

The Enrollment Management Association

# The Yield

Spring/Summer 2018 Edition

What's Possible

***THEY SAID WHAT?!***

**PARENTS GET REAL  
ABOUT ADMISSION**





## Dear Colleagues,

Marketing guru Scott Stratten, this September's Annual Conference keynote speaker, asserts that today's parents are loyal to one thing only—their children. His insights will certainly be useful as our independent school community works to address the new needs and interests of our changing customers. For some time, EMA has watched national lower school trends that indicate millennial parents seek a different set of benefits when considering independent schools for their children. What are those new needs expressed by families as they seek a great education for their offspring? EMA is ready to work with our members to take stock and reconsider traditional messages that may no longer resonate with today's and tomorrow's parents and students.



Because EMA is responsible for delivering nearly 90,000 SSATs and 45,000+ SAO applications annually to families, students, and our member schools, we have a unique vantage point in working with all parties to better understand changing dynamics. EMA first undertook a wide scale survey of parents in 2014 and presented the results to our membership in *The Ride to Independent Schools*. We carried out this same survey with a new group of parents last summer (seeking admission for fall 2017) and more than 2,700 parents responded. Our 2017 parent group had a lot to say! It is clear that parents want to be heard during the admission process and they have strong opinions about what's working and what's not.

While we issued the aggregate data report and analysis in last fall's *2017 The Ride to Independent Schools* (visit [enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017](http://enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017)), we thought it was equally important to provide you with parent quotes to illuminate the numbers with real life, real campus experiences. Our spring Admission Leadership Council (ALC) seminars, held across the country, and this issue's cover story seek to explore the sometimes funny, sometimes concerning parent feedback that was received.

This same research also uncovered family anxiety about the admission process, which feels byzantine to many. When our industry doesn't work together to deliver a process that is consistent, manageable, and equitable to all, everyone loses. In the year ahead, EMA will continue to push forward on the work of educating our schools about the changing dynamics that affect enrollment success. We are thrilled to announce two new statewide partnerships with the Association of Independent Maryland Schools (AIMS) and The Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) (see the article on page 42), through which all independent schools in these states will use the same application tool (EMA's SAO) to make applying less time consuming; these same associations will also be helping EMA to better understand how we can support families who are not admitted in round one so they can be redirected to other schools with openings. We believe these new partnerships will be something for the rest of our industry to watch, as one clear feedback point from parents is that our process is overwhelming—and so demanding that they drop schools from their list in order to avoid the application process itself.

I wish you a restful summer with time for both reflection and new strategy building. Don't forget to sign up soon for our Annual Conference in San Diego, which will be chock full of strong sessions to support your particular admission and enrollment challenges.

All the best,

Heather Hoerle, Executive Director, The Enrollment Management Association



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The Enrollment Management Association

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# Stronger by Association

2018 Annual Conference **San Diego**



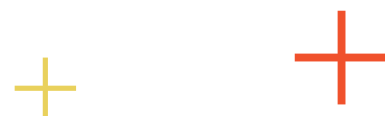
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# + On the **Plus** Side

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.



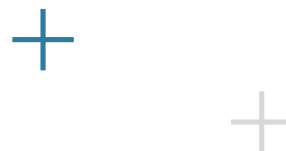
◀ Director of Outreach **Dave Taibl** presents at the ALC seminar at Sidwell Friends School in Washington, DC.



Director of Outreach **Kate Auger-Campbell** is joined by attendees at the Connecticut ALC seminar, hosted by Westover School. From left, **Kate Auger-Campbell**, EMA, **Anne Stanley**, ASSIST, **Angela Wardlaw**, Hopkins School, EMA trustee **Jon Deveau**, Westminster School, **Pam McKenna**, Hopkins School, and **Janet Izzo**, Hamden Hall Country Day School. ▼

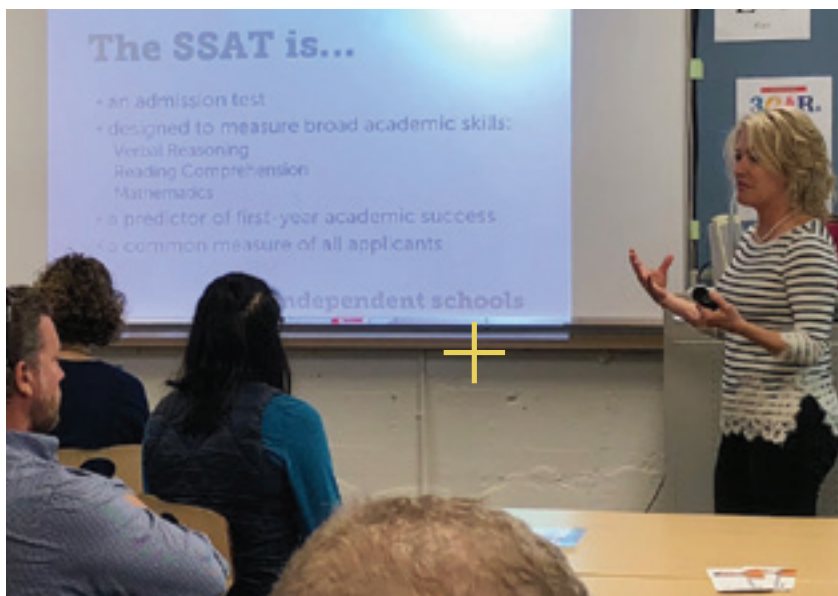


◀ (l-r) **Nekia Waller**, **Sarah Meteyer**, and **Megan Holmes** of Friends School of Baltimore (MD) at the ALC seminar in Washington, DC.





Senior Director of Outreach **Aimee Gruber** presents on the SSAT at a meeting for Epiphany School and Bertschi School (WA) parents beginning the middle school admission process. ▶



EMA Directors of Outreach are joined by members at the IECA Water Cooler gathering hosted by **Bini Egertson** at Brooks School (MA). From left, **Kristin Power**, SSS, **Christina Dotchin**, EMA, **Brian Hetzel**, Holt & Hetzel Consulting, **Bini Egertson**, Brooks School, **Krissy Naspo**, The Bertram Group, **Kate Auger-Campbell**, EMA, **Holly Treat**, The Bertram Group. ▼



The Blake School (MN) staff welcomes EMA for a visit. (l-r): **CJ Jones Eckhardt**, **Beth Pliego**, **Lynn Loew**, **Adriana Matzke**, **Deana Jaeschke Clapp**, **Joe Silvestri**, and **Kelly Wilder**. ▶



▲ (l-r) **Laura Nakatani** and **Kate Gallery** of Capitol Hill Day School (DC) attend an ALC seminar. +

Attendees gather at the G32+ Character Skills Snapshot Summit in Princeton in May. ▼



# ***THEY SAID WHAT?!***

## **PARENTS GET REAL ABOUT ADMISSION**

Whether your school employs a process for collecting feedback from families who do and don't accept an offer of admission, can you be certain you're receiving honest responses? We decided to find out what parents really think about the admission process—for the second time—with an extensive survey of parents seeking to enroll their children in independent schools.

Without a "horse in the race" other than improving the process and informing schools, and therefore the ability to collect a more candid set of responses, The Enrollment Management Association (EMA) surveyed parents who completed the process of applying to independent schools in 2016-17. The survey drew more than 2,700 responses. Participants spent from 25 to 40 minutes on their answers, indicating that this is a group with a lot to say.





After perusing the responses and analyzing the data in a seminal report entitled 2017 *The Ride to Independent Schools* ([enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017](http://enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017)), we felt it was important to share the remarks beyond the statistics with our community. These parents spoke honestly about what is working in the admission process and what isn't. Here, we delve into some of the reactions from parents that schools can act on to ease the process and turn prospects into applicants.

### TELL THEM THEY'RE SPECIAL

Your communication strategy can make or break your relationship with parents before it has even begun. Parents were outspoken about emphasizing that the amount and type of communication they had with schools was critical to their decision to explore further or drop a school from consideration. It's clear that families want to be heard and to be treated personally and authentically.

In this age of the stealth applicant, how are families gathering initial information? Digital media aside, many of them are getting it the old fashioned way: thirty-one percent of parents who responded to the survey said that they began researching independent schools by talking to other parents.

*"The day this school was recommended to us, I just so happened to run into a woman and her daughter (wearing the school uniform) at a local store. When I inquired about their experience at the school both the mother and her child had nothing but extremely positive things to say. That gave me a really good feeling from the start."*


Well before reaching families through school fairs and campus visits, parents are already communicating with each other through word of mouth. Schools that take this important factor into account are those that put themselves in the driver's seat, anticipating what families will say and controlling the narrative to the best of their ability.

