



# Lehman Catholic High School

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## Enrollment Initiatives a Must for Catholic Schools

There is no individual more passionate about Catholic education than **John Cooper**, a consultant for the Institute of School and Parish Development (ISPD). Several years ago, a member of the Lehman community anonymously donated \$25,000 to LCHS and its feeder schools to form a collaborative to bolster enrollment in its Catholic schools. Cooper, who lives in Cincinnati, was recruited to rally the troops and engage everyone in a meaningful discussion regarding enrollment.

Core teams were formed and participants fanned out into breakout rooms to discuss their respective school's enrollment management plan for attracting new students. Enrollment initiatives were identified and Cooper challenged each school to return to their respective community – Piqua, Troy, Sidney, Wapakoneta, Celina, Greenville and St. Marys-to focus on how to do a better job reaching their prospective audiences.



For the past year Lehman Catholic has worked tenaciously in eight areas of planning including: financial assistance, involvement, marketing, programs, retention, recruitment, technology and attitude. Chairpersons were assigned for each of the planning areas with results reported to a steering committee which ultimately charts their progress.

To date the steering committee has tackled a number of initiatives ranging from dual enrollment programs, satisfaction surveys, web page improvements and a pen pal program with feeder schools to pep rallies, server replacement and student representation on the retention committee. Among the upcoming activities is the first annual Bridging the Gap (Generation) Day on March 27 whereby grandparents and/or an older adult who has impacted LCHS students' lives will be invited to spend a morning with the students.

Of course these activities require the time and talent of many individuals. During a recent visit Cooper visited with the collaborative core teams to determine their progress one year later. It's obvious that much has been accomplished; however, much more needs to be done to ensure good marketing (evangelization), "funneling" prospects through the enrollment process, providing seamless communication that focuses on relationship building and retention and continued connection after graduation.

As a conductor orchestrating a concert, the personable Cooper encourages greater participation among the core groups suggesting they be represented by everyone from "techno geeks" and "marketing junkies" to "great teachers" and "super men and wonder women". Each individual, he notes, provides a unique perspective on enrollment strategies.

As part of his presentation, Cooper provided five points schools should also consider: the challenge of financing tuition. "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 two sentences "financial assistance is available" or "see the school office for more information". You can either have someone tell people that tuition is \$7,000 per year or you can have them saying tuition is \$5.44 per hour. We can't overstate what we can do for people, but we also can't understate what we can do for people."

At the conclusion of his meeting with the representative schools, Cooper provided a myriad of ideas and materials for Catholic schools seeking to attract tomorrow's students. As he closed with a prayer, tears were streaming down his cheeks. His passion, empathy and commitment to Catholic schools was a defining moment for everyone present. It was evangelization at its best.