

## Growing School Development and Enrollment

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Kansas City Christian School (KCC) was started in 1951 and is enjoying over 60 years of tradition. The first academic year of KCC began in September, 1951 with 50 students from grades K to 12. The school was housed in a 15,000 square foot building purchased at 4645 Booth in Kansas City, Kansas. In May of 1952, KCC held its 8th grade graduation. In the fall of 1968, a high school program was begun by adding an academic program for the 9th grade. The following year, space was rented from Open Door Baptist Church in Kansas City, Kansas. Beginning in the fall of 1971, grades 7-12 were moved Central Bible Church in Kansas City, Missouri. A permanent facility was acquired for the junior and senior high school at 4701 Merriam Drive, Merriam, Kansas to allow for continued growth. The former Ridgeview elementary school was purchased in 1986, located on 7.44 acres at 4801 West 79th street in Prairie Village, Kansas. This became the home of the current K-12 program for KCC. The former Oxford Park Academy at 133rd and Nall was acquired in 2004 and established as a south campus location for preschool through 2nd grade.

KCC is facing two primary challenges; financial sustainability and net zero enrollment growth. My project is 1) to be trained in development work in order to grow our financial sustainability and 2) to grow enrollment through strategic changes in admissions.

KCC has been operating without a Development Director since 2009. Since then the development work has been undertaken by a committee led by a board member. This approach has been more successful in raising resources for our mission than efforts by our previous Development Director. However, having a Development Committee is proving challenging for the volunteers because of the time demand, the requirement that there be consistent contact work

undertaken and the difficulty of focusing a committee. KCC does not currently have the budget capacity to hire a part-time or full-time Development Director. Families at KCC have room to grow in their understanding of God's mission for KCC and how they are called to support it through their resources. I would like to see more families giving, families with greater means giving greater amounts, the creation of endowment funds, preparations for facility upgrades and the funding of next year's scholarship fund rather than only the current year.

Most job descriptions for a Head of School will detail involvement in the development work of the school. Typically the primary work of engaging donors and coordinating development activities is handled by the Development Director and the Head of School supports the process by attending key donor meetings. My project mission is that I be trained in the philosophy, knowledge and skills to perform development work since KCC does not have a Development Director and as a new Head of School, I have no experience or training in resourcing a school through donor gifts.

This project approach accomplishes multiple objectives. First, it allows me to be trained in order to immediately engage in development work. This supports a real need for KCC to have focus placed upon the financial resources needed to successfully operate the school in the current school year. Second, it prepares me for hiring a Development Director in the next or following school year. As I am trained and gain actual development experience it will prepare me for providing leadership for a Development Director and it will also prepare me to make a more informed decision for which candidate would be the best hire. Third, this project will allow me to become better acquainted with our constituency as I meet with them. Development work is highly relational and will require that I connect on a personal basis with those people who are the partners in our ministry. Fourth, it puts me in a position of having to share the vision, mission and challenges facing our school in a way that will build my articulation of who and what is KCC.

The school currently has an enrollment of 435 students which is approximately 80-100 students lower than enrollment from 1996-2008. There are several key factors for this including the financial downturn in 2009, a change in board strategy to move closer to full cost of tuition, aging facilities and programming inconsistencies. We have stabilized over the last several years with enrollment ranging from 420 to 445. We would like to return to our previous levels, however, current trends would indicate that we will not increase over the next five years. The population of potential students for Christian education far exceeds the number of students actually enrolled in a Christian school in the Metro area. The most common response we receive when parents learn of KCC is that they have never heard of us. We are offering a great product to Christian parents through a holistic approach that focuses on faith development in the context of a Biblical worldview, character development and educational excellence. We are not effectively communicating why we exist, who we are and what we can offer Christian parents.

We have had a part-time admissions coordinator who is responsible for supporting prospective new families in considering KCC. This position has been generally responsive to prospective parents rather than taking initiative to engage parents and influence their decision to choose KCC for their Christian school option.

In order to successfully accomplish the project objectives I engaged Zach Clark of Leadership and Development Coaching as a consultant. I was assigned Sarah Guldalion, who served as my personal coach. The consulting agreement was for a year and would involve weekly coaching by phone, training through weekly video presentations prepared by Zach and work assignments to be completed between the weekly coaching calls. The full scope of the consulting agreement will not be completed until September 2015.

