

The Enrollment Management Association

# The Yield

Fall 2018 Edition

What's Possible

## The View from 30,000 Feet

Experts on the Latest Trends Impacting  
Enrollment Management in our Schools

**Inside:**

**In Perpetuity: Common Questions  
about Enrollment Contracts**

## Dear Colleagues,

At the end of every EMA Annual Conference, I am moved by the collegiality and professionalism of those attending. This year, however, my level of satisfaction and genuine joy at the camaraderie on exhibit was at an all-time high. Every session that I attended was focused on strategy and leadership. The opening awards ceremony, with thoughtful words from industry leaders David Baker (St. Mark's School of Texas, TX) and Dennis Facciolo (Tampa Preparatory School, FL), set a tone of professional gratitude and humility and made the time together more personal, even with 1,049 attendees! Whether it was UnMarketing guru Scott Stratten making us laugh at ourselves and see our brands through the eyes of parents, or closing speaker Ritu Bhasin reminding every attendee to be their "authentic self," our meeting in San Diego lived up to its "Stronger by Association" theme—and then some.



In the year to come, EMA will send along more tools to support you in your work. Watch for our latest *State of the Industry* report (2018) in late fall (I'd like to send a shout out to over 800 professionals who took the time to answer our survey, as well as the fellow associations that helped us collect additional data from their states or regions). Our Admission Leadership Council (ALC) has expanded its mentorship program and is building a thicker reference/resource online library for you this year (see page 42 for more information). We will also be working in the coming weeks to further educate our membership on the benefits of The Character Skills Snapshot (see more on page 41). And our testing season has gotten off to a great start. Be sure to avail yourselves of EMA's Student Prospect List so that you can connect with students already in the admission funnel who might benefit from YOUR school's offerings; to learn more about this tool, chat with your member associate or visit [enrollment.org/studentlists](http://enrollment.org/studentlists).

In this issue of *The Yield*, we leaned on a different segment of our community for the cover story—the consultants and experts serving schools with enrollment and other business challenges. They will update you on the emerging trends that they see in their work with multiple schools. Check out the cover article and share it with your administrative team if these trends resonate with your experience.

Finally, I want to double down on this year's conference theme and ask you to consider how you might work to become #StrongerByAssociation. What challenges do you face in your work that might be overcome by working with colleagues in collaboration, not competition? We have many examples of positive advances in our work together to date...but I contend that we haven't even scratched the surface of possibilities that could allow all EMA members to experience future enrollment success.

Let's get started!

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Heather Hoerle".

Heather Hoerle, Executive Director, The Enrollment Management Association



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# + On the **Plus** Side

Our team brings our research, offerings, and training to life at school, consortia, and association events. The Enrollment Management Association is here for you, where you are. We're thrilled to connect with our community across the country every day.



◀ Admission Training Institute faculty close out this year's ATI training: l-r **Jasmine Harris**, The Lamplighter School (TX), **David Baker**, St. Mark's School of Texas (TX), **Ayesha Flaherty**, The Langley School (VA), **Anne Behnke**, St. Mark's School (MA), **Steve Brown**, The Lovett School (GA), **Molly Dorais**, Colorado Rocky Mountain School (CO), and **Eric Barber**, Crossroads School for Arts and Sciences (CA). Not pictured: ATI Chair **Tom Sheppard**, St. Andrew's Episcopal School (MN)



▶ EMA Director of Business Development **Dave Taibl** poses with **Matti Donkor**, director of enrollment management at Madeira School (VA) at the ALC seminar in Washington, DC.

◀ EMA's Future Leaders participants out on the town at The Punch Bowl Social in Detroit, MI.

EMA Director of Product Strategy **Kate Auger-Campbell** visits the Lakefield College (ON) admission office. L to R: Kate, **Valerie Marlow**, **Sarah Milligan**, **Leslie Schumacher**, **Barb Rutherford**, **Felicia Neil**, and **Jessica Hart**. ▶



Chief Member Services Officer **Peter Baron** addresses the room at the 2018 Annual Conference. ▶



The 2018 Future Leaders participants take time for a group photo. ▼



EMA Director of Business Development **Christina Dotchin** (second from right) and Membership Associate **Heather Hyslop** (far right) meet with Los Angeles area schools. L to R: **Lauren Windom** (director of admissions, Brentwood School), **Aaron Mieszczanski** (director of admission, Harvard-Westlake School), **Jeanette Woo Chitjian** (director of enrollment management, Marlborough School). ▼

▶ Attendees enjoy 2018 Annual Conference keynote speaker Scott Stratten.



