

3. Catholic Schools

What are Catholics' perceptions of Catholic schools? What will it take to attract and retain students and financial support in the future?

Key Findings

Parental Choice

- A majority of the Catholic community feels that Catholic schools provide a better education than public or other private schools. Opinions regarding the quality of Catholic schools vary with age, education, and income level.
- Parents whose children were currently enrolled in a Catholic school generally reported making the decision earlier than those whose children were never enrolled or were withdrawn from Catholic school. Most cite personal experience as a major factor in the decision to send their children to Catholic schools.
- Parents cite high cost, no added advantage, and lack of programs for children with special needs as the main reasons for withdrawal or non-enrollment. Parents who have never enrolled their children in Catholic school are much more likely to be married to someone who is not Catholic and are less likely to be registered in a parish.

Value to the Church

- A majority of the Catholic community feels that Catholic education makes an important contribution and should be continued. Most in the community believe that Catholic schools provide the best way for the Church to develop high moral standards in children.
- 18% of staff and clergy, however, feel that Catholic schools are no longer needed. One-third of pastors share this view.

Share of Resources

- 65% of the clergy believe that Catholic schools receive more than their share of resources. Many in the Catholic community believe parents should be solely responsible for financially supporting Catholic schools. (Key donors and those involved in Church activities are less likely to share this belief.)

Recommendations

Catholic School Enrollment & Retention

- Increase interest among younger Catholic parents. Set and publicize specific goals to improve the perception of the quality of a Catholic educational experience. Involve the community in setting the goals and standards for Catholic schools so that the Diocese better understands the community's expectations and to foster buy-in of the plan.
- A clear mission statement for the schools should be developed and publicized.
- Mount an aggressive, well executed marketing communications program to highlight the advantages of a Catholic education. Include testimonials from credible graduates. Stress commitment to teaching values and positive self concepts. Increase the number of parent visits to the schools.
- Evaluate capabilities for serving students with special needs.

Financial Support

- A special fundraising appeal to key donors might prove successful.

"Increase interest among younger Catholic parents"

Actions Planned or Under Way

Catholic Schools

- Funds have been allocated for school marketing. A consultant has been hired to help quadrants develop and implement coordinated marketing plans. Marketing plans for the next two years will focus on building a unified approach to public relations, recruitment and retention.
- A marketing plan has been developed for the Northeast Quadrant and is being implemented this year. Major projects for the Quadrant included an opening celebration, newsletters, a brochure, a marketing workshop for principals and volunteers, Catholic Schools Week events and a parent survey.
- Communications Committees for the Southeast, Southwest and Northwest Quadrants have been formed to plan marketing and recruitment projects. Communications strategies are developed for each stage of the system framework plan.
- A marketing workbook has been drafted which will enable quadrants to systematically gather and update information about students, parents, prospects, and competition.
- Last spring, a generous benefactor pledged a gift of up to \$500,000 on behalf of students attending city Catholic schools. The goal is to fill the nearly 500 empty seats in these 11 schools. So far, principals and volunteers, with support from the Crandall-Horner Department, have increased enrollment by 223 students this year, providing \$23,000 for financial assistance.

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