



## **Business Plan for Tower Grove Christian Academy**

**Michael Gregory, Head of School**

### **History**

Tower Grove Baptist Church birthed Tower Grove Christian Academy in 1978, at this time the church had over two thousand members that attended their weekly services. The church was a power house in this community by impacting lives throughout the city of St Louis. Over 90% of the students enrolled in the school parents were members of Tower Grove Baptist Church. Therefore; the focus was primarily discipleship due to the majority of our students being regular attendees of the church.

Our school has changed greatly over the years. We have observed a complete shift, whereas now over 90% of our students do not attend Tower Grove Baptist Church and over 50% of our students are non-Christians. Therefore; our perspective has evolved from discipleship to a more evangelistic approach. Changing our focus resulted in replacing some and retooling most of our teachers. We are finally beginning to see students in high school accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. The spirit of our school is thriving and we are thrilled to see the impact we are making in the lives of students and their parents.

### **Project**

I began my project by reviewing our current Mission Statement to determine if it is in line with who we are and where we are planning on going.

*“Our mission is to provide a complete education which promotes academic excellence and a biblical worldview. It is the goal of TGCA to equip students with the intellect and character they need to impact their world.”*

It is our vision to serve inner city middle to low income families that are seeking alternatives education choices for their children. It is our goal to seek out scholarships and keep tuition cost at an affordable rate for students residing within the city of St Louis. Our staff is committed to making a difference in the lives of all students, we accept students of like-faith as well as from many other religious beliefs and backgrounds.

It is our desire to change the landscape of the city by changing one student at a time; we are in a continuous process of building relationships with entrepreneurs and foundations that can assist us with this endeavor.

Tower Grove Christian Academy has not had a strategic road map in over twenty years. As a result, our enrollment has steadily declined and the ability to raise scholarship funds has diminished. We are located in the city where parents are inundated with many options, and Private & Parochial Schools have taken a major hit due to Charter Schools offering their service at no charge. Tower Grove Christian Academy needed to rebrand and attack the market with a solid plan of action.

A plan of action was created to see if TGCA could remain competitive as a viable learning institution within the city of St Louis. The following strategies and goals are being implemented:

- Aggressive Growth Plan (enroll 1% of students residing in St Louis)
- Raise \$200,000.00 in Scholarships Funding annually
- Aggressive Marketing/Advertising Campaign
- Increase Tuition cost by 10% annually
- Restructure our Middle School (hire a male teacher)
- Operating in the Black within three years

We started with an overhaul in our enrollment process by giving incentives to parents who enrolled their children by March 31<sup>st</sup>. Reenrollment for the upcoming school year has doubled as a result of this implementation.

Tower Grove Christian Academy was founded by Tower Grove Baptist Church therefore 90% of the students derived from the church in its beginning stages. Almost forty years later 90% of our students do not attend Tower Grove Baptist Church. By asking each new student how they heard of Tower Grove Christian Academy, we learned that many never knew we existed before a word of mouth conversation taken place.

We realized we had to start branding Tower Grove immediately. We launched a marketing campaign by advertising via Billboards, Poster Boards, Yard Signs, Web site, Facebook, Twitter, Referral Program, from this we saw a 11% increase in student enrollment in 2013-2014. We have an aggressive growth plan for the next five years.

- 2014-2015 (235 students in KG through 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 2015-2016 (250 students in KG through 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 2016-2017 (275 students in KG through 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 2017-2018 (300 students in KG through 12<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 2018-2019 (325 students in KG through 12<sup>th</sup> grade)

Our upcoming school year goal is to exceed 15% growth in new enrollment. With an incredible step of faith, we have aggressively marketed Tower Grove. We saw an increase of 300% attendance from the previous year's open house events as a result of our new marketing initiatives. The increased number we had at our Open House and our aggressive marketing campaign give us faith that we are in an excellent position to achieve this goal and more.

We believe if we continue to use strategic marketing this growth will multiply itself, and we will be the school impacting St. Louis now and in the future.

### **Scholarships**

In 2007 Tower Grove Christian Academy awarded families over \$220,000.00 in scholarships and discounts. Without an external source of revenue, it was clear that we would be unable to continue awarding these funds.

Over the last six years we have completely changed our internal scholarship structure. We continue to grant over \$80,000.00 in scholarships and discounts, but are receiving an approximately \$150,000.00 from external resources.