# The View from 30,000 Feet

## Experts on the latest trends impacting enrollment management in our schools

Sometimes to see more clearly, it helps to take a step back and listen to others' perspectives. *The Yield* spoke with experienced professionals who, while they don't work *in* admission offices, are very close to them: enrollment, hiring, and marketing consultants. They shared the trends they are seeing in today's and tomorrow's independent schools, based on their work with hundreds of independent schools of all shapes and sizes, and in all regions.



**Chris Baker** of The Baker Group works to bring professional strategic thinking and practices of enrollment management to independent schools. She is an EMA trustee.



**Rick Newberry** of Enrollment Catalyst is a private school marketing and strategic specialist.



**Scott Barron and Tammy Barron** are the CEO and president/senior partner of School Growth, whose mission is to "grow schools and the people who have the courage to lead them."



**Doreen Oleson** is a search consultant at Resource Group 175, following 25 years of independent school headship.



**Americus Reed II** is an EMA trustee and professor of marketing at UPenn's Wharton School of Business. His research focuses on branding and the psychological elements that guide consumers' decisions.



**Orpheus Crutchfield**, president and founder of Strategenius, works with schools to increase their capacity to become more welcoming, inclusive, and supportive of diversity.



**Bradford Reed** is principal consultant at Admission Management LLC, where his work includes assisting admission offices in optimizing their structure and evaluating their processes.



**Kathy Hanson**, a senior consultant at Marts & Lundy and a former EMA trustee, has 20 years' experience in independent school marketing.



**Jesse Roberts** is CEO of Admission Pro, a strategic enrollment service that aims to bring a business approach to the admission office.



**Dana Nelson-Isaacs**, founder and principal of DNI Consulting, has nearly 20 years of experience working with school leaders to create effective strategies to cultivate a robust student body.



**Ian Symmonds** of Ian Symmonds & Associates helps schools with strategic planning, positioning, marketing, identity, and enrollment management.



## Collaboration: Embracing the Role of “Connector in Chief”

When leading consultants were asked to consider today’s admission environment, collaboration was top-of-mind.

Tammy Barron sees great opportunity for admission and enrollment to play a leading role in school-wide collaboration. She explains that the most effective admission directors have their fingers on the pulse of what’s happening both inside and outside of their schools. “Understanding all of the different perspectives and connecting the dots for everyone is such a valuable consultative role that admission directors can play in their schools.” Scott Barron adds, “The admission office has access to a lot of very valuable data that, if collected well, could be shared with the administration and lead to overall school improvement.”

It’s unfortunate that so many admission officers still operate in silos, missing that golden opportunity to serve as school “connectors in chief.” The Barrons see collaboration between the business office, the advancement department, and admission as a huge advantage. Further, Tammy says, while many admission directors know they need to engage with constituencies like the board, the head, and division heads, some struggle with how to do so—what information they need to know and how to effectively share it. Likewise, many know they need to be data driven, but struggle with what that means practically. They ask, “What information do I keep? How do I report it forward? What do those reports look like? What information can I share and how do I analyze it?”

The head of school must play a role in creating a culture of collaboration, says Kathy Hanson. “A head of school who understands the value of collaboration among the divisions of the school, both inward and outward facing, creates a cooperative framework for the various departments.” In reality, however, she says most schools “do not have the expectation that admission, advancement, and marketing/communications will have any type of formal association, or will collaborate on messaging.” What’s stopping such collaboration? Hanson says many schools haven’t recognized how individual departments could be strengthened through communication and shared research results, and some hold on to outdated notions about protecting data: “There is so much to gain from cross-department collaboration and the schools that are doing it well are exceeding cultural expectations and increasing enrollment and parent satisfaction.”

## Positioned for the Leadership Pipeline

Chris Baker agrees with Tammy Barron that effective admission and enrollment directors have a unique perspective that draws from their knowledge of all areas of the school. She believes that when enrollment directors access their institutional knowledge, embrace the role of collaborator, and combine these with their externally focused efforts, they become ideal school leaders.