### WORK YOUR WEBSITE

*"It would be great to have more detailed information [about] each school; for example, its culture, school life, teacher/student relationships, etc. The school website is helpful, but they all look very similar and formal, [I] can't feel the 'true' picture of the school."*

In addition to speaking with other parents directly, today's prospect can find a wealth of information online. A quarter of respondents said that school websites are their primary means of researching school options.

**WE SUGGEST:** Make your website exceptional, make it a data mine, and make it a form of personalized communication. "Let's say that I know that you've been on my website by your IP address and you fill out a web form that says, 'Hey, I want to hear from the soccer coach,'" illustrates Jesse Roberts, CEO of Admission Pro. "You have now officially self-identified. We can examine the browsing history, take that information and score the engagement to see how in love you are with my school. I can see how strongly you are paying attention to my website, and if you're answering my emails (or at least opening them and clicking through them), or sharing things to social media. Now I can start to score that engagement, and those engagement scores are directly correlated to enrollment."<sup>1</sup>

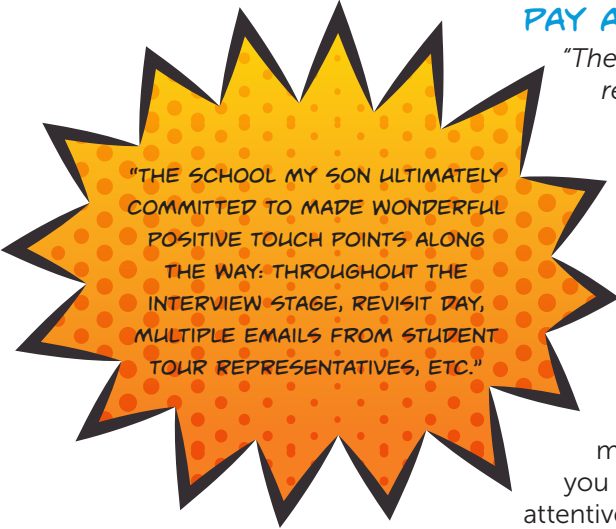


"THERE IS PLENTY OF INFORMATION VIA THE SCHOOL WEBSITES, AND IT WAS A JOY TO GO THROUGH THEM AND HELP MY DAUGHTER NARROW IT DOWN. I WAS VERY IMPRESSED BY THE LOOK AND FEEL OF THE SITES AND THE HIGH LEVEL OF PROFESSIONALISM."

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## THEY SAID WHAT?! (CONTINUED)

### PAY ATTENTION



"THE SCHOOL MY SON ULTIMATELY COMMITTED TO MADE WONDERFUL POSITIVE TOUCH POINTS ALONG THE WAY: THROUGHOUT THE INTERVIEW STAGE, REVISIT DAY, MULTIPLE EMAILS FROM STUDENT TOUR REPRESENTATIVES, ETC."

*"The admission office at the school we did not choose was not responsive or very attentive, and even somewhat cold during most interactions except for their big event."*

*"The staff at one school always seemed aloof and disinterested. Another school, which was equally or even more competitive, had a much warmer manner. The first school sent out a cold, unpleasant rejection letter. Twice. The second sent one kind, gentle rejection that even named my student personally. I would consider the second school again, but would hesitate regarding the first."*

Along each step of the path from an inquiring prospect to a matriculating alumnus, families and students must understand that you are interested in them. This means a multifaceted, personalized, and attentive approach to communication is the best way to ensure families identify strongly with your school's brand and include themselves as part of your community from day one. As Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon.com, wrote, "There are many ways to center a business. You can be competitor focused, you can be product focused, you can be technology focused, you can be business model focused, and there are more. But in my view, obsessive customer focus is by far the most protective of Day 1 vitality."<sup>2</sup> Your customer focus makes a difference to families.

### ORCHESTRATING THE PERFECT VISIT

Every school says it: "As long as we can get them on campus, they'll fall in love and apply." Unfortunately, according to this survey, that is not the case. Just 58% of families applied to every school they visited, suggesting that the campus visit may be a make or break item for many potential applicants. While 84% of families (and 86% of U.S. families) visited at least one school, nearly a third said they did not apply to some of the schools they visited because they did not like the school, had a bad visit, or did not care for the people they met.

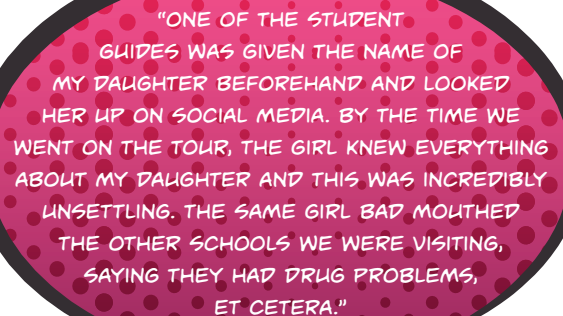
### SPEAKING OF THE TOUR GUIDE...

The first person with whom a family will engage when they come to tour your campus (beyond your receptionist or greeter) is likely a student tour guide. While spending time on your tour guide program may be an afterthought in the admission office, delegated to the office newbie or the youngest and most "relatable" staffer, an untrained and uncoached guide can have a devastating effect on the way families perceive your school.

*"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 responsibilities. We rejected schools after the tour because the student guide was so bad, and we rejected a school after a revisit day for the same reason. I can't stress this enough. I've heard similar stories from other parents."*

"Bad" can mean many different things to many different people, and one person's personalization (such as a tour guide researching a prospect on social media in advance of a visit—see quote, right) may be another's privacy nightmare. Err on the side of caution.

In a spring 2012 survey of children who applied to independent schools, EMA's Aimee Gruber and Rumsey Hall School (CT) Assistant Headmaster Fran Ryan found that 33% of the students surveyed said that the student tour guides were "very influential" in their decision to apply to a school. Sixteen percent said they did not apply to a school due to a negative experience with a tour guide.<sup>3</sup>



"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 BAD MOUTHED THE OTHER SCHOOLS WE WERE VISITING, SAYING THEY HAD DRUG PROBLEMS, ET CETERA."





## LISTEN CLOSELY

Once you get them to campus, be sure families are cared for every step of the way. This means providing them with opportunities to see the areas of campus they want to see, sitting in on real classes, chatting with teachers of their favorite subjects, and having opportunities to connect with students.

*"Particularly meaningful for our child were the school visits where she could sample student life by attending classes, assemblies, advisor groups, meals, dorm life and extracurriculars; become acquainted [with the] academic team by meeting with teachers and/or educational support specialists; have one-on-one access to a student guide; and to have a caring and curious admission officer take an interest in who she is/wishes to become."*

While respondents largely felt well-prepared before their tours and interviews, often the simplest things (and, by assumption, the easiest) can get overlooked by admission teams not focused on details.

*"We had asked for an interview date and were confirmed to have one. But the admission officer was nowhere to be found. Even though they gave us a very generous financial aid package, I felt we were not a top priority for them. My son chose to attend a day school close to home. He was ready for boarding, but we worried he would fall through the cracks."*

Making the visit a personal experience can take many different forms, but in all cases it entails knowing something about the applicant. Cate School (CA) Senior Associate Director of Admission Gwendolyn Pierce seizes every opportunity to help people forge relationships with those already at Cate, emailing a list of the visitors to the entire Cate community. People who know each other, or who are from the same town, generally make a point of stopping by to greet families. Pierce describes this as going after the "low-hanging fruit," adding that it helps visitors connect and feel more comfortable.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, don't assume every family is interested in joining a group visit; include options for children and families who prefer a more low-key setting.

*"Group visits were terrible. Other, rude families often interrupted or dominated time with key people my daughter wanted to meet. She was suspicious of "white washing" at organized events. Personal tours and class visits on normal days were far more valuable. I must note my daughter (and her parents) are more introverted. I'm sure extroverted folks like the group days."*



"I FELT TOTALLY IN THE DARK IN TERMS OF LOGISTICS SURROUNDING TOURING/INTERVIEWING. I MADE THE APPOINTMENT, RECORDED THE TIME AND DATE IMMEDIATELY IN MY CALENDAR, BUT UPON ARRIVAL WAS INFORMED THAT MY CHILD WAS NOT ON THEIR LIST OF TOURS/INTERVIEWS FOR THAT DAY; WE HAD DRIVEN THREE HOURS AND FELT PRETTY STUPID."