We have a local organization that awards scholarships to students in grades Kindergarten through eighth grade. Within the last couple of years our population has grown from six students being awarded these scholarships to seventy-one in 2014-2015 school year. Each scholarship is an estimate of \$2000 per student.

In addition to the above scholarships, a local entrepreneur has established a scholarship in my name for a high school student. I am hoping this gentleman will renew this scholarship on an annual basis. Over forty-five percent of our student body will be receiving some form of discount or scholarship.

### **Tuition**

We are still in the early stages of creating a tuition increase schedule that will stay in line with our goals as well as keep tuition affordable for our parents. We know our tuition is much lower than our competitive schools but creating an increase schedule that serves all parties involved will take much thought and time. With a 10% increase in our high school tuition for the 2014-2015 school year, compared to other private schools in our area we are still considerably below the average cost for private education. This increase was instituted and explained to our parents at the end of the 2013-2014 school year, and we have not received any negative feedback.

We are continuously changing and improving who we are and who we want to become. Our goal is to be an affordable school in the city where academics meets excellence through teaching truth and shaping character.

## **Leadership**

We are in need of a complete overhaul of our governing board as well as the need to add key positions within the leadership team. We need to hire a High School Principal and a Director of Development. I am currently wearing multiple hats which is not a plan for the future if we believe we are going to be in existence for another forty years. Currently we have a committee driven structure in which each committee member serving on the Christian School Committee must be a member of Tower Grove Baptist Church per our church's constitution. If 90% of our students are from the external walls of our church we must make a change to address this legitimate concern from our parents who are our stakeholders. I am in the process of creating a new structure and job descriptions for an advisory board. We are also considering creating a separate 501c3 for the school which will allow us to raise additional scholarships funding from agencies that will not support schools that are governed by a church.

## **Sustainability**

Upon reviewing the census data for the city of St Louis there are over 66,000 school age children living within the city, therefore; growth should not be a problem. It is our goal to serve at least five hundred students in the city; which is less than 1% of the students that resides in the city. The location of our school is a major key to our growth and success. We are located in one of the most diverse and growing communities in the city. The Shaw neighborhood is a historic neighborhood and our school is nestled between the Missouri Botanical Gardens and Tower Grove Park. This neighborhood is one of the most sought out neighborhoods in the city due to its rich history, diverse cultural and economic groups, and the many multi-cultural dining cuisines. One of our greatest marketing tools is the diversity of our student body, our student body is made up of African American, White, Vietnamese, Burmese, African (Liberian, Sierra Leone, Ethiopian), Mexican, Norwegian, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Croatian, Puerto Rican, Columbian, and other ethnic decent.

In addition to the our marketing campaign and the location of our school, we have a preschool that serves students beginning at one year old through five years of age. We average between 115 and 120 students per calendar year, we are looking to increase our enrollment by 10% annually. It is our goal that at least fifty percent of these students enroll in our kindergarten program. We are very close to reaching our goal this upcoming school year.

Our preschool serves a very diverse group of families just as well, another tool we use to market our school is that you can drop them off at one years of age and pick them up at the end of twelfth grade as long as you get them every weekend. There are not many schools or any other schools in the city that serve the whole family. We consider ourselves a school for the whole family.

As you can see, we are an Urban School educating a large spectrum of cultures, and no matter what ethnic makeup, students can attend and feel like part of our community.

## **Conclusion**

Buzz, buzz, is what we are hearing at Tower Grove. The phones are ringing and the doors are being swung open by potential parent inquiring about our school. We are excited to kick off our upcoming school year. As of today we have an increase in total enrollment of over 20%, compared to the 2013-2014 school year. This summer we have been busy, busy, busy, we have not had a week go by without interviewing and testing new potential students.

We have four new teachers starting this school year, two for high school, one for elementary, and one for middle school. We had a goal to hire a male teacher in middle school and, yes, we have Kyle starting this upcoming year. We have completely overhauled our middle school by moving teachers where we believe they fit and bringing on an additional teacher.

Our Extended Day Program will have a new structure and new staff, we are moving forward at a rapid pace and the labor of our efforts are coming to fruition.

Focused strategy and purposeful prioritizing has shown an immediate impact on Tower Grove Christian Academy. We will continue to review our strategy and goals, growing our students, teachers, and our community.

We are changing the city of St. Louis one student at a time!