The training sessions began by orienting the philosophy around using a relational approach to developing partners in ministry. Based on this philosophy, each weekly training and coaching session has worked towards developing a clear message that is compelling to potential

donors, connecting in a way that builds relationship, expressing the needs of KCC clearly, and preparing to let God do his work. Important in this process is learning to thank donors well, report what is happening in the ministry and also letting donors know the impact of their giving. Key to this success is organizing donor contact information, donor conversations, and donor giving year over year to make sure that overall donor giving is growing. My assignments have included weekly donor one-on-one meetings, scheduling new appointments and following up previous donor meetings. One practical initial assignment was the development of a white paper that would outline KCC development. Excerpts of this paper are provided below.

The coaching sessions have also focused on how to engage prospective parents in a more effective way. At the start of the current school year a new Admissions Coordinator was hired and the position was moved to full time. The new Admissions Coordinator is invited to attend the weekly coaching sessions whenever the topic is related to admissions. The admissions strategy was changed from responding to prospective parent inquiry to proactive engagement of a prospective family. The Admissions Coordinator responds with a phone call to each inquiry rather than sending an information packet as was previously done. Each parent making an inquiry is invited to come to KCC and meet with the Admission Coordinator. The Coordinator answers questions, addresses parent concerns for their children's education and provides a tour of the facility. The parents are invited to connect with a KCC Parent Ambassador and their children are invited to shadow during a school day. Each student on a shadow is paired with a KCC Student Ambassador. The number of site visits and student shadows has increased 50%, however, at this point in time it is too early to determine if these strategies will result in net gain in enrollment.

The KCC Board along with my Administrative Team has begun framing out the need to renovate our current facility. In order for the school to provide growth in enrollment and resources to facilitate our program the building needs to increase by 30,000 square feet. This

renovation will be the primary focus of the development work beginning in 2015-2106 in addition to raising \$500,000 for the operating program including scholarships.

### **KCC White Paper (excerpts)**

#### **Our Student Profile**

As a result of attending Kansas City Christian School, our students will develop an intention to live out a Christian faith that permeates their whole life. They will encounter the world with a restorative and redemptive mindset rather than an opportunistic attitude. Their lives will be characterized by making a Kingdom difference in the lives of the people they regularly encounter and in the institutions and communities in which they work and live because they recognize and exercise the unique strengths and gifts with which God has blessed them. Our students will have productive vocations, be engaged in community, will live out healthy family life, and will give back to our school for the benefit of others. KCC students will be lovers of Jesus, lifelong learners, and leaders of influence.

#### **Our Impact**

We strive to offer a high level, appropriately challenging academic program, a robust slate of student life opportunities, and a community of engaged and committed parents who are investors in our vision. We are building our approach upon a holistic, Christian worldview education that is the driving passion of our faculty, the focus of our curriculum decisions, and the foundation upon which we train our students to be effective leaders in our culture. We want to shape our students' faith through an engaging, extensive study of God and His world. We think that a meaningful commitment to our Christian beliefs shapes a value for godly character and a passion for becoming intellectually curious Christians. We want our students to engage the world, to dialogue with competing ideas, and to learn how to live lives that embrace the exciting challenges that come with pursuing God's kingdom in all areas of life.

The keys to our impact and success in the next decade include (1) developing adequate facilities to support our curricular and extracurricular programs, (2) recruiting and retaining teachers committed to this vision and providing faculty training to not only develop exceptional educators, but also leaders, (3) create financial sustainability that will allow future financial security, resources for competitively compensating faculty, funding for scholarship programs and

form a collaborative relationship with other independent evangelical Christian schools in the KC metro area.

We will continue developing our Biblical worldview education so that it is fully integrated in all that we do. We will continue cultivating a culture that reflects our values, engages our parents and aligns with our vision. We will also continue the work of making our presence known in the city as one of the best options for Christian education. We will continue the journey of making engaging our alumni as members of our extended community.

God has given us the opportunity to impact Christian families for generations and to develop Christian leaders who will make a difference for the Kingdom of God wherever they live, work and raise families.

### **Our Next Steps**

1. \$5,000,000 has been received in the past 10 years for projects including a high school science lab remodel, playground improvements, student scholarships, urban education partnership, iPads for teachers, and physical upgrades to our sports programs.
2. \$6,000,000 will be utilized for renovating and expanding the building to create an enhanced learning environment, to construct educational spaces for differentiated learning, to build a multi-purpose space to be used for a cafeteria and community gatherings, and to provide a performing arts space.
3. \$2,000,000 for the payoff of mortgage debt. The funds used to pay debt service will be redirected to increasing teacher compensation and to attract, retain, and developing the highest quality teachers.
4. \$3,000,000 will allow the development of upgraded sports facilities which would include locker rooms, a weight room, track and field surfaces, and the addition of an artificial surface on the soccer field which will allow for year round use.
5. \$7,000,000 to be used to fund an endowment dedicated to future scholarships for students who would not otherwise have an opportunity to attend our school.