**WE SUGGEST:** Given how important the school visit is to solidifying families' interest, take a closer look at what is happening during and after campus visits. Jenna King, director of admission and enrollment at Riverdale Country School (NY), takes a hands-on approach: "There's no better way to know what's happening in the life of the school than to experience it through the students' eyes," she says. "How does a prospective parent experience your school and application process? Take a tour. What questions weren't answered? Give the tour guide feedback about what was missing or unclear. I cannot overestimate the value of spending your team's time really understanding your school and your admission process from an outsider's perspective. Debrief the user experiences, and use them as a starting point for your planning."<sup>5</sup>

## REPEATED REFRAIN: THE REVISIT DAY

Eighty-seven percent of the families surveyed said that the revisit day was extremely important in helping them make their acceptance decision, either in a positive or negative direction. "Regarding the school visits and the revisit day, all we heard were extremes on both ends," asserts Aimee Gruber. "Either it was so fantastic it made the experience, or it completely undid the experience. There was no middle ground."

*Continued on page 10*

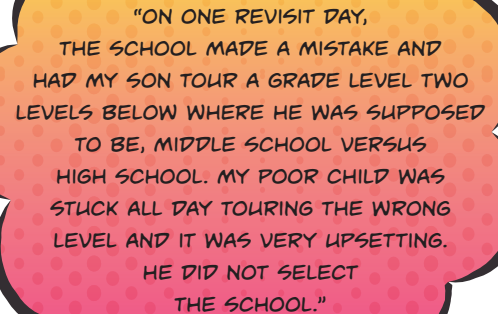
## THEY SAID WHAT?! (CONTINUED)

We'll let the parents speak for themselves:

*"One school has a full-day [revisit] program for both parents and kids. The kids have their own program and the parents have a different program. It was absolutely phenomenal and like 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."*

*"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. 'Hey big woman you gonna make a big man 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."*

While admission offices may understand the value and importance placed on revisit days, this message may not always be communicated campus wide. Jennifer McGurn (Pace Academy, GA) and Kat Sullivan (Bay School of San Francisco, CA) warn that while a great visit is everyone's responsibility, you must take care not to overwhelm your colleagues: "Take the time to understand the school from the perspective of your colleagues. Understand their workflow so you don't schedule a prospective family reception on the night of a full day of teacher conferences and expect any of your faculty to show up. Be organized, plan ahead, and do not ask your maintenance team to accomplish Herculean tasks the week before a major event. Put yourself in the shoes of your colleagues: respect their time and they will respect yours."<sup>6</sup>



*"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 VERSUS HIGH SCHOOL. MY POOR CHILD WAS STUCK ALL DAY TOURING THE WRONG LEVEL AND IT WAS VERY UPSETTING. HE DID NOT SELECT THE SCHOOL."*

**WE SUGGEST:** What else can schools do to improve revisit days? Post-visit surveys are an important but underutilized tool to improve campus visits. Only about a quarter of the survey's respondents say they received a post-visit survey, but the vast majority of those who did (80%) said they did not hesitate to give negative feedback for fear it would impact the admission decision. This suggests there is little risk to conducting these surveys—and likely much benefit in helping schools refine and improve the in-person experience.

### APPLICATIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS

*"I was a bit taken aback by how difficult and time consuming the application process is. I think it's ridiculous, it was more rigorous than the university process."*

*"The process is too long and drawn out. After paying all of these fees and not to be accepted is ridiculous. Very disappointed. I would like all my money back and time spent filling out all of the paperwork."*

*"I believe the children are asked to write too many essays."*

Families are applying to more schools than ever in their search for the right fit (and the right financial package), and many are seeking the most efficient and timesaving way to do so. There are several standard applications in the independent school marketplace, but the largest and most used (with over 240,000 applications submitted) is EMA's Standard Application Online (SAO), a free member benefit designed by and for schools. Before researching, 24% of first generation families and 16% of all families are concerned about understanding how to apply. Later in the process, 12% dropped schools due to the amount of time involved in applying.

Parents appreciate the option of a standardized application, but many schools hesitate to accept one in lieu of (or in addition to) their own proprietary application. Julie Cucchi, director of admission and financial aid at Princeton Day School (NJ), asserts, "Using the SAO simplifies the application process in meaningful ways for the students and families we serve. It has definitely resulted in PDS being able to admit and enroll qualified students who may not otherwise have applied to our school. We had a 25% increase in applications our first year! Using the SAO has saved us time and resources. We now spend more time with our prospective families and less with our filing cabinets."

Although hundreds of EMA member schools accept the SAO, 44% of parent respondents who did not use a standard application say it was because the school did not offer one. Another fifth (22%) were not aware that it was an option, and a small percentage (8%) believed using it would negatively impact chances for acceptance.

Scott Eckstein, director of admission for Solebury School (PA), tells us that once his school began using the SAO, "The feedback from families has been consistently positive. To be able to say to them, 'I value your time and your teachers' time, and so we use this common application so that you can focus on continuing to do well in school and not filling out different applications' feels really good to me. The SAO family interface is intuitive and easy to use."

**WE SUGGEST:** The lack of awareness among prospective parents about the availability of a common application—and misunderstandings about the way it's viewed by the admission office—could be remedied with clearer in-person and online communication. For schools hesitating to accept one, consider that you are losing families simply by not taking this crucial step to make it easier for them to apply. Given that the use of a common application is one of the key recommendations parents make for improving the admission process, it's difficult to argue against one.

## MONEY TALKS

It should come as no surprise that affordability is a key hurdle to application and enrollment. For 90% of the parents who applied for financial aid, its availability plays an extremely or very important role in the decision to apply to a school. Even before applying, 62% of all survey respondents expressed a concern about affordability. Half of the families who were accepted to an independent school but did not attend said it was because of price.

*"We would not have even considered a private school to begin with if we didn't think we would qualify for some aid. By the time we were refused aid, our son had his heart set on attending this school."*

*"Be more transparent about what they can offer families. Stop the back-and-forth that likens the process to a car sale."*

Beyond the significant obstacle of affordability, respondents expressed a sense of frustration at the process of applying for financial aid. Several said they completed the entire admission process before being notified about their financial aid status. Ten percent of the respondents said they lacked information about the financial aid process, and another 6% said the process was just too overwhelming.

With six in 10 families—from all income brackets—applying for financial aid, the question often asked is, "What makes an independent school better than our free options?"

*"Private schools struggle to articulate the value for the money they provide. It felt that the only benefit for a significant cost is better access to counseling. Private schools should better sell educational benefits they offer vs. the costs they charge."*

*Continued on page 12*

## TAILORED APPROACH

### SCHOOL:

UNITED WORLDS  
COLLEGE  
SOUTHEAST ASIA  
SINGAPORE

### OBJECTIVE:

MAKE OPEN HOUSES  
CONVENIENT FOR  
PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES

### STRATEGY:

RECENTLY, UNITED  
WORLDS COLLEGE  
SOUTHEAST ASIA  
CREATED A VARIETY  
OF DIFFERENT WAYS  
TO VISIT CAMPUS,  
MAKING THE PROCESS  
CONVENIENT NOT JUST  
FOR THE SCHOOL, BUT  
ALSO FOR FAMILIES.  
THE SCHOOL OFFERS  
CASUAL DROP-IN VISITS  
WITH OPEN TOURS  
(ON CERTAIN DAYS  
OF THE WEEK), THAT  
DON'T REQUIRE PRE-  
REGISTRATION. FROM  
INDIVIDUAL TOURS  
AND VISITS TO GROUP  
STYLE OPEN HOUSES,  
THE SCHOOL PROVIDES  
OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
FAMILIES TO CHOOSE  
HOW THEY WANT  
TO LEARN ABOUT  
THE SCHOOL IN THE  
WAY THAT IS MOST  
COMFORTABLE FOR  
THEM.

