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August 2008

## ***Catholic School Enrollment Talk***

ISPD is your Catholic School Enrollment Solution for maintaining and/or increasing the quantity, quality, or diversity of your elementary or secondary Catholic school enrollment.

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### **Faculty as Enrollment Managers**

**By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist**

In evaluating the common characteristics possessed by the Saints of the Church, most of us would acknowledge that self-awareness is a foundational characteristic of what made them holy. The following narrative or parable invites Catholic school faculty to a greater self-awareness of the role they play in managing enrollment. I would be interested in knowing what you think.

#### **A Tale of St. Patrick's School System (Pre-k thru 12) Any Town, USA**

##### **Cast of Characters - Staff Faculty**

Denise Goodwin as "Our Hero - The Principal"  
 Cindy Burbank as "That Wild and Crazy Kindergarten Teacher"  
 Tony Smith as "The No Nonsense 2nd Grade Teacher"  
 Michelle Potter as "The Energetic New Spanish Teacher"  
 Brian Delaney as "Mr. Perfect Biology Teacher"  
 Carl West as "The Teacher Every Student Looks Forward to Having"  
 Tom Henry as "Dean of Academics"  
 Sue Carson as "The Collection Agent a.k.a. Business Manager"  
 Jennifer Claypool as "The Secretary that Everybody Loves"  
 Marsha Williams as "The PR Point Person"  
 Sam Robinson as "The Guidance Counselor"  
 Rachel Osgood as "The Director of Development"

##### **Cast of Characters - The Parents**

Rudy Mers as "The Dad Whose Son is Always Right"

Tammy Watson as "The Mom Who Volunteers for Everything"  
Sue Rock as "The Parent Who Expects the Moon"  
Chuck Brady as "The Father Who Just Doesn't Get it"  
Lilly Thomas as "The Parent Who Never Knows What's Going On"  
Jack Robinson as "I am a Customer of this School"  
Bill Jackson as "The Conservative Catholic"  
Hilda Casey as "Don't Mess with Grandma"

#### **Cast of Characters - The Students**

Jessica Rock as "That Little Angel"  
Tommy Mers as "The Trouble Maker"  
Susie Watson as "The Quiet Child"  
John Brady as "The Super Star Athlete"  
Wendy Thomas as "The Most Popular Girl in School"  
Terry Robinson as "Don't Give Him any more Sugar"  
Billy Jackson as "Like Father, Like Son"  
Gina Casey as "I've Got the Best Grandma"

### **Pre-Season Training Camp**

As principal, Denise Goodwin was introducing ISPD's enrollment specialist John Cooper as the presenter at the faculty in-service, she said, "I'm sure you will have the undivided attention of my faculty."

Tony Smith, long time faculty member at St. Patrick School turned to fellow teacher Brian Delaney and said, "Here we go again with another long, boring, irrelevant faculty in-service. Why don't they just let me go back to my classroom and prepare for what they pay me to do? Teach students!"

To this Brian Delaney responded, "I guess they brought this guy in today because enrollment growth has been flat the last couple of years. Our principal is probably going to try and scare us into having more Open Houses. She's better than the Catholic Church at making people feel guilty."

Michelle Potter, 1st year Spanish teacher overheard Tony and Brian's conversation. She said to them, "I'm just happy to have a teaching job at a great school like St. Patrick's." She added jokingly, "How about helping me stay employed by listening to what this guy has to say about enrollment? I may be new, but the one thing I know is that you can't teach students you don't recruit and retain."

At lunch Rachel Osgood, the school's development director spoke with long time teacher Carl West about the morning's presentation. Rachel asked Carl, "You've been around here for a long time and you're one of the most respected teachers at our school. What do you think faculty has gotten from John Cooper's presentation so far?"

Carl said, "It's hard to tell how much my colleagues heard, to say nothing of how much of this they will actually put into action. When Mr. Cooper spoke about the strong correlation between student/parent satisfaction and enrollment, he was saying what I have been thinking. Times have changed. St. Patrick's tuition is now a substantial financial investment for parents. Parents expect us to be more than just effective. They expect us to be great!"

Rachal asked Carl, "What does it mean for us to be great?" He replied, "We can measure effectiveness by any number of things such as student performance and behavior. Public schools are expected to be effective in these areas. St. Patrick's is expected to be great in academics, spiritual development, co-curricular education, and extra-curricular activities. We have to find ways to monitor, measure, and respond continuously to levels of greatness or satisfaction. Raising faculty consciousness is one of the steps in our being great."

After lunch, St. Patrick's faculty continued to discuss ways that they can impact enrollment on a day to day basis. John Cooper highlighted several specific, tactical ways that faculty can contribute and he gave them all a *Faculty Invitation to Help Form* to complete.

