How to Win Students and Influence Parents
At The Enrollment Management Association, we believe that the admission practices of the past will not sustain the independent schools of the future. Every day, we serve enrollment leaders, increasing their success through the best science, research, and training.

**Because when great schools enroll great students, everything is possible.**
2017
The Ride To
Independent Schools
2,700 Families Tell Us About Their Journey
Who Responded

• 2,736 parents in the U.S., Canada, and worldwide
• Parents whose child took the SSAT between August 2016 and April 2017
• Respondents accurately reflect the distribution of parents in the SSAT database who were actively engaged in the 2016-17 independent school admission process.
Predominant Parent Profile

- White mother of an 8th grader currently enrolled in either a private/independent or public school
- Between the ages of 35 and 49
- With a household income of $250,000+
- Holding a post-graduate or professional degree
Moms are in charge.

78% of respondents were mothers.
“When we went to the revisit day, I was shocked that the boys’ a cappella group sang a song called “Fat Bottomed Girls” by Queen. Fat Bottomed girl, thank you for making a man out of me. It was surprising to me that a school would allow a song like that to represent them on such an important day. My son thinks I am ridiculous that it bothered me, but it did.”

Family Voices, Ride2
“Convincing Mom”

She’s a boarding school’s toughest customer: the powerful Gen-X mom with a powerful bias against giving her child up to boarding school. But, once convinced, this power mom can also become an outspoken advocate with other boarding-averse parents. Participants will learn how to convert skeptical Gen-X Moms who will in turn transform into influential Convincing Moms.

Convincing Mom Presentation
Available on enrollment.org
The child exerts a significant influence in the choice process.

83% noted that the child was to a great/very great extent a decision maker in the process to apply AND to enroll.
King’s Academy

King's Academy
Quantifying Impact of Videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Inquiries</th>
<th>Applications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011-2012</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012-2013</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>359</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013-2014</td>
<td>727</td>
<td>464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-2015</td>
<td>895</td>
<td>493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*2015-2016</td>
<td>1399</td>
<td>665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-2017</td>
<td>1131</td>
<td>631</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* “This Could Be Your School” video released.
Diversity is an important factor in deciding to apply.

More than half of respondents indicated exposing their child to a more diverse student group was important in deciding to apply to an independent school.
Almost 6-in-10 parents applied for financial aid
Private School, for K-12, in NYC Crosses the $50,000-a-Year Mark

Some parents increasingly are concerned that these K-12 schools are dominated by the city's most affluent families.
45% Not affordable

Of those families who were accepted to independent schools but will not attend, 45% of them stated it was not affordable.

26% Free options were of equal value

26% felt that free options were of equal value.
Money Matters

“I encourage schools to include their financial aid package with their admissions offer. Our first choice school did not do this and so we were put off and decided not to attend even though they later offered financial aid. Too late, we went with the school that was more transparent.”
Value Proposition

- 15 things to look for on tour
- List of things school doesn’t do
- [ASB Value Proposition](#)
Parents: Benefits Must Outweigh Cost

“Private schools struggle to articulate their value. It felt that the only benefit for a significant cost is better access to <college> counseling. Private schools should better sell educational benefits they offer vs. the costs they charge.”

The Enrollment Management Association

Family Voices, Ride2
International families begin the process more than two years out.
Cost is a considerable concern for international parents.

44% indicated that cost was the #1 concern.
## Strength of US Dollar

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Tuition</th>
<th>Tuition in RMB</th>
<th>US More Expensive By</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CT Boarding School</td>
<td>$63,805USD</td>
<td>422,893 RMB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ON Boarding School</td>
<td>$63,700 CDN</td>
<td>330,274 RMB</td>
<td>+$13,974 USD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harrow (UK)</td>
<td>38,550 £</td>
<td>338,229 RMB</td>
<td>+$12,773 USD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strength of USD relative to 2 dozen international currencies dramatically inflating tuition for families.
Changing International Landscape

- Increased Competition:
  - 30% more schools competing for same pool (IIE)
  - Day schools
  - Other countries
  - International schools
Motivation is critical to your marketing.

39% indicated they were just exploring other educational options.

20% are unsatisfied in their current educational environment.

30% are looking because their child is in the current school’s final grade.
Word of mouth is king.

31% indicate their primary method of research is parents of children in the school or who have attended the school.
School fairs are a mixed bag.

Less than half of families attend school fairs. Of those that attend fairs, nearly half indicated that they did NOT add school as a result of attending.
Parents do not follow a predictable path through the funnel.

**First Point of Contact with Schools**

- **33%** Filled out a general online inquiry form
- **18%** Registered for an open house at the school
- **15%** Called the admissions office
- **14%** Submitted an application to the school
- **11%** Emailed the admission office
Schools make a positive impact on engagement.

How committed were you to enrolling your student in a private/independent school?

- Before you researched: 77%
- After visiting: 86%
- When you applied: 88%
Face time with admission officers is important.

68% said having personal time with the admission officer was an extremely/very important factor in deciding whether or not to apply to that school.

