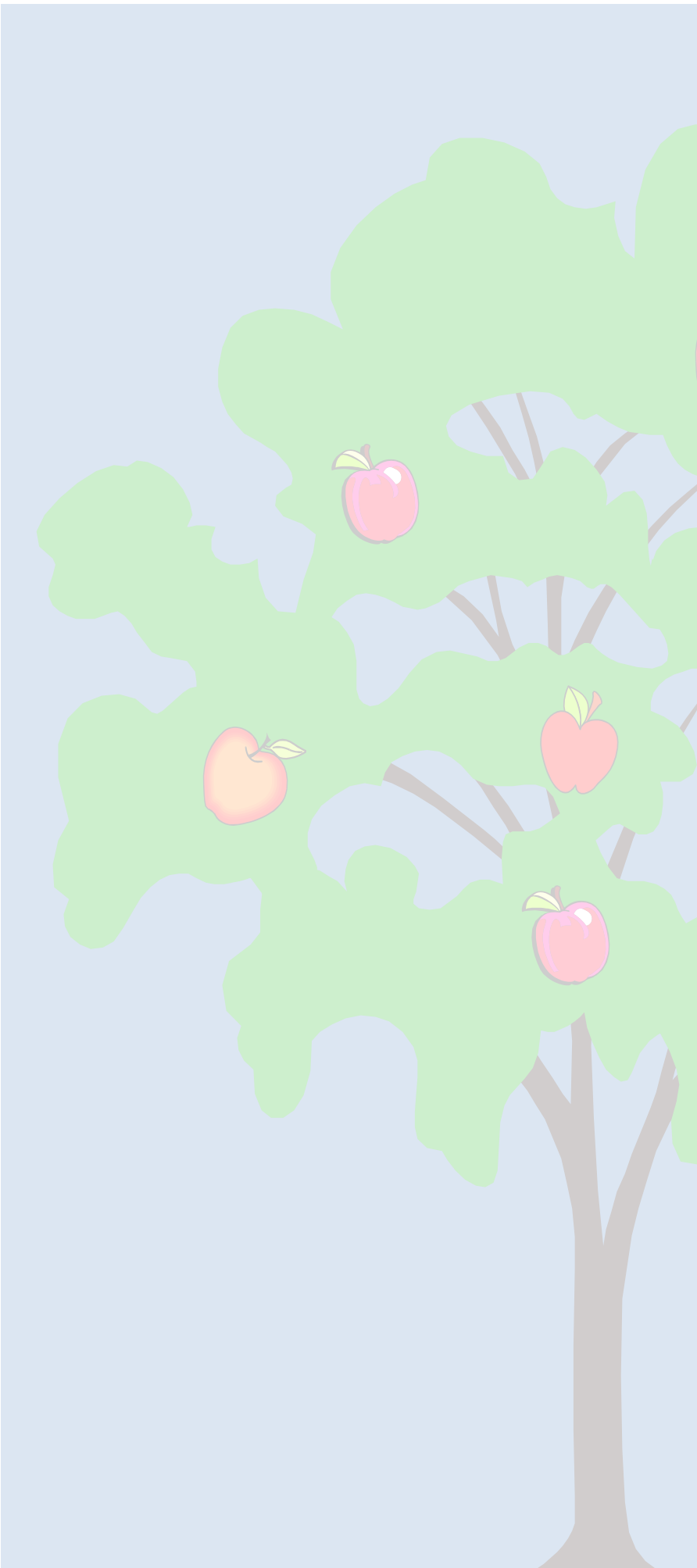
1. Capture the concepts that caused the growth

2. Facilitate continued growth

3. Provide a structure to raise the capital funds needed to build additional facilities to accommodate the growth

4. And begin the process of adding middle school programming to the current school.

This project demonstrates that effective development growth concepts result in the desired outcome… growth and development.

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Christian school growth is difficult to capture as a step-by-step process.  Many have asked how the school has managed to grow through this recessionary period.  It really starts with questions.

What does quality education look like?  How much is a quality education worth?  Can anyone pay the real price? If not, then how is it funded? These are the central questions facing Christian school leaders today.  Most school boards struggle with raising tuition to reflect the true cost of education knowing that many of its clients will not be able to pay the price.  The only alternative is fundraising.  As a result, school boards are turning to professional development efforts to fund that bottom line.