Cooper concluded, "The level of marketing, recruitment, and retention activity we need to conduct at St. Patrick's is in direct proportion to how much self-promotion is occurring within the school. A dynamic, fully engaged teacher in the classroom is better than 50 billboard ads!"

Armed with a renewed sense of purpose, the St. Patrick School faculty headed off into the 2008-09 school year. So as to not forget the points that John Cooper made at the in-service, teacher Carl West agreed to re-visit (an aspect) of the role of educators in managing enrollment at each faculty meeting.

Tony Smith turned to his fellow teacher Brian Delaney and said, "Give me a break! We have to listen to this stuff all year long. All I can say is, it better work and get us more students!"

As St. Patrick's faculty headed into the first week of school, their principal Denise Goodwin encouraged them to make every effort to control the battlefield from day one.

Denise said, "We must start the year off on a positive note. Attitudes about our school will be reflected in each family's supper table discussion. Parents will ask children, how was your first day of school? The response parents receive will be one of excitement, passivity, or negativity."

## Opening Day - Battle Front #1 - The Supper Table

The Jackson Family - "So Billy, how was your first day of high school? Billy replied, "I liked the block scheduling. My biology teacher Mr. Delaney seems like he will be really cool."

Billy's dad commented, "That sounds good, but I can't believe your school would begin the first day without celebrating Mass. Back when I was in school, we went to Mass everyday!"

The Casey Family - Grandma Hilda Casey asked, "How was school today? Gina replied, "Not good. My teacher gave us a ton of homework and some girls in class were teasing me. Grandma asked, "Did your teacher do anything about those girls?" With a tear in her eye, Gina said, "My teacher didn't seem to care when I told her they were teasing me."

Kindergarten teacher Cindy Burbank was prepared. During one of her summer home visits she met Sue Rock. Sue was really taken with the Montessori approach. She wanted to know how much of that approach could be incorporated into her daughter's traditional classroom at St. Patrick's. Cindy thought to herself, "This mother's expectations are really high. If I can satisfy Sue Rock, then the rest of my parents this year are going to be a piece of cake."

During the first couple weeks of school, Cindy Burbank proactively scheduled a meeting with Sue Rock to further discuss her expectations. Even though Sue would have preferred Montessori, she understood what St. Patrick's could provide. She was actually impressed with the level of hands on work that Cindy Burbank had in her classroom. **For now, Sue was happy, retained, and was out sharing how impressed she was with her daughter Jessica's kindergarten experience.**

Teacher Tony Smith believed that he was there to teach and not to hold the hands of students or parents. Principal Denise Goodwin considered Tony a fine teacher. She just wished he had more patience.

Tony had Terry Robinson in his class this year. Terry was an extremely hyperactive child. Terry's father, Jack Robison expected that Mr. Smith would work with his child. After all, Jack thought, "St. Patrick's was a private school and the tuition he paid should mean accommodations for his son."

From day one, Tony Smith sent notes home to Jack Robinson about Terry's disruptive behavior. Jack responded to the notes through email. Mr. Smith was slow in returning email. When he did respond, the tone was one of **"this is your family's problem."**

The slow response coupled with the sarcastic, demeaning tone of the email, infuriated Jack Robinson. He forwarded Mr. Smith's email to a bunch of his friends with the message **"can you believe I am paying tuition to be talked to like this?"** By the first week of October, Jack Robinson had told just about everyone he knew, how much he was upset with St. Patrick's.

## St Patrick's Calls a Time-Out to Discuss How Things Are Going They Make Adjustments to Their Game Plan

A satisfaction survey was sent to Jack Robinson asking, "How likely is it that you would recommend St. Patrick School to family, friends, or colleagues?" He was given a scale with 0 being not at all likely and 10 being extremely likely. Jack gave a score of 4. When asked what improvements could be made to cause him to give a score closer to 10, he wrote, "the teachers need to communicate more effectively, especially when there is a problem."

St. Patrick's Enrollment Management Core Team met to review the results of the satisfaction survey. At the August in-service there was an opportunity for faculty to volunteer for this core team. Carl West and Michelle Porter had agreed to serve.

Carl read a couple comments about teachers not communicating effectively. The team asked Carl to reach out to some teachers who were struggling in this area. Carl said that he would tactfully approach of couple of these teachers.

Michelle Potter commented that the high school's scores looked pretty good on the survey. However, there were some responses from seniors indicating dissatisfaction with math. Guidance counselor Sam Robinson said that dissatisfaction was probably coming from the low math scores on the SAT. Tom Henry, the Dean of Academics agreed to convene the math department faculty to discuss these scores. After a strategy was identified, he would communicate these changes in the math curriculum with parents.

Marsha Williams, the public relation's point person received a number of faculty generated press releases. She attributed this increase to a greater faculty awareness of how important it is to share the good news. Brian Delaney's high school biology class had Dr. Clifford Jones, an expert on global warming spend several hours in his classroom. Mr. Delaney had the students write reflection papers on this experience. He then took the best of the reflections and wove them into a timely and wonderful press release.

