

"It's possible to have registered students who are not really 'sold' yet. So we reach out and get them involved in the Becahi community."

— **John Petruzzelli**
Principal
Bethlehem Catholic High School



TWO KEY FACTORS FOR ENROLLMENT SUCCESS:

- **Be Mission-Driven.** Tell your school's story in a clear, concise, and compelling way. Who are you? What do you do? What makes you unique? What do you aspire to be?
- **Be Data-Informed.** Use school-specific retention and enrollment data (openings by grade, re-registration numbers, prospect details) to identify challenges, develop solutions, and measure progress.

How

PURPOSE: Since its founding by the Sisters of St. Joseph in 1925, Bethlehem Catholic High School (Bethlehem, PA) grew from its first graduating class of 12 to its highest numbers during the 1960s, ushered in by a move to a new building. Current enrollment, at a healthy level, ranges from 700-750. Three years ago, the freshman class size had dropped to 163 from a typical range of 180-185. With a renewed focus on recruitment and retention, the school needed to improve how it welcomed new students.

APPROACH: A new full-time director of admissions position replaced the former part-time role. In addition to introducing tiered fees to incent earlier registration, the school made a concerted effort to regularly engage with new students. Bethlehem Catholic plans multiple points of contact with prospective and registered new families:

TO ENGAGE WITH THE NEWLY REGISTERED

- 8th grade parents' night, daytime visits for incoming freshmen and transfer students, and a November open house.
- Orientation days: 1) in April, for families to meet with representatives from academics, student affairs, student life, athletics, and more. Students receive their class T-shirts. 2) in August, with the assistance of peer listeners, for students to tour the building, meet teachers, receive locker assignments, and enjoy a class lunch.
- Regular correspondence: Christmas cards, postcards congratulating 8th graders on their graduation, letters over the summer from the principal and student council president, and updates for parents who sign up to receive emails.
- Summer activities, sports and music training and practices, providing early experiences in team building and interaction with students of all grade levels.
- An August barbeque for new students and families. Student council oversees the set-up and helps to create a warm welcome.
- A first day of school for new students only, with separate programs for freshmen and transfers.

"Each contact we make or event that we host can help build a sense of belonging and relieve any expected anxiety about the transition. It's our chance to share a taste of what goes on here."

— **Joe Henrich**

Director of Admissions
Bethlehem Catholic High School

INVOLVE CURRENT STUDENTS, REINFORCE THE DECISION

On shadow days at Bethlehem Catholic, each 8th grader is paired with a current 9th grader who has similar interests. Student ambassadors, who represent the school at community functions and through programs for partner elementary and middle schools, encourage and answer questions from prospective students. The school provides information on its peer listener program through which dedicated, trained students lend an ear and offer confidential support to any student in need.



OUTCOME: Bethlehem Catholic tracks enrollment progress meticulously. More than 85 percent of newly registered students attended the most recent orientation in April. Several weeks later, the school was up 17 new registrations over the same time last year and only 8 students shy of the total school goal. This year, the school will realize its first enrollment growth in five years. Bethlehem Catholic will continue with tactics that create a sense of community and deliver results.