*Figure 1*

The problem is that most small Christian schools do not have the funds for a paid development professional.  Therefore, the role of development falls into the Administrator's job description or the Board member's job description until the school reaches such a size that a development professional can be an employed part of the team.  In these situations, most board members have difficulty understanding their role in the process of school development and fundraising. Often times they enlist a well-intentioned volunteer to head up a candy sale when the real answer lies in sharing the mission and purpose of the school with targeted prospects.

This report will describe the process of development that Penn Christian Academy utilized to grow its school.  The process identifies the interconnected and interdependent relationship between enrollment increases and fund development.  It is artistically described through the metaphor of a tree, taking relationships from a seed to the final phase of bearing fruit.  This report also provides an overview of each development initiative involved in the process.

An understanding of the information within this report will inspire and encourage the leaders of small Christian schools to structure themselves in such a way to develop and grow… ultimately accomplishing their mission, purpose and strategic goals.

## Capturing the Process

The process of development is much like the growth of an apple tree.  It begins with careful seed selection, soil cultivation, planting, nurturing, and harvesting.  As illustrated in *Figure 2*, it is a six-step process that leads to the production of fruit – funding for your school through both tuition income and contributions.

The **first step** of the process involves the selection of seeds for planting.  The illustration (see step 1) refers to this as the naming of various critical groups.  Critical groups are the groups of people who make up the development base.  These are the people who are critical to the accomplishment of the mission.  When planting an apple orchard, one must sort the seeds which produce the varieties of apples (Macintosh, Delicious, Jonathans, etc.).  And so, the school's prospects must be sorted by group.
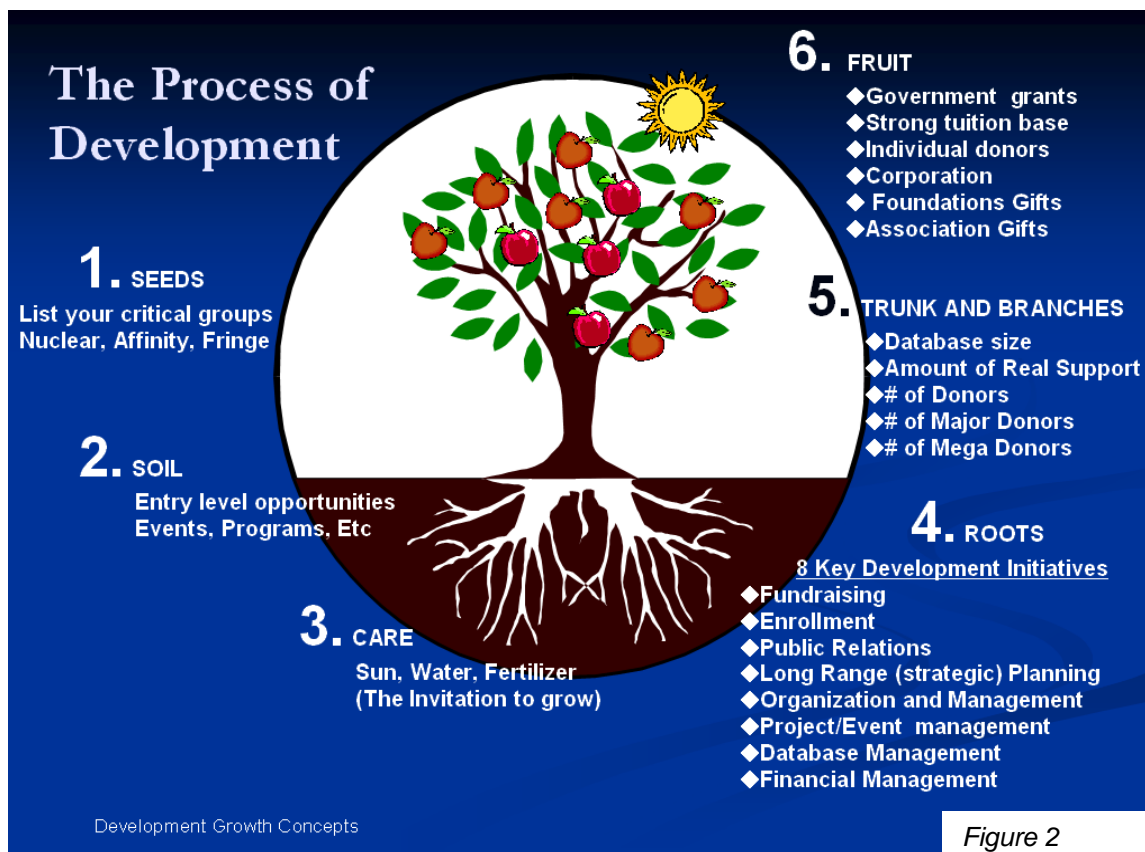