“Enrollment directors have more in common with the head of school than anyone else on campus. No one else straddles the internal and external worlds like they do,” she asserts. Although Baker is impressed with the growing level of professionalism she sees in admission and enrollment, she asserts there’s still much more work to be done in gaining respect for current enrollment managers and offering ways to expand the enrollment management mindset of independent school professionals among (and beyond) those serving in admission: “This in turn will raise admission professionals’ competence and confidence levels. Independent schools need to hire thoughtful enrollment managers to be heads of school, and the admission profession must continue to cultivate strong enrollment managers.”

In her work as a search consultant, Doreen Oleson is seeing that some of the best new administrative and headship candidates are “prominent and successful enrollment officers.” In the interview process, they demonstrate familiarity with industry trends and great ability as storytellers. She adds, “They can market, they can communicate. They’re very effective as team players. They have a strong set of organizational and management skills and a great sense of humor.” Where she has seen some of these candidates struggle is with questions related to school challenges that go beyond enrollment. She encourages enrollment directors who aspire to headship to gain more understanding about issues relevant to whole-school management.

## Cultivating Communities of Color

Orpheus Crutchfield works with school leaders on overcoming what he feels is a major limitation to their efforts to meet their diversity goals in enrollment (as well as in leadership development and hiring)—that is, the ongoing historical difficulty in cultivating true communities of color. “This includes not just enrolling students

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## The View from 30,000 Feet (continued)

### Six Characteristics of Successful Leaders

In today's challenging enrollment environment, Chris Baker says successful heads of school and directors of enrollment management must be:

1. Visionary and strategic
2. Analytical
3. Collaborative
4. Balanced in intelligence and emotional quotients (IQ and EQ)
5. Calculated risk takers
6. Leaders with a sense of urgency



of color," he says, "but having supporting programs, developing together a deep understanding of mission." He continues, "One of the huge issues that has really come to light is that particularly communities of color, but maybe even all lower income families, are not feeling ownership within the school. They feel like they're guests, and everyone else owns the school." He describes examples of mutually beneficial partnerships happening between some schools and their local communities—where they are "building relationships, not transactions" and acknowledges the interest many independent schools have taken in engaging in difficult but important conversations, including those about white privilege and implicit/unconscious bias, and states that it all begins in the boardroom. "This must be a top down philosophy. I've walked into many schools in which the board and school leadership lack diversity and perspective."

### Marketing: Believing, Investing, and Thinking Boldly

A number of consultants highlighted trends they are seeing in marketing: an overall acceptance of its importance as well as new strategies and messages.

In his work with schools, Americus Reed II focuses on encouraging them to "seriously invest in their brand." He explains that schools—like brands—provide something above and beyond educational content, something that transcends a building or a curriculum. Such an investment involves more than a website, a tagline, and matching colors. "That's the easy part, the outward-facing tactical part. The hard part is infusing that into every single fiber, every aspect of what you're doing, and using your brand as a way to make decisions every day about HR, enrollment, and strategy."

Reed does see some shift in schools' acceptance of this broader view of branding and marketing—likely because of the sense of urgency brought on by the tightening market. "They're starting to see parallels in the corporate world, where you have companies like Apple, whose success is built largely on ensuring the brand is front and center as a vehicle for strategy and decision making."

In terms of marketing investment, Rick Newberry describes a real divide among schools: "There's definitely the sophisticated independent school with the high tuition rate, where they're investing resources in enrollment management and marketing, and they're involved in the latest and greatest strategies. But I'm also seeing schools that aren't. They don't have the right personnel in

### Mobilizing the Internal Marketing Machine

Are you maximizing your internal marketing resources? Tammy Barron says schools will grow more by investing here. Students, faculty and staff, coaches, administrators, current parents, and board members can all make your school and its unique features and mission come alive through a carefully crafted strategic plan and brand narrative. Internal marketing involves building relationships with these constituents, providing accurate information, and building a sense of investment in admission as a whole-school endeavor. "It's the most effective, most underutilized, and least expensive marketing schools can use. We call it fueling the machine, energizing the base, and mobilizing the masses."

place. They're not investing one to three percent of their operational budget in marketing. And they're sensing the need for knowledge about how to reach their markets. Investment in market research is critical and enrollment teams need to start the conversation with the board, starting with the data they have on hand and advocating for funds to get the data they need."

