

Grayson Christian School: Selective Growth Strategy

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Case Objectives and Use

The focus of this case are the issues faced by a private Christian school attempts to expand enrollment and potential strategies available. The school has no strategic plan, no formal organizations structure, and no “marketing person” on the staff. There is limited budget information in the case, but it could be assumed that very few funds are available for a major marketing effort to recruit students.

Students are asked to prepare a SWOT analysis, evaluate the growth strategies given in the case, propose an organizational structure and a marketing plan to attract students (parents). This case is suitable for an undergraduate or graduate course in strategic management. It could also be used in a marketing management course where the instructor wanted to emphasize developing a marketing plan for a not-for-profit organization with limited resources and personnel.

Case Synopsis

This case focuses on the struggles of a Christian school and its’ attempts to increase growth in the junior and senior high. Currently the school’s student population is pyramid shaped with most of the students in the Pre-K to kindergarten level. Many of the Pre-K and kindergarten students transfer to public schools in the area leaving a dwindling number in the upper elementary, junior and senior high. Only 3 seniors were in this years’ graduating class while about 40 were enrolled in the Pre-K3 and Pre-K4 classes.

While the Principal, Greg Rostyne, wanted to grow the junior and senior classes, he wanted students who would fit into the school’s culture of beliefs and behavior. Departing from this has meant expulsion

of some senior high students over alcohol incidents with threats of law suits over expulsion. He has developed 3 potential strategies for growth that need to be evaluated and then a marketing plan developed to implement the chosen strategy.

Grayson Christian School: Selective Growth Strategy

Greg Rostyne, or Brother Greg as everyone called him, was trying to come up with a plan to present to the board for what he called “selective growth”. He wanted to see an increase in enrollment from the 152- student body to at least 200 over the next couple of years. However, he wanted to bring in more senior high students and those who beliefs and behavior would fit the school’s culture. An incident last year confirmed the need for alignment of new students’ beliefs and behavior with the school’s in that two high school students were expelled over an alcohol situation.

At the current time the school’s enrollment was like a pyramid with most of the student population in the Pre-K classes and then narrowing down at higher grade levels. This past year, there were about 40 in the Pre-K classes, 20 in the two kindergarten classes, 8 in the first-grade class, 6 in the second-grade class and so on. There were only 3 seniors in this year’s graduating class, so increasing enrollment in the junior high and senior high levels is a priority.

Background

For almost 45 years Grayson Christian School (GCS) has been using tried and true approaches to prepare their young students for a successful life. Located in the Texoma (Texas-Oklahoma) area of Sherman, TX, GCS was founded as a ministry of Grayson Bible Baptist Church. The school opened its doors to students in September 1973 as a private, non-profit, co-ed (37% male and 63% female) Christian school whose mission is “to provide a safe environment for students to learn and stand alongside Christian parents, assisting them in the task of reproducing the mind of Christ in the lives of their children.”

The school believes that a true Christian education is one that prepares a student to find his place in the will of God and to equip him to boldly engage the world for the cause of Jesus Christ. Grayson’s emphasis is on maintaining excellence in character, academics, athletics, and fine arts through biblical training. They emphasize the traditional values of Christian faith, family, character, patriotism, integrity, initiative, and perseverance, while teaching students the academic knowledge and skills needed for today and for lifelong learning. GCS teaches a Biblical world-view. Although students in all grades are taught in Bible class and chapel, the goal of GCS is to cultivate a biblical world-view by applying the Word of God in all subjects.

GCS began by offering classes from Kindergarten through Senior High to the first-year students at the church’s property on the corner of First & Cherry Street in Sherman, TX. In 1974 the school built a gymnasium and cafeteria with classrooms. Members of Grayson Bible Baptist Church began a new building project to relocate from the church to 4400 Hwy 82 E, which was completed in February 2004 located on a 12-acre campus. A new school building was finished for fall 2006 which contained spacious and comfortable classrooms, specifically designed for their purpose. A gymnasium with a hardwood court surface accommodating over 300 people for volleyball and basketball was finished in November 2010. It also provides space for a cafeteria. A 2,200 square foot playground provides recreation opportunities for younger students. The church’s 500-seat auditorium is available for special meetings, chapel services, plays, and concerts, as well as school graduation exercises. The school is administered by a Principal and his staff.