*Figure 2*

Once prospects are identified, then they are grouped according to the depth of their relationship with the school.  Prospects are entered into the database where relationships can be tracked and managed.  People groups are named as nuclear, affinity and fringe.  They are described as follows.

The nuclear group consists of people closest to the core of the organization, the people who are directly affected by the work that the school does.  They include the students, parents, alumni, staff, administration and board members of the school.  These names must be gathered and placed into the database.  These are the most likely to contribute.

The affinity group consists of people who are indirectly affected by the work of the school and may be affected through a relationship with a nuclear prospect.  For example, vendors, grandparents and other family members of nuclear prospects, church members of sponsoring churches, and local Pastors are all members of the affinity group.

The last group is the fringe group.  The fringe group consists of the school's neighboring families and businesses within the community.  They are not affected by the school in any way.

They may or may not even know of the school's existence.  Generally speaking however, most have at least seen a sign or newspaper advertisement about the school.  These are people who currently have no relationship with the school, but the school leadership decides that this individual or business would be worth pursuing.

Once the development prospects or seeds are identified, then the soil must be cultivated or prepared for planting – **Step 2**.  In development terms, these are the events or programs that people attend.  Every person attending becomes a prospect.  This is when the prospects are "planted" or immersed in the mission of the school.  The event or program is likened to the soil because it must be properly prepared for the prospect's attendance.  A well planned event that highlights the mission and purpose of the school should foster a strong tie to the school for all who attend.

Next, **Step 3**; the relationships must be cared for, just as a tiny seedling must be cared for.  Opportunities must be given for the individual to grow in their relationship with the school.  In agricultural terms, the seedling must be watered, fertilized, and of course must receive the warmth of the sun.  In just the same way, development relationships must be warm and nurturing – care must be given to them for survival and growth.

Under the soil of every strong tree lies a strong and healthy root system.  **Step 4** is the root system.  The root system is symbolic of the key development initiatives – the development base.  These initiatives are led by individual members of the board or leadership team who form the development team.  Without the root system in place, the tree will die.  And so, without a healthy development base, the school will wither and die over time.  The following initiatives need to be accomplished by a competent team of both paid and volunteer leadership. Once the team is in place, strategic initiatives for each area of development must be understood.  Then, specific, tactical goals must be written to accomplish each initiative.

- *Fundraising:* Fundraising initiatives must center on setting up a structure for donor support.  That structure must include quantifiable goals in every area of funding.

- *Enrollment:* The focus of the enrollment initiatives is the recruitment of new students and the retention of current students.  Retention is perhaps more important than new enrollment.

- *Public Relations:* The public relations initiatives center on positioning and creating an image in the community that is conducive to growth and understands the market need.

- *Long Range Planning:* The long range planning initiatives begin with reevaluating the school's vision, mission, objectives, and core values.  If there are none written, this should be the primary focus of the goals for the first year.  A strategic planning consultant can be valuable in this process.

- *Database Development:* The database management coordinator must engage in initiatives that help to build the number of prospects interested in the school (both for enrollment and as donors) through the central database.

- *Financial Management:* Managing school finances with integrity is of utmost importance.  This clearly affects the bottom line, but it also affects a donor, corporation, or foundation

in their consideration of support for the school.  Fiduciary responsibility is critical for successful growth and development.

- *Organization and School Management:* There are two levels of leadership where goals need to be developed.  One is the board.  The other is the Administrator.