## THEY SAID WHAT?! (CONTINUED)

As the following parent points out, schools need to help families understand an independent school's return on investment, especially when affordability becomes a barrier to applying/accepting:

*"Give each parent that has to apply for financial aid a one-on-one appointment to walk them through the process and procedures."*

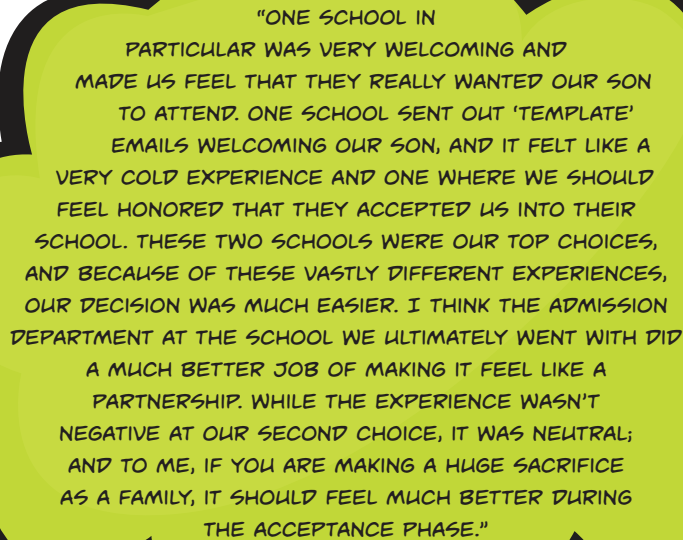
**WE SUGGEST:** Continue to strive to provide more clarity and ease in the financial aid process. One possible solution is offering families additional guidance and transparency about whether they would qualify for aid before they complete their applications.

Nancy Cleary, director of admission and financial aid at The Loomis Chaffee School (CT), has published a family contribution distribution chart on the school's website for years. She says, "This way, the tuition cost is irrelevant, and you are talking only about how it will impact the family—what they will actually pay. It's hard to get families to think in these terms, because they are so programmed to talk about how much financial aid they got, or will get. It's definitely a paradigm shift, but one that is a much better gauge for a family in terms of making an informed decision about their financial future."<sup>7</sup>

With the growing complexity of tuition models and financial options, enrollment leaders and financial aid decision makers need to think strategically about satisfying both the needs of the families and the school in the process.

### HOW DO WE START SPEAKING THEIR LANGUAGE?

Ultimately, the most important takeaway from the family feedback in our survey was that schools need to put the family experience first. From the first time they visit your website to the way you accept or deny them admission, they must feel that they are your priority. Ensure your visit program is lockstep, from scheduling to tour guide training to matching a student's interests with the campus highlights they see. Have adequate signage and make sure every family gets a real experience when they come to campus. Reach out often and ask families about their experience with you. Don't let your daily minutiae get in the way of bringing families in the door.



"ONE SCHOOL IN PARTICULAR WAS VERY WELCOMING AND MADE US FEEL THAT THEY REALLY WANTED OUR SON TO ATTEND. ONE SCHOOL SENT OUT 'TEMPLATE' EMAILS WELCOMING OUR SON, AND IT FELT LIKE A VERY COLD EXPERIENCE AND ONE WHERE WE SHOULD FEEL HONORED THAT THEY ACCEPTED US INTO THEIR SCHOOL. THESE TWO SCHOOLS WERE OUR TOP CHOICES, AND BECAUSE OF THESE VASTLY DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES, OUR DECISION WAS MUCH EASIER. I THINK THE ADMISSION DEPARTMENT AT THE SCHOOL WE ULTIMATELY WENT WITH DID A MUCH BETTER JOB OF MAKING IT FEEL LIKE A PARTNERSHIP. WHILE THE EXPERIENCE WASN'T NEGATIVE AT OUR SECOND CHOICE, IT WAS NEUTRAL; AND TO ME, IF YOU ARE MAKING A HUGE SACRIFICE AS A FAMILY, IT SHOULD FEEL MUCH BETTER DURING THE ACCEPTANCE PHASE."

#### References:

- <sup>1</sup> "Tracking the Stealth Applicant." From *The Yield*, Spring 2017.
- <sup>2</sup> "2016 Letter to Shareholders" by Jeff Bezos. dayone, The Amazon blog. April 17, 2017. <https://blog.aboutamazon.com/working-at-amazon/2016-letter-to-shareholders>
- <sup>3</sup> "What Kids Think!" From *Memberanda (The Yield)*, Fall 2012.
- <sup>4</sup> "Doing It Right: School Visits, Cate Style." From *Memberanda (The Yield)*, Fall 2011.
- <sup>5</sup> "Reflecting on the Prospective's Perspective." (Right on Time blog, June 2016, [enrollment.org](http://enrollment.org))
- <sup>6</sup> "Internal Marketing—Getting Your Team Invested in the Goal." (Right on Time blog, October 2016, [enrollment.org](http://enrollment.org))
- <sup>7</sup> "Best Practices: Transparency." From *Memberanda (The Yield)*, Spring 2013.



## An Interview with **Laurie G. Hurd**

Associations serve as the front line in the collision of trends and tradition, as schools gather to share their experiences and collaborate on ways to meet current and upcoming challenges. *The Yield* sat down with **Laurie G. Hurd**, executive director of the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England (ISANNE), a membership association of schools with proud independent traditions, to explore ways in which her association is watching the market and helping enrollment professionals prepare for the future.

### **Tell us a little about who you are, your background, and your career path.**

I grew up on independent school campuses and I feel fortunate that beginning in my student days and throughout my career, I've served in many different departments, working with all the constituencies that embody a school community. One of my first jobs was establishing an after-school program at Norfolk Academy in Virginia; before becoming executive director at ISANNE, I was director of development at Oldfields School in Maryland. In the early 80's and 90's, I returned to my alma mater as admission director for The Hyde School (ME). I helped establish Hyde campuses in the public and private sectors and served as head of school at Hyde's founding campus in Bath, Maine. I've been executive director for ISANNE since 2014.

### **Tell us about your association and the schools you serve.**

ISANNE consists of 64 independent schools located primarily in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, plus a school in Connecticut and one in Canada. They are day, boarding, and town academies with a diversity of missions. Our smallest school has less than 10 students and our largest has over 3,000. Twenty of our schools operate under the town academy model, as independent schools with the majority of student tuition paid by sending towns that don't have a public school option.

**Laurie G. Hurd** is the executive director of the Independent Schools Association of Northern New England (ISANNE).



# + Enrollment Perspectives



"Admission is the lifeblood of the school, enrolling families and future stewards. The person in charge of bringing in the major revenue stream needs to be part of the school's senior leadership team. Working with the board underscores the responsibility and commitment required for the job. "

## What trends are most likely to impact school enrollment in your region over the next five years?

Many of our schools are feeling the impact of trends including:

- + Shifting demographics (meaning fewer students)
- + The scarcity of the full-pay domestic students—more schools are going after the same kids and often offering competitive financial packages
- + Canada has become very attractive to international students compared to the U.S. It's easier to get visas in Canada, tuitions are lower, and the political climate is friendlier to international students

## What, if anything, should schools and associations be doing now to plan for these trends?

For most of us, the planning and doing began a while ago! Know what distinguishes your school in the marketplace and be intentional about communicating it. Don't take the fundamentals for granted and assume everyone understands them. Start with brutal honesty and identify the realities and how they could impact your organization. Revise budgets. Most importantly, everyone needs the right attitude. While the realities are sobering, tackling the challenges ahead requires an inspired (and informed) positive team mindset. Figure out who you are—your defining difference in the market—and do your best at it. Consider partnerships and collaborations with other organizations in ways that might have been unthinkable in the past. These might be the disrupters that change the game.

## What are the new and emerging skill sets that practitioners must have to be successful in today's enrollment management climate? How is the job changing from what was needed a decade or a generation ago?

The job has changed; it's responding to a changing market that has become intensely competitive for most schools today. The skills I'm thinking about will be new to some professionals; for others it's sharpening skills they already have. Understanding and using data and looking for impacting trends are much more on everyone's radar today. A high emotional literacy is necessary to understand and connect with people because it's incredibly important to identify and appeal to the decision maker in the family. The fundamentals aren't new, but bear repeating:

- + Have integrity and honor
- + Go above and beyond what's asked or expected
- + Think on your feet with confidence
- + Be an effective public speaker



**Traditionally, admission and enrollment professionals have not had a place in the boardroom. Why do school leaders need to rethink that?**

Admission is the lifeblood of the school, enrolling families and future stewards. The person in charge of bringing in the major revenue stream needs to be part of the school's senior leadership team. Working with the board underscores the responsibility and commitment required for the job. Without a seat at the table, admission is a silo department in its own world. A great admission operation is a community-wide effort that transcends the department. Everyone has a role to play in attracting and keeping families.

