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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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Enrollment Management Can Be the Catalyst That Moves Schools from being "Effective" to being "Great"!

By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist

During Catholic Schools Week, it is important to realize that for schools to thrive in the Third Millennium, they will need to move from "effective" to "great."

We rarely encounter a "great" school that is suffering from an enrollment decline. Great schools attend our workshops and engage us in long-term consults with the goal of remaining "great." With the commitment of time, talent, and money required by families in sending their children to Catholic schools, there is a growing expectation that Catholic schools move beyond being simply effective. Most tax paying citizens expect that the public school system they support will be "effective." The controversial "No Child Left Behind" legislation is aimed at insuring effectiveness and accountability in the public school system.

A proper appreciation of the scope of enrollment management can help schools to realize that just about any area of the school can either enhance or detract enrollment. A paradigm shift from effectiveness to greatness in these areas is imperative for the survival and success of Catholic schools. Those enrolled in or looking to enroll in our Catholic schools expect more than effectiveness, they desire greatness in academics, spiritual development, and community building.

Here are a few signs to illustrate how effectiveness differs from greatness. Use these signs as discussion starters at your next staff, faculty, board, or PTO meeting.

Signs of Effectiveness:

1. A prospective family contacts a Catholic school and requests information. Effective schools respond with a packet of information mailed out right away. They also follow-up with a phone call to make sure the family received the information and they offer to help them in any way they can throughout the process.
2. A prospective family visits a Catholic school web site searching for information related to enrolling their child. Effective school web sites welcome the family with communication on the homepage that is particular to someone who is new. Effective schools give ample ways for the prospect to let the school know who they are.
3. A prospective parent interacts with a school over a period of time with an interest in determining the value of not only the school's academic program, but also how the Catholic faith is shared, taught, and developed. Effective schools point out all the various features of faith development that occur within the school such as weekly school Mass, service opportunities, and sacramental preparation.
4. A prospective parent talks with parents who send their children to a Catholic school. Effective schools have parents who say the following:
 - o "After we registered and before we ever set foot in the school, my son's teacher sent us a nice welcoming letter."
 - o "Whenever I contact the principal or teachers, my call or email is always returned promptly and my question answered."
 - o "When I stop by the school, the secretary makes me feel welcome and is always helpful."
 - o "The school emails a weekly school update to me to let me know what's going on."
5. A Catholic school family is impressed when they are asked about their level of satisfaction. Effective schools continuously measure satisfaction, not once, but at least twice a year. What may be working in October, may not still be working in February.
6. A family's greatest concern in sending their child to a Catholic school is being able to afford it. Effective Catholic schools make it known to concerned parents that there are options available. They send out communications that encourage families to contact the school about financing options. These effective schools educate all their staff, faculty, and parents about the steps for applying for tuition grant assistance.

Signs of Greatness:

1. A prospective family contacts a Catholic school and requests information. Like effective schools, great schools send out a packet and make a follow-up phone call in a timely manner. However, what makes a school great is in going beyond what is expected by someone inquiring about the school. Great schools realize that prospective families need to hear from current school families as well as from the faculty and even alumni. They understand how important it is to have a diversity of types of contact (mail, phone, email, person-to-person). These great schools strive to anticipate objections like the common one of paying tuition. They are prepared to roll out a communication stream that includes hopeful information about how tuition is made affordable for families. Overall great schools don't interpret a request for information as anything more than a family wanting to know more about the school. They realize that their work at engaging and convincing the prospect has only just

begun. They realize that a relationship must be built and this is no small matter.

2. A prospective family visits a Catholic school web site searching for information related to enrolling their child. Like the effective schools, great ones recognize and affirm the visitor who is not familiar with the school. Great schools go beyond simply encouraging interaction, they strategically construct ways for the prospective visitor to communicate. On-line inquiry forms are present and visible throughout the site. A robust stream of communication is provided for prospects to hear:
 - o You want them to be part of your school
 - o What the benefits are - "what's in it for me?"
 - o What students, faculty, alumni, parents have to say
 - o The who, what, when, where, and how of enrolling
 - o How to finance the cost of tuition
 - o How they will fit into and be accepted in your school's community

3. A prospective parent interacts with a school over a period of time with an interest in determining the value of not only the school's academic program, but also how the Catholic faith is shared, taught, and developed. Great schools move beyond effective schools in demonstrating more than just the features of faith development. Schools that earn the descriptor of being great, do so by clearly illustrating the concrete benefits of faith development. Students at great school are asked to share the spiritual benefits of their Catholic education at open houses, during reflections at the end of Sunday Mass, in print in parish bulletins and in community newspapers, in a school booth at the festival, and the lists goes on. At great schools prospects are shown ACRE test score results on the web site, in special mailings, posted in the parish bulletin, and communicated from the pulpit. Great schools frequently site research that points out the overwhelmingly positive research relative to how Catholic schools teach and share the faith more effectively than any other entity outside the home.