At the August in-service several faculty agreed to serve on the school's news bureau. Development director Rachel Osgood had shared with the news bureau that there was a perception in the community that St. Patrick's was weak in the area of science. This prompted news bureau member Cindy Burbank to reach out to Brian Delaney and ask him to write about his guest lecturer on global warming. Rachel said, **"Remember that press releases can change or enhance perception in ways that traditional advertising can't."**

## Where the Rubber Meets the Road - Grade Cards Go Out

After 1st quarter grades were sent out, several parents called to complain. School secretary Jennifer Claypool listened to these disgruntled parents. Lilly Thomas, a parent who had a reputation for not reading communication was one of the first to call. Lilly complained that she was totally thrown off by her daughter Wendy's grade in Spanish. Lilly said, "My daughter couldn't possibly have received a C in Spanish."

Spanish teacher Michelle Potter had a difficult time getting in contact with Lilly. She had left several messages during school hours. It took an evening hour's phone call to finally connect with Lilly. The two had a productive conversation. Michelle agreed to stay after school for the next two Wednesdays in order to give Wendy some extra help.

**The next day Lilly Thomas told a whole lunch table full of co-workers about how fantastic Ms. Potter had been!**

Everything can turn sour when report cards hit. Student Billy Jackson loved his biology teacher until he received a C grade. Bill Jackson had come to the parent-teacher conference ready to "chew out" biology teacher Brian Delaney. Bill had been telling his friends that poor teaching and a lack of Catholicism at the school might cause him to not re-enroll his son.

Brian began the conference with "let's forget about the grade and let's focus on turning this around. Here's a list of things that Billy could do differently. What can I do differently to make this class work for Billy?"

### The Daily Grind of the School Year

Following the fall Open House on November 2, Development Director Rachel Osgood mailed high school prospects academic department letters. She mailed elementary school prospects letters from self-contained classroom teachers. The faculty had started to craft these letters at the in-service. They focused on three things:

1. Three goals for students
2. Three methods of teaching used to reach those goals
3. Three main benefits that students receive

The letters kind of set up a "wow" moment!

Rudy Mers refused to believe his Tommy son could do anything wrong. Carl West had heard about Rudy so when he issued Tommy's first detention, he decided to schedule a proactive meeting with Rudy.

Carl started the meeting by sharing some positive things about Tommy. "He's bright, intelligent, and is probably one of the strongest math students that I have had." Carl asked Rudy, "How can we work together to draw out even more of the best in Tommy this year?"

Tammy Watson was a wonder "mom" who volunteered a lot. Cindy Burbank valued Tammy's volunteering in her classroom, Cindy knew that parents were needed to help with enrollment.

Cindy asked Tammy if she would be willing to re-direct some of her volunteer efforts. Cindy said, "You would be perfect calling prospective families." Tammy replied, "I would need to be trained, but go ahead and tell the development director that I am willing to help."

Tony Smith was put in charge of the school's carnival. Lilly Thomas (the forgetful parent) was on his committee. Tony relied solely on email to communicate with the committee. Lilly was asked (via email) to get workers for the food booth.

Tony was angry, when on the night of the carnival he found out that Lilly had not gotten workers for the booth. He scolded Lilly in front of the committee.

**The next day Lilly told a whole lunch table full of co-workers about how horribly Mr. Smith had treated her.**

## St Patrick's Calls A Second Time-Out They Decide to Go into a Full-Court Press

With the second satisfaction survey in February, Bill Jackson was feeling better about his experience. He gave the school a rating of 8 on the satisfaction scale. A rating of 8 usually meant that a person was passively satisfied. Unfortunately, a person giving a score of 8 was 50% less likely to say something good.

On the open-ended section of the update, Bill Jackson wrote, "Mr. Delaney renewed my belief in the quality of education. My son has pulled his grade up from a C to a B. I scored you an 8 because I am still bothered by a lack of Catholicism at the school."

The second satisfaction survey was the focus of a faculty meeting. The principal asked Brian Delaney to share how he had turned things around in his Biology class. Brian gave credit to having been challenged at the faculty in-service in August as well as watching his mentor Carl West.

The principal said, "What can we do to respond to the perception that we are not Catholic enough?" Michelle Potter suggested, "Why not conduct a campaign to highlight our Catholicism? From campus ministry to the classroom teacher, why don't we share signs of what makes us distinctively Catholic?"

**When Bill Jackson received the "*Signs that Make Us Catholic*" mailing from the school, he knew that he had been heard.** He appreciated the effort that the faculty had made to illustrate its Catholicism.

He told his friends, "You can't argue with ACRE scores that are in the 95th percentile nationally. St. Patrick's must be producing students who can understand and explain their Catholic faith."