## Personalization, Plus

Like Americus Reed II, Jesse Roberts has begun to see a growing understanding of the need to use more sophisticated marketing and communication techniques and tools that have long been used in the corporate world. Some schools are taking positive steps to understand prospectives' online behavior and provide deeper personalization (and opportunity for two-way conversation) at every step of the inquiry/enrollment journey.

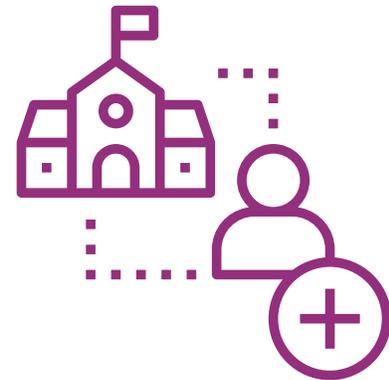
For example, he's worked with some schools on setting up chat windows as a way to facilitate an immediate conversation with prospects who are doing research online. He explains, "Sometimes prospects just want to dive in and have a quick conversation—it may be anonymous, but it may also spark the next step." Similarly, Roberts thinks schools should behave a little like Amazon: "I think schools should start to see individualization as a behavioral trend and not just something that stores do." If a prospect inquires via a school's website about a particular aspect, the school can interact by providing more information on related areas of interest.

Another positive marketing trend Roberts has seen is that of moving away from "facts and figures differentiation" and moving "towards that emotional engagement that you need to get somebody to buy into your school." Part of telling a school's story effectively, says Roberts, is to tell it from the eyes of the customer or, as he puts it, "flipping the script." Instead of thinking, "We need to get the word out," a school asks the question, "How can we best tell our story to the people that need to hear it and in the places that they want to consume the message?"

Scott Barron puts the notion of "flipping the script" in this way: "Most of the time a school has the communication habit of talking about features—our curriculum, our faculty, our technology, etc. You end up selling the bacon and not the sizzle. What we have found is the post-millennial family is very interested in being the hero of the narrative versus the school being the hero. That changes how you tell your story."

Dana Nelson-Isaacs has heard the same type of feedback in her work: "Parents want a focus on little things that demonstrate the school knows and cares about their family, like being recognized and called by name when they come to campus, or an accept letter with a personalized message—not just a mail merge with the child's name. Missing these details can have a really negative impact on families. Parents will tell me they heard great things about a school, but didn't feel that the school really got to know their child through the process."

Kathy Hanson agrees with the importance of starting with the customer's point of view in all communications—even routine interactions with current parents. Too often in independent schools, she says, "the communication comes out when it's timely for the school, not when parents need and want to hear the information." To Hanson's earlier point, better collaboration between enrollment, advancement, and administrative teams could revolutionize the marketing within a schools.



## Setting Clear Expectations Between Admission and Marketing

Jesse Roberts thinks expectations for admission offices are often unrealistic and unclear—i.e., "We need 250 new students. Now, go!" He advocates for admission and enrollment offices to establish clearer partnerships with marketing offices to determine together how to achieve goals and set accountability.

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# The View from 30,000 Feet (continued)

## New Recruitment and Retention Tactics

Rick Newberry reports on strategies he's seeing schools use more frequently to broaden their funnel—including the use of "variable tuition" (or sliding scale/indexed tuition), a model in which tuition is offered at the level each family can afford. Given the tightening economics and rising tuitions of today, Newberry explains that more prospective families may react to tuition "sticker shock" and make a decision not to apply or enroll at a school. He describes variable tuition as a better way to communicate tuition, financial aid, and affordability. "We're not changing anything about the strategy of tuition and financial aid, or the process. We're changing the messaging of it so we can be more appealing to the community to help grow the enrollment of the school."

A retention strategy Newberry has seen used more in recent years is "continuous enrollment" (or perpetual enrollment). As he explains, it's a move away from an annual re-enrollment process "where you're planting seeds of doubt asking families to opt back in for another year." He says that in his experience with schools, "continuous enrollment has been an opportunity to change the marketing conversation and streamline the process, allowing families to recognize that they are already a critical thread in the community and eliminating the need for them to question their place." For more on this topic, see Debra Wilson's article on page 18.

