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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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The Core Enrollment Management Team

By John Cooper, ISPD Enrollment Specialist

This edition of Enrollment Talk takes off where the May edition left off. In the [May newsletter](#) we examined the dynamics of an elementary school's enrollment management core team as viewed through *A Tale of St. Mary's Core Enrollment Team*. Today, we look at *A Tale of St. John's High School Core Enrollment Team*. You will notice that the core team is comprised of many more paid staff than your typical elementary school would be able to field. Maybe your school has the benefit of having a Registrar or Director of Diversity. You can add them. On the other hand, maybe your high school doesn't have a Director of Communications or a Dean of Academics. You can delete them from this scenario. The goal is to create a core team that enables your school to take a "broad" view of enrollment management. Your success depends on it.

Tale of St John's High School Core Enrollment Management Team

Regular Cast of Characters

John Cooper - ISPD Enrollment Consultant as "The Protagonist"
Carol Thompson - Director of Enrollment Management as "Core Team Chair"
Mike Lewis as "Freshman Class Teacher Extraordinaire"
Cindy Rogers as "The Go to Sophomore Class Teacher"
Wanda Thomas as "The Junior Class Prom Advisor"
Carl Cassell as "The Teaching Legend that Every Senior Looks Forward to Having"
Sue Carson as "The Business Manager"
Tom Henry as "The School's Dean of Academics"
Jennifer Claypool as "The Front Office Secretary that Everybody Loves"
Marsha Williams as "Director of Communications"
Sam Robinson as "The Guidance Counselor"
Rachel Osgood - "The Director of Development"
Denise Goodwin as "The Principal"

Guest Appearance Cast Members

Ray Jones as "A Freshman Class Student Ambassador"
Jessica Flores as "A Sophomore Class Student Ambassador"
Tina Roberts as "A Junior Class Student Ambassador"
Alicia McCain as "A Senior Class Student Ambassador"
Nancy Banks as "A Freshman Class Go to Parent"
Hank Johnson as "A Sophomore Class Go to Parent"
Wendy St. James as "A Junior Class Go to Parent"
Roy Jamison as "A Senior Class Go to Parent"
Michelle Walker as "An Alumni Representative"

Carol Thompson, St John High School's Director of Admissions didn't know what was in store for her when her principal Denise Goodwin suggested that they attend an ISPD Enrollment Management Workshop. Carol had been on John Cooper's *Enrollment Talk Newsletter* distribution list and she thought that a lot of good ideas were offered each month.

At the workshop Denise and Carol both had slightly different responses to John Cooper's presentation. Denise could see how an expanded notion of enrollment management was needed at St John's. With tuition reaching \$8,000 per year and the market for high school students getting more competitive, Denise understood what John Cooper was saying about needing a broad, "full court press" type approach to managing enrollment.

Denise immediately started talking about changing Carol's job description from Director of Admissions to Director of Enrollment Management. Carol did not see the need for such a change. She saw herself as an admissions officer for St John's. It all sounded like more work and responsibility for her.

After about a week of sitting with the ideas that John Cooper presented at the workshop, Denise decided to ask John to assist St John's in changing the institutional culture related to managing enrollment. One of the first things that John Cooper did was present Denise and Carol with a change in job description. Together they worked on a broader enrollment management job description for Carol Thompson.

Carol was still not sold on the idea, but what can you do when your principal wants to move in that direction. Initially, Denise, Carol, and John worked to lay out a plan for "on-boarding" the school's board, faculty, staff, students, parents, and alumni with the strategic shift to an enrollment management paradigm.

Formation of the Enrollment Management Core Team was chosen as the main conduit to roll out this change. It would also be a key team to support Carol Thompson in the work of managing enrollment. Denise, Carol, and John spent several hours discussing and strategizing about the composition of the core team.

They decided that there should be regular members as well as guest members of the team. The regular members would be employees of St John's and the guest members would be made up of non-employees such as students, parents, and alumni.

All members would be asked to regard information exchanged within the core team meetings as confidential. However, Carol would ask only regular members to be present at meetings which required discussion of particularly confidential topics and issues.

Persons were invited to serve on the enrollment management core team. Most accepted the invitation without much arm twisting. A kick-off meeting was held in August right after school year had started. Since this was a full meeting of the core team, Carol decided to have a dinner meeting at 6:30 p.m. in the evening.

At this opening meeting Carol welcomed all the core team members and thanked them for agreeing to serve for the 2008-09 school year. After dinner, John Cooper was asked to give an overview of enrollment management. He shared what the role of the core team was in helping to guide the school's enrollment management program. He also outlined the specific responsibilities of each core team member.