4. A prospective parent talks with parents who send their children to a Catholic school. Great schools have parents who say the following:
 - o "After we registered and before we ever set foot in the school, my son's teacher called me to talk over any concerns or anxieties that I had. I had some particular concerns relative to my son's shyness. Can you believe it, the teacher scheduled a time to stop by and meet my son personally before school started so that he would feel more calm on the first day."
 - o "Whenever I contact the principal or teachers, my call or email is always returned promptly and my question answered. They always make it a point to contact me a week or so later to see if the issue has gotten better. I don't know how they manage to remember to follow up with me, especially with all the students that they have in the school."
 - o "When I stop by the school, the secretary makes me feel welcome and is always helpful even when I am sure she gets tired answering my silly questions. No matter how busy she might be, she always asks me if I want something to drink. She makes me feel like a part of the family. I never feel like I am burdening her."
 - o "The school emails a weekly update to me. This weekly newsletter is sent out using software called *Constant Contact*. It provides neat graphics and is presented in such a way that I want to read it. Periodically, I receive separate emails from the principal and my child's teacher asking how things are going. They go out of their way to communicate with me. I am never blindsided by not knowing important information."

5. A school Catholic school family is impressed when they are asked about their level of satisfaction. Effective schools measure satisfaction among parents. Great schools measure satisfaction among both parents and students. Great schools understand that its what you don't know that will hurt you the most. After gathering feedback from both students and parents, they set out to address areas of concern. They even address those comments that may seem at first glance to be "out there in left field." Great schools understand that misinformation and misunderstandings within the school community, if ignored, can grow into something that threatens the school. Great schools take the feedback received from parents and students to their staff, faculty, and boards of education to determine an appropriate response. Once a response is determined, they share it with the school community.

6. A family's greatest concern in sending their child to a Catholic school is being able to afford it. Like effective schools, great schools understand that given the cost of tuition today, it is imperative that financing options are systematically communicated to both prospective and current students. Here is some of what great schools do in this regard:
 - o They know the economic situation of their families, not just anecdotally, but they know the real income ranges that exist within their school.
 - o They know what economic situations they are most successful in registering and retaining.
 - o They know what economic situations they are least successful in registering and retaining.
 - o They use this economic data to appropriately leverage tuition grants and scholarships.
 - o They make financial assistance awards in a face-to-face setting rather than through letter or phone.
 - o They publish what past awards have looked like based on income levels and family size, meaning that a prospective family could look at a chart of what the school has been able to do in the past and see where they might fit.
 - o They regularly bring the best business and math minds together from their school community to analyze how to best leverage tuition assistance.
 - o They regularly monitor how families are doing with their payment plan obligations and they attempt to work with families that are falling behind before the situation gets any worse.

Spiritual Thought



The picture above is a photo that was taken on September 23, 1923 of the dedication of St. Michael School in Ripley, Ohio. The building is still in use today as St. Michael School continues to serve students in pre-school through 8th grade. Back in 1923, it is reported that more than 5,000 persons showed up for this dedication ceremony. There was a lot of Klu Klux Klan activity during that time period and Catholics were sending a strong message to the KKK that they were not going anywhere. During Catholic Schools Week, let's send a similar message within our communities. Catholic schools are here to stay, thrive, and grow in the Third Millennium!

Spring 2008 Workshops for Schools

Dynamic presenters share proven strategies and discuss Catholic school enrollment issues during one and two day seminars. These workshops are conveniently held across the country at an affordable price of \$69-\$250 .

We hope you'll join us soon!

[Register on-line](#)

or call us today at 1-800-299-2393

TOPICS INCLUDE:

- Catholic School Enrollment Solutions - Strategies That Deliver Immediate Results
- Best First Steps to Take in Beginning Your Catholic Development Efforts

- Best First Steps / The Annual Fund
- Capital Campaigns That Produce Results
- Long Range Planning
- Customer Service in Your Catholic School
- Catholic School Enrollment Solutions - Strategies for Catholic School Enrollment Growth

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 Spring 2008 Schedule and More Information on ISPD Development Training Workshops](#)

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