



February 2009

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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The Cost of Catholic School Education in an Economy in Crisis

By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist

Here are 5 Points that your school should consider as it approaches the financing tuition challenge with prospective and current families:

1. **Elementary and high schools need to better analyze what they are doing relative to leveraging merit and/or need-based tuition assistance.** Numbers tell a story and many Catholic schools are falling short in understanding how effectively they are in leveraging tuition assistance. School boards and finance committees need to look deeper than a balanced budget. A balanced budget does not necessarily equal full classrooms. You can have a balanced budget each year and still face enrollment decline. Schools must review their wins and losses related to financing tuition. Every school should know its discount percentage rate (percentage amount discounted off the published cost of tuition). If a school's discount percentage rate increases, then ideally that school's bottom-line revenue should improve. If your discount rate has been increasing while your bottom-line revenue is decreasing, then strategies need to be identified to change that negative financial picture. The best strategies emerge from gaining a greater command of your financial numbers relative to helping people afford your school. Your school needs to develop a "science" of what it is doing relative to financial assistance.
2. **Not enough families are applying for financial assistance.** In an economy such as the one we are in today, prospective and current school families should be applying for financial assistance at a higher rate than in the past. Why? Communication is central to your ability to address concerns around tuition. A request for or a completed financial assistance application means that families are communicating with your school. This dialogue does not necessarily mean that you end up providing the perceived level of tuition assistance that is requested. It does mean that by having families in dialogue with you the chances are greater that you can address perceived financial concerns. It is within this communication that your school **may choose** to move from the "science to the art" of leveraging financial assistance.
3. **Financial assistance is offered much too late in the process.** This week I was

presenting in a diocese and I asked, if those gathered communicated through a letter, how to finance tuition. Several schools said, "Yes, we do after a family registers." Such a response is symptomatic of the problem that schools are facing. Most schools and dioceses have created processes where financial assistance is being talked about and offered too late in the enrollment cycle. Remember that your school has an *Enrollment Funnel* and that people may not enter or proceed down into the funnel without communication regarding how they are going to afford tuition.

4. **Information pertaining to financial assistance is often not being shared among the key players within a school.** When I am in front of large workshop gathering of faculty, I often find that many of them don't know what the tuition is in their school. If they do know the tuition, it is very seldom that they can tell me the process for financing tuition. We must start with making sure that anybody and everybody (staff, faculty, volunteers, or school parents) who is connected with your school is fully apprised of financing tuition options. What we don't want is a situation where only a couple of key individuals (business manager, principal, pastor) are the only persons in the "know" regarding financing tuition. We also want to make sure that information regarding financing tuition is proactively shared within the school. If I were to call your school today and tell your school secretary that my wife just lost her job and that this might impact my decision to enroll my daughter, what would happen? Would the secretary make note of this? How would she respond? Would she share this information with the principal or business manager? People do communicate their financial apprehensions. Are we hearing them and responding in a timely, persuasive, and helpful manner?
5. **Schools are giving very little hope in print, on the web, and in person.** We heard the words "Yes We Can" a lot in the past presidential election. Our Catholic schools need to create this sense of hope around financing tuition by communicating the message "Yes You Can Finance Tuition." No longer can schools offer the standard two sentences. "Financial assistance is available. See the school office for more information." Schools must communicate more of a hopeful message to prospective and current families in print material, on the web site, and in person. You can have your secretary telling people that tuition is \$7,000 per year or you can have her saying that tuition is \$5.55 per hour. We can't overstate what we can do for people, but we also can't understate what we can do for people. Identify the line that you want people to walk up to when sharing information about financing tuition. The better analysis you do in Step #1 that I previously outlined, the better you will know what that line is.

Believe it or Not - Reducing Negative Word-of-Mouth is More Important than Increasing Positive Word-of-Mouth

The London School of Economics conducted research into the effects of decreasing negative word-of-mouth and increasing positive word-of-mouth in your business or organization. Here's what they found:

- 1% reduction in negative word-of-mouth correlated to 41% growth
- 1% increase in positive word-of-mouth correlated to 14% growth
- Reducing negative word-of-mouth could grow revenue by 300% over increasing positive word-of-mouth

Evoke Response from Your Prospects by

Earning an "A" for Effort at Personalization

Robert Cialdini points to an interesting study about personalization in his book *Yes! 50 Scientifically Proven Ways to Be Persuasive*. He mentions a study of busy medical doctors who were sent a survey using three different cover letters. Here's what they found:

- Response rates to completing the survey were at 36% when a printed cover letter was used.
- Response rates increased to 48% if the printed cover letter had a handwritten message on it.
- Response rates increased to a whopping 75% when that handwritten message was placed on a post-it note.

How about writing your financing tuition letter and sending it with a post-it note with the message, "Don't allow tuition to stand in the way of making a great educational choice for your child. Give me a call (123- 4567) and we can fully discuss how to finance your child's education." You're asking a lot of families to afford your tuition. This research seems to indicate that they may be more likely to respond if they see more effort at personalization on your part.

Spiritual Thought

I recently came upon this quote from St. Ignatius of Antioch. He said, "Faith is the beginning, love is the end, and the union of the two together is God." Catholic schools help make this union possible. May God bless you and your teachers in this most noble endeavor! Amen.

ISPD to Host Four Free Webinars

With the success of our webinar back on November 24th on *"Getting Ready for a Capital Campaign"*, ISPD will host four additional one-hour webinars this spring. Here is the schedule:

- **February 23:** *"Building a Strong Catholic Development Effort in Tough Economic Times"*
- **March 27:** *"Getting Your Parish and/or School Ready for a Capital Campaign"*
- **April 27:** *"Understanding the Successful Traits of a Successful Catholic Parish and/or School Development/Advancement Director"*
- **May 18:** *"Evaluating and Assessing Your Catholic Development/Advancement Efforts"*

- [Visit our Website to Register Today!](#)

Spring 2009 Workshops

Dynamic presenters share proven strategies and discuss development issues during one day seminars for Catholic parishes and schools. These workshops are conveniently held across the country at an affordable price of \$75-\$99.

We hope you'll join us!

Topics Include:

- ** Annual Fund **
- ** Become a More Welcoming, Engaging & Affirming Catholic Parish **
- ** Best First Steps to Take in Beginning Your Catholic Development Efforts **
- ** Capital Campaigns That Produce Results **
- ** Catholic School Enrollment Solutions **
- ** Long Range Planning **
- ** Strategic Plan for Development **

Locations Include:

Austin, Chicago, Cincinnati, Ft. Lauderdale
Kansas City, Lexington, Little Rock, Omaha
Philadelphia, Providence, Raleigh, Seattle

ISPD Also Conducts On-Site Workshops

Offered to Catholic schools and parishes within a single diocese, these workshops are designed to meet your specific needs.

- [Check Here for More Information on ISPD Development Workshops](#)

Development Directions

Development Directions is our free monthly online newsletter for anyone engaged in the ministry of Catholic development. Hear about success stories in your neighboring schools and parishes that will give you the confidence to take the first step necessary towards successful development.

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 - Educational DVDs on Catholic Development
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Please feel free to forward this newsletter to anyone you think could benefit from this information. If there are any topics you would like to see covered in a future newsletter, please contact us.

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