In the question and answer period, Wanda Thomas, a teacher asked, just what her level of involvement was supposed to be? John Cooper informed her that she was being asked to attend a monthly meeting of the core team. At each meeting she would be asked to listen and respond to agenda items from the perspective of a faculty member, in particular a faculty member who had close connections to junior class students.

Wanda responded, "So you are not saying that I need to coordinate the fall Open House? Carol Thompson interjected, "No. You will be part of a team of persons that I go to when Open House is approaching. I will be looking for your perspective on how to provide the best Open House experience."

Ray Jones, freshman class student ambassador said, "You want to know from us how to make the Open House less boring and more enjoyable for 8th grade students." Carol replied, "That's exactly the kind of thing that I need. Just take that line of thinking and multiply it by a thousand. I need each one of you to give me input and guidance on all kinds of things that impact enrollment on a daily basis." John Cooper was so proud to hear that response!

In September the second meeting of the Enrollment Management Core Team was held with this agenda:

1. Welcome and Prayer
2. Update on Enrollment Numbers for 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 (standard piece of every agenda)
3. Review and Discussion of ISPD's Most Recent Enrollment Talk Newsletter (included as a regular agenda topic)
4. Preview and discussion of this year's signature Search Mailing
5. Preview and discussion of fall Open House
6. Discussion on how successful we were in launching the 2008-09 school year.
 - o Where did we drop the ball?
 - o Are there students and families that seem to be feeling unwelcome or not fully engaged with the school?
 - o What can we do to reach out to them?
7. Selection of a faculty core team member to give a regular update at faculty meetings about the work of the core team relative to teaching.
8. Formation of an Enrollment Management Committee on the Board of Trustees that will interact with our core team periodically.
9. Each member is asked if they have any other business to share or introduce.
10. Adjourn

October meeting of the core team. Marsha Williams, director of communications shared her frustration about faculty and staff not giving her good "leads" for news stories. She said, "In August I emailed each faculty and staff member the template press release that John Cooper gave us to use. To date, I have yet to receive one back. I know that there are things going on in this school that I am missing ."

Mike Lewis, freshman class teacher said, "Teachers have to have that call for press releases continually put in front of them. A discussion followed about what types of press releases from faculty would be most needed to enhance enrollment. Mike volunteered to share this at the next faculty meeting.

Sam Robinson, the guidance counselor noted that the school had a large number of African-American freshman students this year. He said, "Now that we are into the second month of the academic year, how are we doing with making sure that they feel welcome and part of the school community?"

Tina Roberts, the junior class student ambassador said, "I heard that there were some negative comments made about race during the boy's basketball team conditioning practices that started this month. A couple of students got their feelings hurt by those comments." The Principal

indicated that she would discuss this with the Athletic Director.

November meeting of the core team. Carol Thompson gave a summary of the fall Open House. She highlighted how many attended. The core team reviewed comments made by prospective students/families. Carol said, "As you can see a good number of those who attended commented that financial assistance was going to be a key factor in their decision to enroll."

Wendy St James, a parent interjected, "I was in their shoes a couple of years ago. I came away from the Open House worrying about how I was going to pay for this school. We received a lot of information that night, but none of it went into detail about financial assistance."

Tom Henry, the school's academic dean responded, "Wendy, what could we have provided you after the Open House relative to financial assistance?" Wendy replied, "It would have been helpful to have received a specific mailing or email regarding financial assistance, outlining what I needed to do, but more than anything, offering me some hope that I could afford St John's."

Sue Carson, the school's business manager asked, "What could we have done to offer you more hope?" Wendy responded, "I would have appreciated knowing how likely it was for someone in my financial situation to receive some help from St. John's."

Jennifer Claypool, the front office secretary said, "Sue, how consistent are we in giving out financial assistance each year?" Sue said, "We have pretty straightforward guidelines that we follow, meaning that if you fall into a certain financial situation, you will probably be awarded a certain amount of assistance."

Jennifer asked, "Then why can't I use those guidelines in sharing information with prospective families when they call the school?" Sue responded, "We don't want to give too much hope, setting expectations to too high, and not be able to deliver." Jennifer came back and said, "From these Open House comments, it seems we are falling short of giving enough hope for people to even think that St John's is a viable option."

Carol Thompson asked Sue Carson, if she could pull together a group of financial advisors to review past financial assistance guidelines and awards/denials to see just what could be shared publically. Sue agreed to have this information at the December enrollment management core team meeting.

December core team meeting. Since financial assistance figures were going to be discussed, the meeting was limited to the regular core team members who were paid employees of the school and thus bound to a greater level of confidentiality. From this discussion, strategic actions were outlined to present to the full core team at the January meeting.