**Tuition discounting has become a topic of much discussion. How do schools best balance the need to respond to the growing demand for affordability without approaching discount rates that might threaten their financial viability?**

The business, admission, and development offices need a healthy partnership to navigate these challenges ahead. They can't operate in isolation—and they won't if they understand each other's objectives. The truth is, some schools won't be able to balance these competing realities. As we know, some aren't balancing them now. Accepting that we are in a state of tremendous imbalance will help open us up to considering options such as school mergers, curriculum collaborations, and mission revisions.

**In what ways do you envision effective collaborations among schools and associations in order to ensure thriving enrollments and to fend off perceptions that our schools are unaffordable?**

Perception is reality, and for many families our schools are unaffordable without significant financial packages. Similarly, associations are aware that our schools are paying membership fees to multiple associations. We are working with other associations on ways to collaborate and bring more value to our members. Next year, ISANNE is partnering with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) to pilot New England Leads, a yearlong program that includes mentoring, leadership development, and accreditation training for our members. This is based on the ISANNELEADS program we

started 6 years ago with the help of an E.E. Ford Foundation grant. By joining with NEASC, we integrate the accreditation experience with the broader professional development experience, which benefits both of our organizations and our members.

**Millennial parents will begin showing up on our campuses over the next five to 10 years. What should schools do to be ready for this next generation of parents?**

Millennial parents will continue the trend of parents being very involved in their child's school experience. School safety is becoming parents' number one concern in a dimension that is new to most of us. Parents want assurances that the school has a thoughtful and current approach for keeping students' welfare the priority. They will expect new protocols that protect their kids from potential internal and external threats in physical and cyber spaces while fostering a welcoming, creative school environment.

Many schools say they address the whole child and respect the individual. I suspect millennials will have new expectations and definitions for these terms. Schools could start by looking at their traditions and practices with a new lens. How well do those traditions fit today and with the future? Do they need revisioning? What is the purpose of our time-honored practices and is there a new way to carry them out? It's hard to see the changes that are needed while we are immersed in our schools; visiting other schools can create new perspectives on existing approaches.



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# Member Spotlight

**Katelyn Forero**, Associate Director of Admission, Viewpoint School (CA)

## Why do you belong to The Enrollment Management Association?

For the unparalleled professional development resources. Through the USC Leadership in Enrollment Management certificate program, the Annual Conference, and the various ALC regional seminars, I've connected with enrollment professionals from across the country who have become tremendous professional resources and good friends. This summer I'm attending the Erdmann Institute for the first time and I'm particularly looking forward to learning more about Bob Moesta's "Jobs to be Done" theory.

## What has changed most in independent school admission and enrollment since you first started?

I entered the world of independent school admission only a few years after the Great Recession, when admission offices nationwide were grappling with how best to address the challenges of a changing economic landscape. The importance of a clearly articulated value proposition is more important now than ever.

## If you could tell yourself one thing when you took your first job in admission, what would it be?

It's not what they think, it's how they feel. It's ok to not know every one of your school's features right away. What's important is how a family feels when they leave your office.

## What is the one piece of knowledge/advice you'd pass along to your admission/enrollment colleagues?

Surveying families immediately after admission events and at the end of the admission cycle can produce invaluable feedback. The best way to evaluate the family experience is to ask them about it! But keep in mind that a poorly constructed survey won't serve you either.

## What was the last book you read that helped you think about your job?

*The End of Average* by Todd Rose. It reframed the way I think about my job, my family, and myself. It's helped me further embrace all of our "jaggedness." The message that it is our uniqueness that often gives us an advantage in life was empowering for me personally and has provided a useful lens through which to view applicants and their stories.

## What is the number one attribute needed to succeed in your role?

A growth mindset. My work in admission has changed me as a person and a communicator (hopefully for the better) in ways that I hadn't expected. I like that this role requires me to regularly imagine how I can do things a little better the next time around.

## What is the best advice you ever received?

There's always room for improvement.





# Growth by Design

by **Greg Bamford**

Four years ago, Watershed School faced a real enrollment challenge. Despite an innovative educational model, we had high attrition and a poorly understood identity in our market. Today, Watershed's enrollment is up by 82%. I believe that design thinking is part of the reason for that turnaround.

What is design thinking? Simply put, it's adopting the mindset of a designer to solve challenges that we don't typically think of as "design." Thinking like a designer to create a better bottle opener? That's design. Thinking like a designer to improve the first week of school? That's design thinking.

In this article, I'll share four parts of the designer's mindset. While they're relevant to all areas of school operations, I'll focus on how they're relevant to enrollment professionals.

## Starting With Empathy

We started our design process by collecting stories, seeking insight into how families really made decisions about where to attend school. Data are wonderful, of course. But surveys often flatten the granular details that show how life is truly lived.

Approaching your school as an anthropologist allows you to collect unique insights into how your users—kids and parents—really experience their life at your school. Keep your questions open-ended. For example, when calling families who decided to leave the school, we asked for detail and noted sequence: When did you decide to leave the school? Who made the decision initially? Where were you when you made this decision? What happened next?

By encouraging our families to include details, we gained a deeper understanding of the reasons for our high attrition rates. We learned, for instance, that there was rarely one big moment that led to departures, but rather an accumulation of experiences that built up over time.

Using a tool called an "empathy map," our admission committee identified trends in our families' experience. Some of what we mapped was explicit, such as what they were saying about us. But more was implicit: what were they feeling, and when? What were they seeing around them that shaped their perceptions of our school?

## Needs Before Solutions

One habit of design thinkers is defining the human needs you want to meet before you start designing solutions. It's an expectation that needs to be firmly enforced, since it's so contrary to our normal problem-solving orientation. By defining needs before solutions, you ensure that you're solving the right problem—and that your entire team is pointed in the same direction.

When we used design thinking to rethink our progress reports, for example, we found that parents had a deep need to feel connected to their child's experience. Meeting that need would mean a better educational program as well as a better parent experience.

By clarifying that need prior to brainstorming solutions, we were able to explore many possible directions, rather than narrowing our choices too quickly.





## Generating Ideas

While most of us are familiar with brainstorming on some level, it often doesn't work as well as we'd like. Designers consciously alternate cycles of divergent and convergent thinking, seeking to get the most value from each phase. In other words, spend some time consciously generating more ideas—then some time consciously winnowing them down.

One approach is to bring teams together across functions. Our brainstorming team included admission professionals, but also teachers and program leaders, to bring together a diversity of perspective that generates more creative ideas. Another method is to give your team a specific provocation: How would Amazon or Target meet this need? What solutions would drive our biggest cross-town rival crazy?

Perhaps the most important principle is to truly defer judgment until the very end—and make sure everyone takes turn holding the Sharpie, so that everyone's ideas get a chance to be recorded.

## Building Prototypes

At Watershed, we had a graphic designer create a wide range of possible logos to redefine our school in the marketplace. We weren't sure in what direction we wanted to go—we just knew that we wanted a logo our students would embrace, as they're often the decision makers about high school in our market. Prototyping helped us develop our thinking.

While the word "prototype" often conjures images of a sleek new concept car, prototyping is simply making something tangible as a way to develop your thinking rather than waiting for your idea to be complete before putting pen to paper.

Printing sheets with three possible logos at a time, we brought students in and asked them specific questions about how it might be used: Which of these would you put on a skateboard? On your water bottle? Between rounds of feedback, we used scissors to trim (or tape to combine) elements of our prototypes, creating new prototypes that reflected the feedback.

What was critical was our ability to show our ideas concretely: it allowed us to get feedback faster, really honing our visual identity. Today, when I see our logo on a student's computer or bike helmet, I know that prototyping paid off.

## You Already Use Design Thinking

Most enrollment professionals have always been design thinkers, even if subconsciously. This human-centered mindset is a natural part of our human-centered profession. But by embracing these habits more intentionally, we all have the opportunity to become even more human-centered, creative, and effective in our roles.



Starting slowly—practicing one new tool to guide your thinking, and then adding another—can pay big dividends. Our enrollment turnaround is proof.

**Greg Bamford** is the outgoing head of school at Watershed School (CO) and the incoming associate head of school for strategy and innovation at Charles Wright Academy (WA). Follow him on twitter @gregbamford or read his blog at [gregbamford.education](http://gregbamford.education).

## Learning More About Design Thinking

Many independent schools are already using design thinking tools in the classroom. For enrollment management professionals, how can you become more familiar with these tools?

