



# How People and Technology Drove Admissions Growth at the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport

Diocese of Bridgeport, CT



## Customer Profile

Established: 2013

City / State:  
Bridgeport, CT

Grades: PK - 8

Enrollment: 900

School Type:  
Private Catholic

Number of Campuses: 4

Implemented: 2021

“As the Catholic Academy entered the new school year in 2021, **school enrollment had grown by nearly 20%** over the year before.”



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## The Challenge

Between the fall of 2019 and the fall of 2020, Catholic schools in the U.S. lost more than 111,000 students. It was the largest decline in nearly 50 years. From the 1960s, overall enrollment has plummeted from more than 5 million to about 1.7 million now. The long-term enrollment decline has resulted from demographic changes, parents' difficulty affording tuition and competition from public and other private schools. Factors related to the pandemic have only aggravated those problems.

In Connecticut, enrollment declines have led to numerous school closures and consolidations, with the majority of closures affecting elementary grades. For the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport (CAB), which is made up of four elementary schools on four campuses and comprised of 900 students, they were seeing similar consistent declines in enrollment. By 2019, enrollment numbers had dropped significantly, and despite efforts from the administration, the school could not reverse the trend. Before a closure was considered, the school began digging in to find out why they were losing students.

## Solution:

AdmissionsPlus

## Benefits:

- Innovate the entire admissions and enrollment process with online forms and step by step applicant tracking.
- Improve operations and communication between all four schools.
- Create a convenient, positive experience for parents and students.
- Use data, metrics and marketing to build stronger relationships and drive growth.

## About the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport

In 2013, four elementary schools in the Diocese of Bridgeport (St. Andrew Academy, St. Ann Academy, St. Augustine Academy, and St. Raphael Academy) were restructured into the Catholic Academy of Bridgeport.

Comprised of almost 900 students from Bridgeport and surrounding towns, the new school is located on four campuses.

With rigorous academics, student placements in the most competitive area high schools and robust financial assistance, it is a learning environment in which diversity of all kinds is valued and celebrated.

It took looking at the four campuses and seeing how they functioned to begin correcting the downward trend. It also took hiring an executive director to oversee the four campuses. Hired as Executive Director in July 2019, Angela Pohlen discovered that the four campuses were acting independently from one another so the left hand, so to speak, never knew what the right hand was doing. So, when a parent inquired about enrolling their child at one campus and found there was no space, the inquiry was never passed on to the other campuses.

With her wealth of instructional and systematic know-how, Pohlen worked to bring the four campuses together as a cohesive unit. Each campus would no longer act as an island but rather one school where each office knew what the other was doing. But to look at new ways to increase enrollment also took looking outside the box. Pohlen realized that they needed help from an outside source in order to improve their business practices and to facilitate growth.

"We had been exploring hiring an enrollment consultant as part of our strategic plan for over a year," said Pohlen. (We were looking for) "help with data and trend analysis as well as to help us utilize our resources better, and to work better together as an Academy," she said.

## The Solution

In the fall of 2019, CAB hired a consultant specializing in implementing growth strategies for private faith-based schools. Marie Keith, founder and president of Re-Consulting LLC, came to the school with eight years' experience helping Catholic schools remain open – and even flourish. After a thorough analysis of the school's current enrollment strategy and an assessment of how current inquiries were being handled, she collaborated with the central staff and school leaders to develop and implement an enrollment management plan.

What she discovered was that the schools did not have the parents' best interests in mind. Rather than offering convenient times for parents to apply, they limited them to school hours and piles of paperwork. She also saw that they were just keeping the campuses open, not increasing enrollment. But before spending more money on marketing and advertising, they needed to fix the internal operations first, she said. That meant utilizing technology.

"Parents aren't nine-to-fivers anymore," Keith pointed out. "If a parent is sitting at home at 9 p.m. thinking about their child's education, they need instant gratification. That means being able to fill out a form and have it sent to the school immediately. Then it becomes the school's job to follow up with that family. For schools, it's no longer a 'Field of Dreams', meaning 'if you build it they will come'. It's their job to chase them down, find out what their child's needs are and show them how their school can meet their needs," she said.

Knowing that the school used Rediker Software's Administrator's Plus school management software, and after a thorough evaluation of the tool, Keith encouraged the Catholic Academy to implement AdmissionsPlus. Because of its integration with Administrator's Plus, the school could help streamline the admissions and enrollment process with an online experience that was easy to use and offered families the convenience to apply from any device at any time, to schedule school visits, upload documents, submit forms, and more.

"AdmissionsPlus shows exactly where each applicant is in the process. I love that it all ports right over to the SIS to maintain them as a student," Keith said. "I also love that it's easy to use and all the admins took to it so easily. With support and accountability, the admins are held responsible for putting in great notes so that anyone who views an applicant's file can see exactly what contact has taken place and where they are in the process."

Keith also saw the importance of identifying the most qualified staff member at the school to own enrollment. Angela Mantero had been working as an admin at St. Ann's, one of the four school campuses, when she was tapped by Keith for the position of Enrollment Coordinator at the Catholic Academy. The CAB needed a leader, a driver, someone who saw the 'big picture' and how enrollment connected to everything that happens in a school (budget, hires, ordering of materials, space, etc.). Mantero had all that, plus she had the drive to succeed.

