

St. Helen Catholic School Enrollment Kick-Off Event: Division A: Public Relations-Category: 11A Special Events

To promote St. Helen Catholic School (SHCS) and to maintain recruitment and admissions, the school hosted an Enrollment Kick-Off event on December 12, 2019. SHCS was founded in 1940 and is one of the largest ministries of St. Helen Catholic Church in Vero Beach, Florida. The project was necessary because enrollment at SHCS peaked in 2003-2004 at 299 students, after which it slowly waned. In 2014 admissions dwindled to 235 students. A review of secondary research showed that Catholic schools across the country have a problem-declining enrollment. The growth of school choice in the United States has provided for a 571% increase in the number of students in charter schools (Support 1.a.). Furthermore, according to the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) Annual Statistical Report on Catholic Schools for 2018-2019, elementary school enrollment has declined by 27.5% in 12 urban dioceses and 19.4% in the rest of the U.S since 2009 (Support 1.b.). A review of primary research conducted by the Diocese of Palm Beach suggested the following strategic implications which were utilized in planning and promoting this event (Support 1.c.):

- Catholics have a significantly more positive perception of Catholic schools compared to the broader community. Those who attended Catholic school growing up, or have a child enrolled in Catholic school, are most likely to be loyal to Catholic education. Parents feel parishes should be more involved in recruitment and promotion for Catholic schools, and church websites and publications are impactful for driving interest in Catholic schools.
- Parents highly value school safety, moral development, and structured learning environment, and these are areas in which Catholic schools have a notable advantage over non-Catholic schools.
- Current parents are our number one advocate. Word of mouth (other parents, alumni, Facebook) is one of the most important factors for prospective parents when considering where to send their child.

PLANNING GOAL DIRECTED STRATEGIC THINKING: The goal of this event was to drive new student enrollment, primarily in kindergarten, and also to engage our parish community in our school and Catholic education. This goal is specific to the philosophy and mission of our organization, which is to provide a quality Catholic education that incorporates faith, academics, and leadership. **SMART OBJECTIVES:** 1. Plan and execute a successful event in December 2019 to attract at least 15 attendees to visit SHCS. 2. As a result of this event, secure 25 kindergarten applications for the 2020-2021 school year by February 15, 2020. 3. In early October, develop a printed invitation and graphics to promote the event.

STRATEGIES & TACTICS DISTINGUISHED: 1. Target parents who are Catholic by using our current parents (word of mouth), social media, email, and direct mail. 2. Partner with other local Catholic churches that do not have Catholic schools to promote the event and engage the other parish communities in our school. 3. Target parents who have children enrolled in Pre-K programs throughout Indian River County. 4. Target parents who had previously toured the school but not enrolled their children. 5. A tactic used as an incentive to enroll early and attend the event is to offer a 50% discount on the enrollment fees for new families who attend the event and enroll. **AUDIENCE:** Following the primary research, we identified psychographic data and focused on Catholic families with school-aged children within St. Helen Catholic Church parish as well as our 3 feeder parishes. Another demographic targeted were parents of area preschool children who are school-aged (Support 1.d.). We also circled back with families who had toured the school previously but not enrolled their children.

IMPLEMENTATION-SEQUENCE OF EVENTS: The event was scheduled to take place on Thursday, December 12, 2019, in the school library and feature a welcome by the Principal, statements from Student Council Officers on the four pillars of the school and tours of the campus. Due to budget constraints, decorations for the event and continental breakfast items were

solicited from current families using a sign-up. Staff was identified for the event, and a meeting was held in early November to develop a checklist of activities, timeline, and schedule for the day a second meeting was held in early December to finalize details. Graphics were created, leveraging the strengths identified in marketing research, which highlighted our academic programs, school safety, and moral development. The graphics also highlighted the 50% discount and included information about the event, how to contact us, and connect with us on social media. Lastly, a postcard invitation was created that contained all the event details, which was used for mailing and distribution at area preschools and local Catholic churches (Support 4). The event was promoted to St. Helen parish at their ministry fair in early October. The school identified 86 families registered at St. Helen parish with children entering kindergarten, and a postcard invitation was mailed to each family. Additionally, in order to reach influencers and parents, the event was featured in multiple weekend church bulletins, posted on the school, and church social media pages and postcard invitations were placed in the church marketing racks and available after all masses leading up to the event. Our current parents, as our number one advocates, were engaged through weekly school e-newsletters and email messages (Support 2. & 3.). Eight local preschools were identified, and printed postcards were hand-delivered to each preschool and sent home with VPK children. Through these efforts, 325 kindergarten-age children were identified and invited to attend the event (Support 1.c, 2.b, 4.a). Lastly, postcards were also mailed to all families who had toured the school previously but not enrolled their children. (Support 2.c, 3.d., 4.a). **Effectiveness of Plan Messaging:** Messaging used for the event focused on the strengths identified in the primary market research and highlighted our academic programs, school safety, and moral development. The response received was very positive as the event was well attended, and we exceeded all of our goals. **Program/Plan Creativity:** Based on feedback received, the event was well-received by families visiting the campus. Data indicates they especially enjoyed touring the campus and getting a first-hand perspective of what life is like as a student at SHCS. The visual graphics used for the event provided color photos of actual students and campus activities.

Evaluation-Objectives & Goal Met: 1. We exceeded our goals in both attendance and new applications with an investment of under \$250.00. 2. We welcomed 21 families to the event and continued to receive multiple inquiries about enrollment by phone and email after the event (Support 5.a). 3. A total of 30 kindergarten applications were received as of February 15, 2020. Additionally, the kindergarten class for 2020-21 was at capacity with 25 students accepted and enrolled, and one student on the waitlist (Support 5.b). 4. The Facebook event created indicated a total reach of 972 people, with 374 people reached between November 12, 2019, and November 15, 2019, and 95-99 people reached between December 10, 2019, and December 14, 2019 (Support 5.c).

BUDGET: While quotes were received for print advertising and radio to promote the event, the funds were not available in the budget (Support 6.b.). As such, the event was produced using minimal financial resources and donations from volunteers. Printing of the mailers totaled \$158.91, and postage used was approximately \$82.50 (Support 6.a.). Volunteers were utilized for food and beverage items as well as decorations and other items needed for the event (Support 6.c.). The Development office is staffed by one full-time person who contributed approximately 80 hours to this event. Total staff for the day of the event was nine individuals who devoted nearly 35 hours total. All print and digital marketing produced for the event were created in house by the Development Director. Printing in church publications was at no cost to the school.

JUSTIFICATION: The ROI from this event exceeded the expectations of the Enrollment Kick-Off. We exceeded our goal of 25 kindergarten applications by 5 students, and also exceeded our goal of attendance by 6 families. All of this was achieved with a financial investment of less than \$250. Tuition for 2020-2021 is \$6,490.00 for each student; therefore, the extra students earned from this event totaled \$32,450 in revenue.