

Creating a Steady Stream of Inquires

Change is constant and it surrounds your school daily. People move or change schools for many reasons. So, you need to keep the inquiries coming in at all times. Keeping a steady stream of inquiries flowing inward ensures your school has a viable waiting pool of students to fill vacancies.

Satisfied families of current students represent your best marketing tool for keeping a steady stream of inquiries flowing in to your school. Satisfied families generously spread good news about your school throughout the community. And do not forget about your past parents. They have a high level of credibility and serve as great influencers within the school community. Past parents value the experiences your school provided and they can confirm their children's success as they move forward in attaining higher levels of education.

Current families and past parents are your first priority but do not make these groups your only priority. Work hard at building greater awareness and interest about your school within the community.

The following are ideas that help your school build a steady stream of inquiries. These ideas will hopefully serve as catalysts to help you think of many more ideas that can generate interest in your school.

Grassroots Tactics for Creating a Steady Stream of Inquires

- Know who your friends are:

Do a little research. Review inquiry records from the past few years to determine who has been instrumental in pointing prospects to your school. For example, this might include people such as educational consultants, area real estate agents, local doctors, librarians, and/or insurance agents — to name just a few. Spend lots of time building this list; it's an invaluable asset. And make sure that you stay in touch with these people regularly.

These people are strong influencers at the grassroots level greatly help support the mission of your school. Always be sure these supporters have a supply of your most recent recruiting brochure on hand. Visit these people once a year and be sure to invite them to your school campus.

- Spread the word through your parish:

Keep staff members at your parish well informed and up to date about what's happening at your school. If you have a special program going on, make sure the parish knows about it. If you have a new flyer, make sure the parish office as several on hand. Ask to publish notices about your school events and/or include an insert in the parish bulletin. Students might paint holiday cards and display them at the church throughout the year. Someone from your school might volunteer to speak at a church-sponsored young-couples' group about educational issues.

- Open the school to parish activities

Offering your facilities free to outside groups is a great way to bring people to your campus. You can consider hosting a series of unique Saturday morning classes to attract children of all ages. Choose topics that illustrate the strengths of your school's program and expose the students to your best teachers.

To attract adults, consider putting together a program on timely topics that position your school as a parent-education center for the community. Interesting subjects might include financial planning, Internet issues, taxes, health and fitness, recognizing symptoms of learning disabilities, etc.

- Increase the number of your open houses during the year:

Instead of holding your only open houses during Catholic Schools Week, schedule several. Different approaches may attract families who haven't considered your school in the past. You can vary the day and/or time, target a specific geographic area, or

consider planning a theme, such as donor-based or back to school.

For example, consult past admission statistics to see whether parents demonstrate interest at certain times, based on their children's ages (e.g., preschool families before Thanksgiving or upper school families after the winter break). Schedule open houses accordingly.

- Sponsor informal gatherings:

Ask current parents to host living-room coffees for neighbors and friends. This is a great informal way to introduce these families to your school. It is also an excellent opportunity to show your school video or slide program. Be sure to provide copies of your recruitment materials and school publications for the visitors to take home.

Media Tactics for Creating a Steady Stream of Inquires

- Advertising:

You already advertise for your school's open houses. Now work on developing a series of ads designed to build name recognition (branding) and knowledge about what your school offers.

Each ad should contain an eye-catching headline, a lively photograph, a small amount of text, your school name and logo, and basic information about your school: the name, the grade levels you serve, the address, the phone number, and an invitation to call or visit. You might also want to include your founding date and, if you have one, your Web site address.

Create a few advertisements, each the same size and shape, with similar layouts. This type of visual reinforcement in a series provides greater impact. Each ad should focus on one main point - an example of the excellence that occurs at your school and why this is important to parents.

Keep your ad simple. Make it short, attractive, and interesting. This helps your ads stand out in a crowded playing field.

- Direct mail advertising:

Create a direct mail piece. This can include anything from a postcard to a pamphlet. Send these to the families you want to target.

You might cover the entire service area of your school or select specific zip codes. A direct mail services provider can provide you with mailing labels based on the parameters you set forth (location, children's ages, family income, etc). You'll find these services in the yellow pages or Internet under "mailing lists." Remember to print enough copies of your direct mail piece to give to your supporters and visitors.

- Take advantage of your internal school publications:

Let the readers of your newsletter, alumni bulletin, and any other regular publications know that your Admission Office is always seeking qualified students. Insert a referral card or print a form in the publication.

- Create a Virtual Admission Office 24/7:

Your school must be accessible to families at the time families need you. That is why it makes good sense to employ the Internet as a fulltime recruiter.

In closing, it is very important that you keep a steady stream of inquiries flowing in to your school at all times. This helps offset the unexpected loss of students and creates a viable waiting pool of students to fill vacancies. Using the grassroots tactics and media-based tactics discussed will help you keep the stream flowing smoothly.