The educational philosophy at GCS is to provide children with a high level of academic excellence nurtured in an environment that is distinctively Christian, so that this will provide them with the strength and ability to lead a godly, fruitful, and happy life. The comprehensive curriculum offering opportunities in computer, foreign languages, fine arts, and athletics is combined with a strong foundation in Christian and moral teachings. Students also are provided with relevant experience in current technology through computer and science labs. Although all aspects of training are important, GCS views a child’s ability to read as being fundamental to other learning. The school’s emphasis on reading skills begins in

kindergarten with a strong phonics program that equips children for excellence in all areas of academics and continues throughout the elementary grades with constant strengthening of basic reading and comprehension skills.

GCS Kindergarten programs have a strong focus on phonics skills to provide a strong foundation of basic reading skills. Students in elementary grades are challenged to develop writing, arithmetic, computer, and reasoning skills. In the upper school, students are challenged through a rigorous college preparatory curriculum.

GCS's 152 students have a student-teacher ratio is approximately 13:1, but has ranged down to 6:1, with 12 current full-time equivalent teachers. The low ratio allows teachers to conduct experiments, teach individually, and to work more one-on-one with students. GCS teachers are dedicated and often provide extra help classes and even private tutoring beyond the usual class time.

This past year's student population and teacher/student ratio is shown below along with enrollment by grade level.

Total number of students	152
Total number of teachers	12
Teacher/Student Ratio	13:1

Student Statistics

Pre-K	32
Kindergarten	14
Grade 1	14
Grade 2	8
Grade 3	10
Grade 4	11
Grade 5	12
Grade 6	12
Grade 7	9
Grade 8	5
Grade 9	7
Grade 10	8
Grade 11	5
Grade 12	5

Administration

While there is no formal organizational structure, Bro. Greg reports to a board made up of church members and alumni. Everyone in the school is under Rostyne's supervision from the teachers to auxiliary services like the cafeteria, computer maintenance, and janitorial services. He also has a secretary and an administrative assistant.

Bro. Greg is constantly visible at the school and goes by classrooms, the gym and the cafeteria on a regular basis. He also is called upon to handle disciplinary issues to parent/teacher concerns or complaints. He also interviews all prospective student and parents and is the "face" of the school to the public.

Potential Growth Strategies

Bro. Greg had identified 3 ways that the school could grow:

1. Grow the on-campus student population
2. Network with homeschool parents to provide courses online
3. Network with foreign missionaries to provide courses online

While the first option was the most desirable, it was also the most difficult. The school had limited funds for marketing or for giving scholarships to needy students who wanted to attend. There was also the issue of competition, mainly from Texoma Christian School which was larger and better financed. Texoma Christian School had over 300 students and offers a full array of sports and extracurricular activities for students. However, tuition and fees for upper division students was close to \$1000 a month—more than double the cost of Grayson. Texoma Christian was located between Sherman and Denison Texas, the two largest population centers in north Texas.

The second option, targeting homeschool students, was a viable option because of the large number of parents who homeschool their children. There are several homeschool associations who offer students the opportunity to participate in sports activities like volleyball and basketball. The idea would be to offer online courses to these students for areas where a parent might feel less qualified to teach—like algebra or high school English. There were over 1.5 million homeschool students in 2007 with an average growth of about 2.7% a year. There were also several organizations already targeting these students like K-12 International Academy. However, several of the east Texas homeschool associations already interact with Grayson through sports events such as basketball tournaments.

The third option was to try to offer online courses to foreign missionaries with children. The main issue would be access to Internet for these missionaries. Gregg thought it would be possible to obtain email addresses of the missionaries and contact them directly about Grayson's ability to offer their children online access to courses. Like many Christian schools, Grayson used A Beka curriculum which many missionaries would be familiar with already.

Marketing Activities

Unfortunately, Grayson has no “marketing” person and no marketing plan and relies on word of mouth, publicity, and Facebook to find leads for new students. Publicity comes in the form of articles or TV spots on sporting events such as basketball games. If parents of a new student show interest in the school, they are invited to campus to meet with Greg Rostyne and are given a campus tour along with meeting teachers and other staff members. The Facebook page basically show a young girl sitting at a desk and you have to click on other activities to see that they have junior and senior high students and sports.

Questions/Assignments

1. Prepare a SWOT analysis of Grayson Christian School
2. What are the pros and cons of the 3 strategies Bro. Greg has identified?
3. What type of organizational structure would you recommend for the school?
4. What are some marketing strategies that could be used by the school, given a limited budget and no marketing personnel?