  Board Initiatives
  - ✓ Establish a clear and concise policy manual if there is not one in place.
  - ✓ Establish a method of valuing those who serve on the board.
  - ✓ Pursue training for board members.
  - ✓ Implement self-evaluations to measure the effectiveness of board members.
  - ✓ Encourage all board members to become active donors.
  - ✓ Increase the size and diversity of the board if needed
  - ✓ Evaluate the administrator on an annual basis.

  Administrator Initiatives
  - ✓ Plan for the instructional guidance of faculty to ensure a quality program for students.
  - ✓ Provide staff development opportunities.
  - ✓ Plan morale boosting and unity building activities.
  - ✓ Foster ownership by staff and parents through engaging them in activities and empowering them in ways that create a sense of pride and accomplishment.
  - ✓ Set goals for volunteer involvement and recognition for those who volunteer.
  - ✓ Work closely with event coordinator to ensure quality, mission driven programs, activities and events.

- *Project and Event Management:* All event planning initiatives must be done for the sole purpose of building prospect or donor relationships.  A particular event may be the first time that a person is introduced to the organization, or it may be the hundredth time that they have attended an event.  Care for the relationship must be the priority.  Every attendee is a V.I.P.  Also, every event must create an opportunity for people to hear or see the vision and mission of the school.

A comprehensive, 4-page list of all initiatives common to every Christian School can be obtained by contacting Cindy Dodds.

Periodically, a tree must be checked for health.  This is **Step 5** in the process.  Often the trunk and branches of a tree are examined for hollow spots, for fungus, and other unusual signs.  In development, these are described as developmental benchmarks or leading developmental indicators.  The table in *Figure 3* explains the benchmarks for a healthy development program (Development Marketing Associates, 2001).
For the data base, it should contain a

*Leading Developmental Indicators:*

| Category | Benchmark formula |
|---|---|
| 1. Database size | 5 X student body |
| 2. Amount of rational support | 200 X student body |
| 3. # of Donors | ½ size of student body |
| 4. # of Major Donors | 10% of #3 |
| 5. # of Mega Donors | 1% of #3 |

*Figure 3*

number of prospects that are 5 times the student population.  The amount of donations should be 200 times the student body in dollar value.  The number of donors should be one half of the student population and 10% of them should be major donors (giving $1,000 – $9,999 per year). One percent of the donors should be mega donors (giving $10,000 or more per year).  These benchmarks allow the board to assess their development health.  An assessment should be

made yearly.  Once the benchmarks are achieved, then the goal should be to increase those numbers each year.

The final phase in the life of an apple tree is in the harvest, **Step 6**.  With time, the apples are ready to pick.  With an understanding of the development process and careful planning, a harvest can be reaped for the school (enrollment growth and financial viability).  Like the growth of a tree, the development program takes time to reach maturity.  The harvest comes through enrollment increases, growing relationships, tuition income, and donations from individuals, foundations, corporations and associations.

## The Results

As a result of following this development growth process, Penn Christian Academy continues to grow in enrollment and in the active involvement of its constituency.  The 2011-2012 school year concluded with a 13% increase in enrollment.  Nearly $300,000 was given to students for financial aid by corporate donors.  And the capital building fund crossed the one million dollar mark.  For the first time in its history, Penn Christian Academy has grown into a position where it has hired a part-time development director.

Capital funds are available to build the first phase of the new additions.  The ground breaking of the 1500 square foot science lab took place on June 4, 2012.  The lab will be built to completion, with no debt to the school, and will open in the fall of 2012.



*June 4, 2012*

The Middle School curriculum has been written and many necessary resources have been purchased.  The remaining building designs are currently being finalized by architects. The capital campaign funds continue to grow.  The next phase of the building project will include space for the Middle School Leadership Academy.

## Lessons Learned

The lessons learned from this project are valuable to anyone seeking to grow and develop a small Christian school.

First, understand and commit to a process for development. Persevere through the challenges along the way.

Second, develop a team of leaders, committed to the mission, to provide the vital leadership needed to fulfill your key development initiatives.  You can't do it alone.

Third, know your constituency, get them onboard and keep communicating with them.

Fourth, be prepared for obstacles along the way.  If you build a facility, get your permits in order.  Understand that most construction work costs more than you planned and will take longer than you thought.  Provide a contingency fund for these kinds of obstacles.

Finally, prayer and discernment along the way is essential.  Enlist Godly people and consult with them often.