When Mantero was at St. Ann's, each campus office worked independently. But once Pohlen pulled the campuses together and Keith introduced AdmissionsPlus to the staff, everyone began to work as a team. There was some pushback initially using the software, said Mantero, but once everyone saw what the software could do, they no longer felt that what they had been doing was most efficient. Now as the administrator of AdmissionsPlus, she can view the four campuses globally and work as the clearinghouse where she can see how many prospects there are at each school and can send students where there are openings.

"I like how AdmissionsPlus streamlines the process between the four campuses, allows me to view all four campuses at once to monitor the process, and unites each campus in a common process," Mantero said. "I like how easy it is to modify an application, add forms, and customize it as we go. Being able to access it remotely, especially working virtually, is also important, and having information at our fingertips," she said.

Keith not only suggested implementing AdmissionsPlus, she helped get the software customized to meet the needs of each campus and assisted in having each campus admin trained equally. She worked directly with Rediker to customize the software for the CAB, had a great understanding of its capabilities from the beginning, and arranged all the training sessions for them according to their availability. And, as they learned more through the training sessions, Keith would point out what the software could do, suggest how they should/could use it to their best advantage, and encourage them to expand their thinking and ways of doing things to maximize the software's capabilities.

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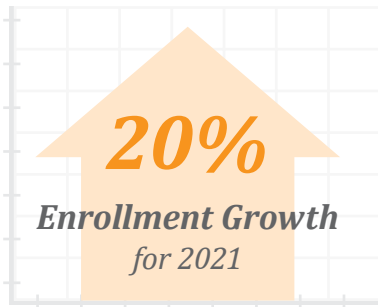
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Marie Keith  
President  
RE- CONSULTING, LLC.

#### Changes for the Better Lead to an Increase in Enrollment:

- Streamline enrollment from AdmissionsPlus to AdminPlus student information system.
- Offer responsive online forms for easy mobile use.
- Pinpoint each applicant in the admissions pipeline.
- Increase level of accountability, details and note taking per applicant profile.
- Implement technology and get people trained and motivated.
- Manage and customize real-time data between all four school.



### **Catholic Academy of Bridgeport Mission Statement**

The Catholic Academy of Bridgeport provides a Christ-centered, academically rigorous learning environment where cultural diversity is welcomed, Catholic values taught and all faiths celebrated. Students are nurtured, encouraged and challenged in preparation for a successful life of leadership and service.

## **The Results**

As the Catholic Academy entered the new school year in 2021, school enrollment had grown by nearly 20% over the year before. With an online admissions software to track and communicate with each applicant step by step through the entire admissions process, the school now offers prospective students and families a convenient experience for applying to any one of their campuses.

It enables them to apply at any time, not just when the school is open, and in several languages. The software benefits families by making the process simple and clear. Collecting all the necessary data from the beginning, in one place, allows the campus and the family to then focus on the experience of the school, having completed the “red tape” up front.

“It makes the process more professional and appear more competitive, creating a deeper desire in the family to attend the academy,” said Mantero. “There is a distinct process to applying to the CAB, it is not an automatic acceptance, and I believe this increased our value in their eyes.”

The CAB has been so impressed with the results of both AdmissionsPlus and with Keith, they have signed her on for another year to continue into the next phase of the admissions process. As they move forward they will focus on growth, data and metrics, marketing, and building relationships with the other ethnic communities where they see students coming from.

“I’d like to continue to grow the school another 10% to ideally reach their capacity of 1,000 for 22-23,” said Keith. “The CAB team and I are currently working with Rediker to institute continuous enrollment in lieu of chasing down families to re-enroll each year. Through this simple on-line process, we will be able to start enrolling new students much sooner and plan for expansion as needed,” she said.

They will also start analyzing the data in Rediker to determine things like demographics, how their leads heard about the CAB, what schools/daycares they are coming from, what their ratio of Catholic to non-Catholic is, and more. And now that the internal staff is trained on handling leads efficiently, they are ready to focus on bringing more leads in to the schools.

“We will do this by getting out into the community. Using the data we have, we can build relationships for referrals, churches that we will want to advertise, and so on, said Keith. “We will also build relationships within various ethnic communities where we see students coming.”

Pohlen is looking forward to having the CAB learn more aspects of the AdmissionsPlus software. “We want to be able to track touch points, make notes on where people hear about us, why they leave, and so on,” said Pohlen. “We believe that some of the internal processes we have put into place, along with using Rediker much more and across the four campuses to centralize our information, has contributed to our enrollment successes,” she said.

And Mantero says she now has the confidence to add forms to the application process, and as they realize certain paper forms they require (Home Language Survey, Records Release Forms, Health/Medical Records), that normally would have accompanied a paper application/registration, they can add them to the online application process from the beginning, making the admin's job easier.

Rediker Software's AdmissionsPlus now unites the four campuses to one Academy, as they want it to be. And each campus feels they are a part of the bigger Academy instead of an island unto themselves. Prospects get the same experience regardless of which campus they are applying to and they feel that Academy unity instead of different schools.

#### About RE-CONSULTING, LLC.

Marie Keith is the President of RE- CONSULTING, LLC. Keith partners with schools across the nation to provide consulting and coaching in enrollment management to help schools reach their goals. By first providing an assessment of current strategies and processes, she then helps implement best practices and becomes your enrollment coach. Working with the elementary and secondary school levels, Keith has taken schools, otherwise slated to be closed, to increases of up to 50% in enrollment. For more information, go to [www.re-consultingllc.com](http://www.re-consultingllc.com) or contact her at 215-360-1936.

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Angela Pohlen  
Executive Director

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