January core team meeting. Decisions were made about how to be more strategic in sharing information about financial assistance. One major decision was made to ask the Board if previous year's financial information could be submitted by families applying for assistance. By not having to wait to complete the current year's income taxes, families could submit their financial information sooner and receive notice much earlier.

Carol Thompson shared some not so good news with the team. "We have had 125 placement exam takers compared to 135 this time last year." Cindy Rogers, sophomore class teacher asked, "How many of the 135 did we convert last year into enrolled students?" Carol responded, "118 enrolled which helped us come in above our goal of 115 new students." Marsha Williams, communications director commented, "Given these numbers we will have to have a much higher conversion ratio this year to reach 115."

Carol Thompson said that she had a couple of ideas. "First, let's continue to try and hit our prospect list which have not taken a placement test or told us that they were going elsewhere. Second, let's hit our placement test takers with a high end mailing detailing the financial assistance possibilities that we have now outlined in greater detail. Third, let's mobilize parents, faculty, and students to do some phone calling of these test takers."

Mike Lewis, a faculty core team member volunteered to recruit a couple of teachers who would be excellent on the phone. Nancy Banks, a parent on the core team offered to recruit a couple of parents to do some telecounseling. Alicia McCain, a student on the core team said that she would enlist the help of some students to phone call prospective students who had taken the placement test. Carol Thompson would have John Cooper come in and train each of these telecounselors.

At the February core team meeting, the results of the second Parent and Student Satisfaction Update were discussed. The team looked to see if scores and responses had changed since the October satisfaction update was responded to. The team formulated questions for board, faculty, and staff relative to feedback gained from the satisfaction update.

During the March core team meeting there was a discussion of possible action strategies that could be implemented to influence retention. Hank Johnson, a parent on the core team asked if there was anything the school could do to work with those families that had not re-registered due to being behind on their tuition payments. Jessica Flores, a student on the core team said that she believed a few students were not coming back because they just didn't feel like the school was a good fit for them. There was considerable discussion regarding how to address both of these concerns.

As part of the April core team meeting the group talked about how the school could best highlight the successes of its graduating seniors. Roy Jamison, a parent on the core team said that in past years he thought that St John's had not done a good job of touting the accomplishments of its seniors. He suggested a series of four advertisements in the *Community News Journal*. Over the course of four weeks leading up to graduation, a different aspect of the graduating senior class could be highlighted. Carol said that she didn't think it was possible to do this on such short notice, but it had merit for next year.

Carl Cassell led off the May core team meeting saying that he had been a teacher at St John's for 30 years and that serving on the core team this past year had given him a completely new perspective on what it means to enroll a student. "I now see enrollment as the central effort to declare publically what we are good at and what we will deliver as faculty and staff. I see it as walking with students and parents while we deliver what we promised. I see it as involving high stakes from an academic, emotional, social, financial, and spiritual perspective. All these areas are operating simultaneously and need to be looked at holistically."

Carol Thompson said, "I have a confession to make. When I first heard John Cooper talk about the importance of an enrollment management core team, I had a lot of doubts about its effectiveness. Carl, I didn't even think a long standing faculty member like yourself would even give it a chance, much less come and participate faithfully in every meeting like you have this year."

Rachel Osgood, the development director said, "I go out to alumni and friends of St John's and I put forth the case that our mission is to educate the whole student in a way that is unlike any other option available. As I participated on this core enrollment team, I felt like I was making that case and living that mission one issue or challenge at a time. Sign me up for next year's core team."

Michelle Walker said, "As the team's alumni representative, I work in corporate America and every business or organization that is worth its salt should have such a team looking out for the customer's total experience. My only question as we continue this core team next year is who else should be added so that an even greater perspective and input is gained."

Aspiration and Anticipation: Two Keys to Enrollment Success

At ISPD we often talk about aspiration and anticipation as necessary "buy-in



ingredients" for a family in choosing to purchase the gift of Catholic school education. This picture from St Rocco School in Cleveland highlights one way Sister Judith, their principal decided to create some aspiration and anticipation within her school. You will notice that each student was able to add his/her name to the red area of the hallway bulletin board as he/she was registered. The red area leads into the yellow area which symbolizes the "yellow brick road" to graduation. The 8th grade graduates names are listed in the yellow area.
Nice job St Rocco!

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Spiritual Thought

Sister Julie Billiart said, "Be very careful not to be agitated about success or failure." In managing enrollment we are going to have ups and downs. Let us listen to the words of Sister Julie and stay healthy in our approach to the highs and the lows of what confronts our schools.

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