## Broadening the Funnel, Broadening the Outlook

One mistake that Chris Baker sees independent schools making year after year is not thinking broadly about who their real competition is and the opportunities that need to be explored to identify prospects outside traditional avenues: "Too many independent schools consider their biggest competition to be another independent school, or other independent schools in their market. Because of this myopic view of their market, schools are missing top of the funnel expansion opportunities and increased points of prospect identification and development. While independent schools have improved marketing efforts within their admission funnels, fewer new prospects are being reached by current marketing efforts. Independent schools continue to share a limited group of prospective families; we're not making the pie bigger."

Baker does see a few key opportunities on the horizon for broadening the funnel. For example, she points to a survey that shows that 38% of millennial parents would prefer private education over public education for their children. She acknowledges that successfully reaching the next generation of prospective parents will take some new thinking: "Because millennials are saddled with more college debt than previous generations and have lower average household incomes than their parents, they don't have the disposable income their parents had to spend on independent school. It's critical that independent schools determine ways to become more affordable to these families, as well as clarifying their distinctiveness and value. Additionally, schools should consider expanding marketing efforts to the older generation of grandparents, who have more disposable income for our high tuitions. It also makes sense to pressure boards and administration to explore cost cutting measures to make our programs more affordable, and to identify new sources of revenue."

### Learning from Your Most Committed Families

Wouldn't you like to get to the heart of what's most valuable about your school? Jesse Roberts helps his school clients do just that. "I map out all of their current families and pick the four that travel the farthest and talk to them to find out more about them. Because those are the ones who are really committed to your school. They're driving past other options to get to you. So what is it that makes you so special?"

She cites examples of schools thinking outside of the box to broaden their reach—taking calculated risks and building strategies for growth that are based on what they know about their specific markets and locations. For example, one school in Cleveland looking to enhance its enrollment and school profile started by first collecting market data to determine what the local trends suggested and what the market needed. Informed by those data, the school adopted a strategic plan to reshape the curriculum, enhance certain programs, and improve facilities. To expand their footprint and build their prospect pool in two parts of the city, they merged with a struggling primary-middle school, allowing them to have two schools in two parts of the city that fed into the upper school. They also invested in modernizing and refurbishing a facility near the medical and university center of the city to have closer



access to Cleveland’s resources and “brain trust.” What that school has done, says Baker, is “they’ve accessed critical data, took a hard look at current programs, embraced a natural resource, Cleveland, and created a plan that reflects a new normal.”

Ian Symmonds says schools need to do more of this kind of out-of-the-box thinking. In fact, for Symmonds, if there’s a silver lining in today’s struggling industry, it is that some schools are thinking more strategically and becoming more open to the possibilities of repositioning and restructuring how they deliver their education.

“Independent schools are selling a very high-quality product at a very high price. And we know that demand for that product has gone down across the country,” he says. “Schools are trying to figure out: ‘Is this a matter of us working harder and more efficiently and optimizing things? Or are there more structural or endemic things facing us?’” He says the answer to both questions is yes. “Schools and enrollment teams must get their operational house in order, and really make sure they’ve optimized their people and assets and systems. But they must also be willing to make the structural changes that’ll make their schools thrive in the future.” And indeed, he has seen some schools starting to ask big questions. “I see leaders rethinking the size of the school, rethinking assumptions about what facilities need to look like in line with the marketplace, looking differently at how else to creatively deliver their educational model and reach a wider audience—including hybrid learning, online learning, and making use of latent or unused capacity.”

To Symmonds, it’s clear that our greatest asset is our independence—our nimbleness. He encourages schools and enrollment offices that are not embracing that nimbleness to rethink the way they operate and adjust to changing markets. “It will only set you up for success,” he says.

Scott Barron comments on a similar thread—what he sees as the school’s need to continuously innovate in a fast-changing market. At most schools, there is a traditional long-term planning cycle and a lack of tools and commitment to utilize shorter tactical cycles of innovation. “There are some tensions right now from board members and donors who are expecting faster thinking and learning,” he says. However, he has seen some schools “able to overcome some of the enrollment threats when they can shorten their learning cycles through continuous improvement” and use long-term planning for vision casting and competitive positioning.