The Stanford design school (or "d.school") has free downloadable tools, including a "Bootcamp Bootleg" that includes dozens of exercises, many of which are appropriate for enrollment strategy. [dschool.stanford.edu/resources](http://dschool.stanford.edu/resources)

IDEO, an international design consultancy, has a "Design Thinking for Educators Toolkit" available at [www.ideo.com/post/design-thinking-for-educators](http://www.ideo.com/post/design-thinking-for-educators)

Greg will lead an interactive workshop on design thinking for admission professionals at the EMA Annual Conference this September. For more information, visit [ac.enrollment.org/pre-conference-events/pre-conference-workshops](http://ac.enrollment.org/pre-conference-events/pre-conference-workshops)



# Leadership

## Taking the Leap from Admission to the Head's Office

**by Patricia Kong**

Admission professionals are uniquely poised to lead. With deep knowledge of a school, its mission and programming, a natural ability to connect with children and parents, and exposure to issues ranging from finance to family feedback, directors of enrollment and admission possess the skills and dedication to perform the tasks of headship with assurance.

While I am currently the associate head of school and director of admissions at Pilgrim School (CA), I recently had the distinct honor of serving as our school's interim headmistress. Pilgrim School is a preschool through grade 12 school located in the heart of Los Angeles. I love and believe in our school, its community and philosophy. Since coming to Pilgrim as a play facilitator, I also served in the roles of teacher assistant, teacher, admission director, and assistant head. Whether you are considering a move to headship or simply wonder what it might be like to fill those shoes, an experience like mine might illustrate for you how it can be equal parts challenging, rewarding, and illuminating.







A proud Korean born and raised in Buenos Aires, Argentina, I immigrated to the U.S. after my Quinceaneras. From a very young age, I wanted to be a teacher—and I am still a teacher at heart, who believes that children always come first. When our former head of school, Mark Brooks, accepted a position as headmaster at The Center for Early Education for the 2016-17 school year, I was approached and asked to become the school's interim head while the search for a new head (our current head of school, Paul Barsky) was underway.

As you can imagine, many thoughts and questions came to mind before I accepted the position. Thoughts like, "ME?" "Can I do this?" "Will I be alive by the end of the school year?" "Will I see my family?" "Will the budget work?" "Will families stay?" "Can I keep our community together through these transitions?" My long term experience at, knowledge of, and love for my school, as well as the experience of working closely with my head of school as assistant head, gave me the courage to face all of these questions and more. I found that I had the judgment and tools to be ready to take the lead, even in a transitional period with many unknowns.

I have always embraced change. While to many of those in our school community these unknowns were frightening, I chose to believe that our unknowns were just going to be differences; not scary or bad, just different. I looked forward to taking the helm and watching as the next phase of Pilgrim School unfolded. I was happy to see that my optimism was justified—the answer the questions I had asked myself was a resounding "yes."

The best part of taking this headship responsibility was that I had a full community who supported and believed in me to take the lead through this transition and they empowered me to do it with great confidence. Maintaining strong relationships both within the school community and externally with our fellow consortium schools was a critical part of this transition.

That said, I do have some recommendations for my fellow admission directors seeking to tread this path:

- + Keep an eye on upcoming trends.
- + Know who your competitors are and why they are your competitors.
- + Know your families and what makes them proud about being a part of your school. Ask them what can be improved—inquire about the strengths and weaknesses of your school. Your families are your best marketing tool and your biggest advocates.
- + Be present in the life of your school—don't just admit students and check items off your list.
- + Retain all your families. Find out who is leaving and why they are leaving.
- + Collaborate and partner with your division directors. Observe and learn how the school is run. Be engaged. Learn. Ask questions—lots of questions!
- + Be proactive.

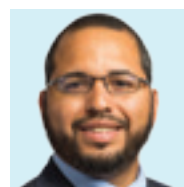
Admission directors have exceptional people skills, planning strengths, the ability to screen families and students. They are organized, empathetic, and ready to listen to everyone's stories knowing that each family that comes through their doors is unique.

Ensure that you plan strategically and engage not only within the school community, but within the broader communities of which we are all a part. Network and learn from your peers about what is going at their schools. Be a mentor. Be a mentee. My positions as both associate head of school and director of admission complemented each other and gave me the opportunity to understand how the school is truly doing, discover what it needs internally, and find the families that make great additions to it.



**Patricia Kong** is the associate head of school and director of admissions at Pilgrim School (CA).

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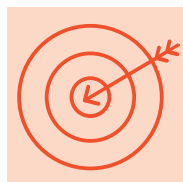
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# Keynote Speakers



## Scott Stratten

In this dynamic keynote, Scott Stratten, bestselling author of *Unbranding*, *Unmarketing*, and *Unselling*, will help us learn why we view millennials the way we do, and how to shift it; how to lead this generation and others in the work and marketplace; and how to harness the strengths of all generations.

## Ritu Bhasin

In this fascinating keynote, Bhasin introduces an innovative new framework called “The Three Selves”, which provides a methodology for choosing how and when to be your authentic self at work while achieving the success and belonging you need to feel engaged, purposeful, and empowered at work.



## Pre-Conference Features

**September 12-13**

**Admission Training Institute (ATI)** The ATI is the premier program introducing admission newcomers (0-3 years) to practical information and useful techniques. Learn all about the job of admission and establish a lasting professional network.

**Admission Directors Institute (ADI)** The ADI equips new admission directors with prior admission experience with the leadership knowledge and skills to address enrollment challenges by increasing their competencies in financial, marketing, and assessment strategies.

**September 12**

### Pre-Conference Workshops

- + **Bringing Disney's Philosophy to Your School**—Gigi Chinisci, Former Admission Professional, Albuquerque Academy (NM)
- + **Design Thinking for Admission Professionals**—Greg Bamford, Head of School, Watershed School (CO)
- + **Free Workshop for International School Attendees**

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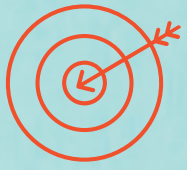
- + Heads Panel: The Future of Independent School Enrollment
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# Marketing

## **Taking the Pulse:** Understanding and Communicating with Millennials

Do you wonder how—and where—to best communicate with millennials about your school?

MaryLeigh Bliss, editor in chief at YPulse, and her team decode and demystify millennials and teens for many industries. They rely on regular surveying of 13- to 33-year olds to get to the heart of this generation's beliefs, habits, and preferences. As a presenter (at our 2016 annual conference and across the country), Bliss provides valuable insights schools can use to craft messages and strategize how to cut through today's barrage of marketing messages to connect with millennials. While this article references her 2016 presentation, YPULSE continually collects data which continues these trend lines.

Why so much talk about millennials? Bliss reminds us that based on its size alone, this generation represents an influence and buying power that no industry can ignore (see image). For independent schools, the need to understand millennials and what is important to them is especially critical; younger millennials are our current and prospective students, and millennials are becoming our current and prospective parents.



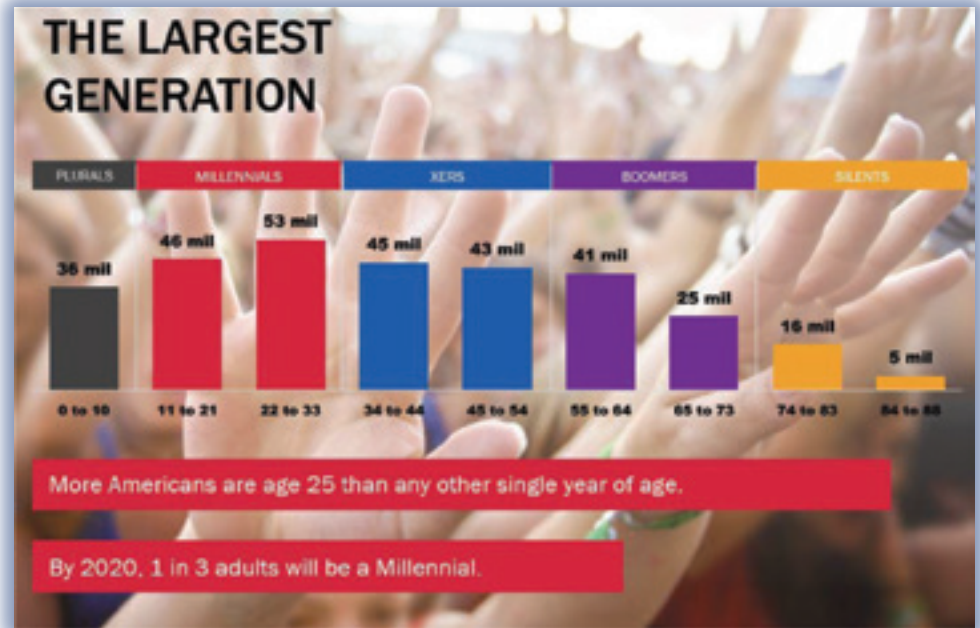
## The Millennial Backstory

All generations are shaped by the events and realities they collectively experience.