## Retention - Every Student Matters

As the upcoming year's enrollment numbers were beginning to take shape, Cindy Burbank reflected on her retention goal. She had set a goal for 95% retention goal for her kindergarten class matriculating to 1st grade. This percentage meant that she could not lose more than two students.

She already knew that the Kelly family was moving. She was informed that two other families had not yet registered for 1st grade. Grandma Hilda Casey had not re-enrolled her granddaughter and Sue Rock had not registered Jessica.

Cindy decided to talk to Grandma Hilda Casey. Grandma said, "Living on a fixed income and with gas prices the way they are, I am struggling. Your business manager Sue Carson has already helped me out. I don't feel right asking for more help."

Cindy Burbank then spoke with Sue Carson. Sue said, "Grandma Casey is sure proud. We can do better for her. Tell her to come and see me."

Cindy went back to Mrs. Casey and said, "Your granddaughter is doing so well. We will work with you on tuition. Please accept our help." It wasn't long before Gina Casey was registered.

Cindy then sought out Sue Rock and said, "I understand you haven't registered Jessica for 1st grade. Sue responded, "Ms. Burbank, you have been so great incorporating more of a hands on approach. I have watched the 1st grade teacher. I see her as giving too much paper work and too little hands on time."

Cindy countered, "Sue, I think you have the wrong impression. She tries to be as hands on with her teaching style as I do. Can I set up a meeting between the two of you?" Following the meeting, Jessica was registered for 1st grade. Cindy only lost one kindergartener out of 30!

## **You Can't Please Everybody Relationship Building is a Two-Way Street**

And then there was Chuck Brady. He was a father who just didn't get it. Chuck acted as if his son John was in school to play sports. Already in the 5th grade, Chuck saw his son as being a star player.

Sam Robinson, the school's guidance counselor was the 5th grade CYO basketball coach. Sam's coaching style was to let all the players get playing time, even if that meant sitting out some of the better players. Chuck Brady was vehemently opposed to this.

Prior to the season, Chuck asked Sam to focus on playing the best players. Sam very patiently explained his coaching approach. He told Chuck that he would not be changing this season.

Chuck scheduled an appointment with the principal Denise Goodwin. He said, "If my son sits on the bench this season to allow players who aren't as good as him to play, then I am withdrawing." Ms. Goodwin expressed her support for the coach. Chuck replied, "If that's how it's going to be, then we are out of here!"

## **The Post Game Report Teachers Reflect on Their Experience This Year**

Michelle Potter joked, "Thanks guys for helping me keep my teaching job by being so sensitive at how we manage enrollment. It looks like we might even have a slight increase. The Spanish teacher is always the first to go when the enrollment heads south."

Tony Smith injected, "I still would like to get back to the good old days when teachers were hired to teach and not run school carnivals, hand hold parents, and put up with students who need an attitude adjustment."

Cindy Burbank responded, "Tony for such a great teacher, you can sure be negative. I personally think I have been a better teacher this year because I entered the year with an enrollment management mindset."

Brian Delaney shared, "My professors in college never connected how our teaching influenced enrollment. We were taught the content of what our students needed to know and the style of how to deliver instruction. An enrollment mindset forces you to look at and attempt to influence wants, needs, and desires."

Carl West concluded by saying, "Enrollment management is everything that a student or parent has ever heard about our school, everything that they have ever experienced about our school, everything that keeps them coming back, everything that causes them to leave, and everything that motivates them to invite their family, friends, and neighbors to join our school family. I now know why they titled the August in-service *Educators as Enrollment Managers!*"

## **Questions for Reflection**

- The level of marketing, recruitment, and retention activity your school needs to put forth is in direct proportion to how much self-promotion is occurring. A dynamic, fully engaged

teacher in the classroom is better than 50 billboard ads! Do you agree?

- Define and describe what it means to manage enrollment as an educator?
- Can you give examples of how you have witnessed or experienced good enrollment management on the part of faculty?
- Can you give examples of how you have witnessed or experienced faculty as hindering enrollment?
- How will you define personal success in how you manage enrollment?

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## Spiritual Thought

Let us pray for our teachers begin the school year. May they enter each day acting in the way of these words from St. Anthony Mary Zaccaria. "True spiritual life consists in this: that one keep one's eyes on God all the time, long for nothing but for God, keep nothing in mind but God, begin every single action in the Lord's name, and direct it to him."

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## Are You Able to Host a Catholic School Enrollment Workshop?

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Each announcement should be no more than 200 words and should invite candidates to submit a resume to your specific address (e-mail or physical). We ask that you mail new requests (with the announcement attached in a Microsoft Word document) to [ISPD@aol.com](mailto:ISPD@aol.com), including the name of your contact person and a telephone number where we can reach you, just in case we need clarification on the announcement. Announcements will be put in alphabetical order by institution.

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