78% said personal outreach by an admission officer by phone/email was extremely/very effective to learn about a school after a visit.
Parents want a common application.

- 44% said the school didn’t accept it
- 22% didn’t know it was an option
- 47% said the amount of work to apply was more than they expected
- 12% dropped school from consideration due to the amount of time involved in applying
Application Burnout

“It was just so much work. I was worn out and felt like I had taken on a part-time job. There were many other schools I did not have time to visit or apply to. All of the moms feel this way ... it is just too much of a burden on us, but we have no choice if we want our children to go to private schools. We did not get our first choice. We got our fourth choice. We want to reapply next year, but we are too exhausted.”
Getting them to campus is only the half of it.

Only 58% of parents apply to every school they visit.

13% of these families were discouraged from applying.

28% said they didn’t apply because the visit was unsatisfactory.
Tour Guides Need Training

“The first campus tour and revisit day are the most important touch points. The schools need to make sure that the current students who interact with potential students are highly trained, and understand their responsibility. I don’t think all schools understand this. Simply finding some student to give a tour, or host a revisit student, is not sufficient – we have rejected schools after the tour because the student guide was so poor, and we have rejected a school after revisit day for the same reason. I can’t stress this enough. I’ve heard similar stories from other parents.”

Family Voices, Ride2
Cyber-Stalking Applicants?

“One of the student guides was given the name of my daughter beforehand and looked her up on social media. By the time we went on the tour, the girl knew everything about my daughter, and this was incredibly unsettling. The same girl badmouthed the other schools we were visiting saying they had drug problems, etc.”

Family Voices, Ride2
Post visit surveys are a good source of feedback but too few schools are utilizing them.

**Received a Post-Visit Survey**
- Yes: 26%
- No: 74%

**Held Back Negative Feedback**
- Yes: 11%
- No: 80%

Chose not to complete survey
Revisit days can be more effective if families knew about them much earlier in the process.

87% indicated that the revisit was extremely/effective in deciding to enroll in a school

“It is a very important part of the process and it was over our spring break. Glad we skipped our spring and spent it in snowy New England but it would have been nice to have known the entire timeline more clearly.”
1 Parent, 2 Revisit Days
Which School Would You Choose?

“On one revisit day the school made a mistake and had my son tour a grade level two levels below where he was supposed to be (middle school vs high school). My poor child was stuck all day touring the wrong level and it was very upsetting. He did not select this school.”

“One school had a full day program for both parents and kids. The kids had their own program and the parents had a different program. It was absolutely phenomenal, unlike no other program, and I am a tough critic. I was engaged every moment of the day, it was so very well coordinated, and I got to meet a lot of other parents. My son ended up selecting this school.”

Family Voices, Ride2
We are losing kids from the pipeline.

Of those parents whose child has not been accepted or waitlisted, only 27% continue to apply to schools.
Both academic and non-academic factors are extremely important to parents.

- Develop and maintain a love of learning in your child: 97%
- To develop a strong moral character: 92%
- To provide an education that will challenge your child: 97%
- To support emotional and social development: 88%
1. **REFINE PROCESS**: Map out the steps of your school’s admission process and brainstorm how to clear roadblocks during each step. What could be made smoother? Would collaborations with other schools help? What could be more personalized? How does your data (from surveys, funnel tracking, etc.) inform the discussion?

2. **QUANTIFY MOTIVATIONS**: Work to understand different motivations of prospective families. Ask questions on the inquiry from and in the interview that get to the heart of these motivations. As a team, role play how to respond to families with different concerns and motivations.

Source: EMA 2017
3. MAXIMIZE THE VISIT: Given how important the school visit is to solidifying families’ interest, reconsider yours. At a minimum, are you providing personal time with an admission director? Conduct a survey post-visit to improve upon the experience.

4. SHOWCASE YOUR SCHOOL’s CHARACTER: How do you show your school’s strengths in the admission process in authentic ways? Find ways to demonstrate tangibly the benefits of social-emotional learning and character skill development at your school.

5. DISCUSS INVESTMENT: This survey shows that affordability is by far the number one concern of applying families in all income ranges. In light of this, objectively review the language you use around affordability. It is clear and transparent? Does it keep the door open to talking about options for financing?
6. DOUBLE DOWN ON DIGITAL: Does your website reflect the clear language and tone you want to communicate? What can you do through web tracking to learn more about your “stealth applicants”?

7. TARGET AND EDUCATE: For families new to independent schools, are you providing enough background and basic admission process information? Review your funnel data, broken down by the type of origin school (and by other demographic factors), to see where your process might be vulnerable to losing certain groups of prospects.

8. ENSURE INTERNAL ALIGNMENT: Provide specific expectations for department heads and key faculty related to outreach and engagement. Don’t forget your parent ambassadors — this survey reminds of us of the importance of parent to parent recommendations.

Source: EMA 2017
Download the Report
enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017
Kevin Plummer

Aimee Gruber
agruber@enrollment.org