Millennials are more diverse than previous generations. They grew up in a time of invention and access. Despite living through the 2008 recession (and still facing a sluggish economy and extraordinary student debt), millennials are known to be optimists who believe they can make a difference. This optimism and passion may be traced to what Bliss calls the “special snowflake syndrome,” in which every child is told he or she is special. Millennials were also—unlike generations before them—given a seat at the family decision-making table. “They were asked their opinions, they weighed in, and they influenced what happened in the family,” Bliss asserts. This resulted in a different relationship with authority and a confidence in their voice.

Also shaping their childhoods was the dawn of the 24-hour news cycle. Constant coverage of dramatic events—according to YPulse surveys, the most notable to millennials being the mass shooting at Columbine High School—made parents protective and kids cautious. Being bombarded with media also forced millennials to become masters at filtering content.

Lastly, millennials share a belief (as young people and now as parents) in the importance of education. Bliss explains that for this overscheduled generation, “Every moment of their time was scheduled with the intention to get them into the ‘right’ college.”



## What's important to them in their interactions with the world?

Feeling confident in their voices and their unique roles, being expert consumers of media, and living through frugal times are among the factors that impact millennials' preferences and expectations.

Millennials expect to see authentic representations of diversity. “When it comes to media, entertainment, and marketing, they want the diversity that they experienced growing up to be reflected back at them,” says Bliss.

They are visual. Note, for example, their move from text-based social platforms like Facebook and Twitter to the more visual Instagram and Snapchat. Bliss advises marketers, “Taking all that information you have and making it into a visual [for example, an infographic] is far more likely to grab their attention than to hand them a pamphlet that they have to read.”

Millennials are experience-oriented. For example, over 90% would prefer sharing an experience online rather than an item purchased.

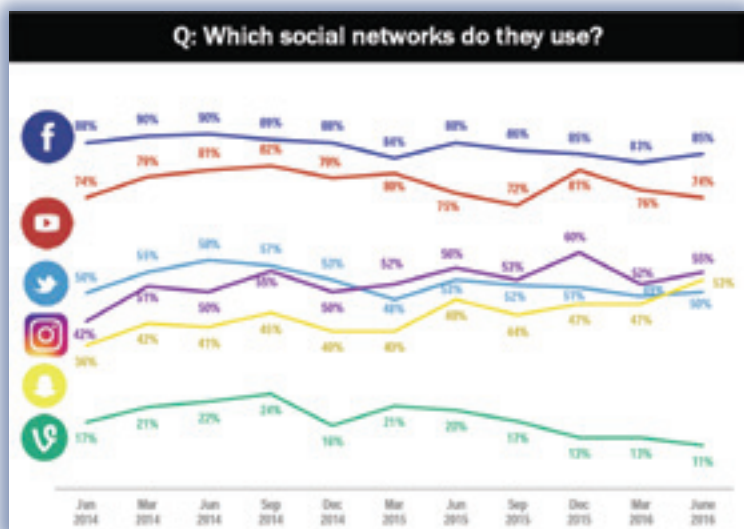
Millennials filter information. Bliss says, “This is a generation that, again bombarded with messaging, has learned to filter it out.” The messaging that breaks through the noise must be compelling, personal, authentic, and—usually—brief. According to YPulse surveys, 72% agree with the statement, “I would like it if brands acted more human,” and 70% say advertisements “usually bore them.”

As school marketing teams consider specific marketing tactics with millennials, these expectations and preferences are important to keep in mind.

## Where do Millennials Spend Their Time?

The short answer is on their phones. Millennials self-reported that they check their phones 14 times an hour.

Bliss advises that whether or not this constant connection sounds “natural” for you personally, it is short-sighted to ignore it as a reality: “Being where they are has become incredibly important...which means you have to think [mobile] because that’s where they’re spending so much of their time.”



On which social platforms should schools focus? Bliss reminds us “this is a generation addicted to innovation” that moves from one platform to the next (see image.) While Bliss thinks school marketing professionals should be aware of all platforms, she emphasizes, “Don’t try to be everywhere. Think about the story you want to tell and the personality of your brand and then, after learning about those networks, knowing who all of these players are, you can figure out where to tell that story the best.”

### Millennials as Parents

NAIS president Donna Orem regularly presents on trends related to millennials as parents. Relying on trends similar to those which Bliss covers—including a challenging financial reality,

passion, tech savvy, the desire to be unique (and to have children who feel unique), and the expectation of diversity, among others—she also explores this generational cohort’s behaviors as parents. They embrace shared parenting, run democratic households, and feel a pressure to be perfect as parents. Given all these trends, Orem encourages schools to take a step back and explore whether their enrollment and marketing efforts<sup>1</sup>:

- + Consider prospects’ possible stress about debt load/offer financial education
- + Inspire (perhaps by demonstrating how you live your mission)
- + Make each family feel their child is unique
- + Demonstrate your school’s impact (not just on academics but also on happiness and citizenry)
- + Don’t assume a traditional family makeup
- + Direct communication to mothers and fathers (and children)
- + Provide up-to-date online, mobile-ready information
- + Make use of social networks of potential and current families
- + Demonstrate how your school values diversity

Bliss entreats school personnel to embrace two trends crystallized by YPulse surveys:

- + **Surprise and delight:** Having been marketed to more than any previous generation and having grown up with digital solutions (think Amazon’s “If you are interested in this...” tool), this generation is “gravitating towards those marketing campaigns that provide [moments of surprise and delight] and those services and tools and unexpected things that give them moments of randomness.”
- + **Unique is the new cool.** Perhaps because they were told they were special, and perhaps to stand out on social media, 65% of today’s teens would rather be considered different than normal. This impacts personal style and consumer choices (e.g., hotels and restaurants). This desire for uniqueness is only amplified in parenting: Bliss reports that “92% of millennial parents want their children to know they are special and unique.”

These last two insights about millennials suggest a tremendous opportunity for marketing teams to build on their own unique school cultures and on the surprises and delights found on campuses every day to craft messaging that resonates with the important audience.



**MaryLeigh Bliss** is editor in chief at YPulse.

<sup>1</sup> Orem, Donna. “Looking Ahead: Millennials.” NAIS, May 2016.



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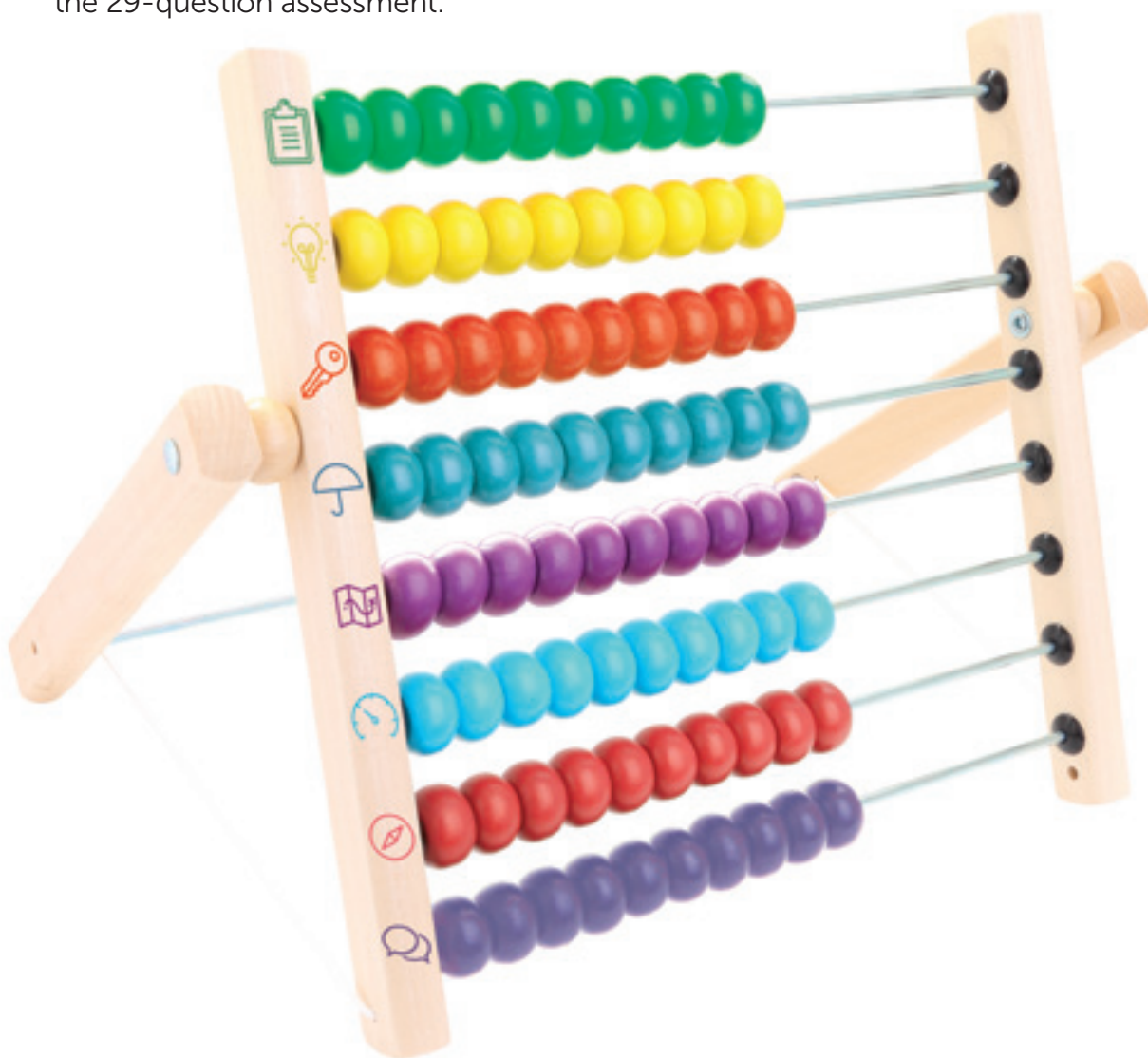
**Current Memberships Expire July 31.**