## Thinking Outside the Messaging Box

One way to broaden the admission funnel is to expand messaging about the value of an independent school education and experience. Chris Baker feels one key message that remains untapped is how well we engage in parenting partnerships. “Parenting is difficult, especially middle and high schoolers, with today’s challenges. Since independent schools have long and successful track records as parenting partners, it is important to market the connection our schools have helping parents parent their child. Independent schools have always done this really well. Now more than ever, parents need us. That is what distinguishes us from any other option out there.”

Scott Barron believes that schools should make their faculties their first target market. “If you look at the data available from EMA’s research ([enrollment.org/whyytheyapply2017](http://enrollment.org/whyytheyapply2017)), perceived teacher quality and engagement is a primary driver for families choosing a private school. So often our independent schools are thinking of their students as being their product. But we have found it’s actually a better approach to prioritize your faculty as the primary product and the experience that they’re creating on a daily basis. Because you can control those variables. The majority of schools can’t control the numerous factors that influence student outcomes.” Admission and enrollment directors, if they use their data wisely, can significantly contribute to helping schools assess and improve the perception of teacher quality.

## Leadership: Elevating the Industry’s Professionalism

The consultants with whom we spoke held varying views about the degree to which admission directors are embracing the role of enrollment management and taking their seats at the leadership table.

It’s clear to Brad Reed that as an industry, we’ve hit the tuition tipping point, where the full-pay family market has gone below a critical point. “As times get more difficult, you need to be realistic about what your enrollment goals are for the purpose of building budgets,” he says, “and the admission or enrollment director needs to be at the table to help set realistic goals.” Reed is seeing some evidence of leaders coming around to that thinking: “Heads of school are beginning to realize that the director of admission or enrollment is the chief revenue officer of the school.” In his work, Reed often coaches admission and enrollment

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## The View from 30,000 Feet (continued)

directors to earn their spot at the leadership table. He encourages them to gain a better understanding of all the processes in their office (including, importantly, the complexities of financial aid) and to own the data so as to become a go-to person for leadership.

Like Reed, Tammy and Scott Barron encourage admission and enrollment directors to use their data and relationship expertise to earn their place at the leadership table and even greater influence. They hear too many board members lamenting that they don't have the information they need about admission/enrollment—especially in important areas like attrition. "It's time to take control and better utilize your data. You can start today, incrementally, to achieve success and momentum. That's the fastest and most effective way to gain credibility and influence. The data will get you there."

Jesse Roberts also sees that not enough admission and enrollment directors are embracing data and the big picture. "I would love to see a stronger focus on that bigger picture and interest in how to look at trend lines and look at your market in a way that will help you see through the clutter."

Dana Nelson-Isaacs echoes this sentiment: "Enrollment managers may have the skills to be very data informed, but often must create the time or the head space to utilize it. Using available data wisely to inform strategy can lead to significant budgetary savings that can be redirected where needed."

Rick Newberry coaches many admission professionals on elevating their professionalism and strategic approach. He always insists that heads sit in on his coaching sessions so they can absorb the importance of enrollment management and what it involves: "Enrollment, let's face it, is the lifeblood of the school. Tuition dollars fund the overall operational budget of the school. The head of school needs to be actively involved in supporting the admission director and the marketing director."

### **Taken together, the advice from these consultants encourages admission and enrollment directors to take steps like the following to succeed professionally and help their schools thrive in today's challenging enrollment environment:**

- 1.** Collaborate. Make the most of your access to internal and external constituents to improve enrollment efforts and your school itself.
- 2.** Earn your spot at the leadership table. Focus on the big picture and become the data go-to person for school leaders.
- 3.** Be part of a school-wide effort to nurture communities of color.
- 4.** Invest in your school brand fully. Go beyond colors and taglines and make your brand a center point for decision making.
- 5.** Think like Apple and Amazon. Don't be afraid to use sophisticated, personalized communication techniques that can enhance the admission experience.
- 6.** Mobilize your internal marketing machine. Build relationships with—and empower—parents, faculty, and other constituents who can best tell your school's story.
- 7.** Take a fresh look at your messaging. What key messages are you overlooking? "Flip the script" to put your customer at the heart of your narrative.
- 8.** Think boldly and broadly about your competition and your prospects.
- 9.** Get your enrollment operation in order, but also be open to big changes that will allow your school to thrive.
- 10.** Be nimble in your planning. Adopt shorter cycles of planning and innovation.