# ✓ Assessment

## Character Counts and Counting Character: A New Way to Measure Skills

Assessing an applicant's character may be one of the more challenging aspects of the independent school admission process. But The Character Skills Snapshot, a tool launched by the Enrollment Management Association (EMA) this past season, offers a new way to gauge these seemingly intangible qualities.

The Snapshot, so named because it captures an applicant's view of their character skills at a moment in time, was off to a quick start with an official rollout that followed four years of research and pilot programs. Since last September, more than 15,500 students took the 29-question assessment.





# The Character Skills Snapshot

EMA Director of Character Assessment Meghan Brenneman, Ed.D, who helped develop the test, said the assessment was the result of conversations EMA had been having for years with admission staff at member schools. “We had been getting feedback that they were already doing character assessment in a non-standardized way, and they thought it might be helpful to have another tool to understand this particular aspect of candidates’ development,” said Dr. Brenneman. Indeed, 46 member schools, called the G32+, helped EMA create and pilot the test.

How does it work? The Snapshot assesses students’ possession of six intrapersonal skills (intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness, resilience, responsibility, self-control, and initiative) and two interpersonal skills (social awareness and teamwork).

It includes 19 “forced choice” questions that ask students to look at three statements and choose the one that is “most like me” and one that is “least like me” (see example).

The other 10 questions describe scenarios and ask test takers to rate given responses on a scale from “Not Appropriate” to “Very Appropriate.”

Based on these responses, the students were then scored on each of the eight skills. Those in the bottom 25th percentile of a skill were determined to be “emerging” in that skill; those in the 25th to 75th percentile were said to be “developing” that skill; and those in the 75th to 100th percentile were said to be “demonstrating” it.

So how did the first year of The Snapshot fare?

Kevin Petway, Ph.D., a senior research scientist at EMA who helped develop the test, said EMA got surprisingly few questions from families about the new assessment during their peak customer service period in December.

Because The Snapshot is so new and in its first year, the majority of schools using it made it a suggested option and used it as a complement to their current processes. In a survey of the G32+ schools, admission staff indicated that some schools required The Snapshot of their applicants, while others made it optional. Most seemed to take a gradual approach, making it a part of their application process but often using it to confirm their own impressions of candidates. Several respondents planned to circle back after the admission season to see if The Snapshot results corresponded with other parts of a student’s application.

## Section 1: Forced-choice

*Instructions: Please select one statement that describes you MOST accurately and the statement that describes you LEAST Accurately.*

Question 1	MOST Like Me	LEAST Like Me
I enjoy difficult tasks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I easily adapt when plans change.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is difficult for me to concentrate when I am stressed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Section 2: Situational judgments

*Instructions: Please rate the appropriateness of each statement from 1 (not appropriate at all) to 4 (very appropriate). You may assign the same rating to more than one response.*

### Scenario 1

Kainoa is assigned a group project, and the group needs to meet once after school to finish work before the deadline. The group wants to meet Tuesday afternoon, but Kainoa has baseball practice at that time.

	1 Not Appropriate	2	3	4 Very Appropriate
Ask his coach for permission to miss practice so he can work on the group project.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ask his group members to meet on another day that suits his schedule.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tell the group that he will do his portion of the work at home and send it to them later.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Meet his group members on Tuesday rather than going to baseball practice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Examples of question types used in The Snapshot





## What's Coming for 2018-19?

### **Enhanced Results Reports:**

Additional granularity with results reported at specific points on the level bands

### **Benchmarking:**

Benchmark The Snapshot with current students beginning this fall

### **Case Studies:**

See examples of ways schools are utilizing The Snapshot in their admission processes

### **Validity Study:**

Data on The Snapshot's ability to deliver on its promise

Director of Admissions and Financial Aid Susie Gundle of Oregon Episcopal School (OR) was enthusiastic about The Snapshot and made it an optional part of her school's recent application cycle: "I am very impressed with the final product. A lot of work and research went into it. It's well done, well described and explained. I'm very encouraged by it," she said. "The qualities that The Snapshot is aiming to identify, these distinguishing qualities, are very difficult to find out about. Anything that would enhance the lens of that character side of a candidate is very, very appealing to us."

Gundle said that Oregon Episcopal, which currently has about 525 upper and middle school students, received about 30 Snapshot results from applicants this year. "We loved reading and seeing the reports," she mentioned. "We didn't have a large enough sample size to draw conclusions. But we will review the data... and will likely do one more optional year. It's a snapshot, part of what makes a successful student. It's another piece of the puzzle."

In post-season conversations, enrollment professionals also had suggestions for improvement to the assessment. One critique from administrators: include more specificity in the results, especially in the "demonstrated" scoring section, in which students rank in the broad range of 25th to 75th percentiles. "Some people wanted a more nuanced perspective," said Dr. Brenneman. "That is one of the changes that we'll be making for next year."

All such changes were discussed when the G32+ group convened in Princeton on May 15. The Snapshot will continue to be improved and refined, with EMA completing validity studies comparing The Snapshot results with student outcomes, comparing student self-evaluation with the impressions they make with their prospective schools, and focus groups with families. Additionally, a benchmark The Snapshot will be offered to schools beginning this fall, so that they may more easily compare applicants with their current student population.

The Snapshot will be the subject of continuing research and refinement—not surprising for the first new tool that admission officers have had in decades. "There hasn't been a new component to the admission process in 50 years. Application, interview, test scores, and letters of recommendation have been the tried and true," said Dr. Brenneman. "Schools want to understand their applicant pool better. They want to know if they are missing out on students to whom they should be extending offers."

**For more information about The Snapshot, visit [snapshot.enrollment.org](http://snapshot.enrollment.org).**

# Visits Are Important!

Below are just a few of the data highlights relating to the school visit and revisit from the *2017 Ride to Independent Schools* report.

To access the complete report online, visit [enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017](http://enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017).

## School Visit Factors Important to Families



Personal time  
with admission  
officer

**68%**



Ability to  
attend  
a class

**60%**



Personal  
time with  
students

**55%**



Personal  
time with  
teachers

**47%**



Personal  
tour

**44%**

## Five Most Effective Post-Visit Touch Points



1. Personal  
outreach by  
an admission  
officer



2. School's  
website



3. Emails from  
the school



4. Attending  
school events



5. Personal  
outreach by  
a teacher/  
coach



## Reflecting on Revisits

**87%** of families indicated that the revisit was extremely/very effective in influencing their decision to enroll in a school.

# School Videos

We have witnessed the evolution of the school video. Not that long ago, school videos were 20 and even 30 minutes in length and viewed on VHS cassettes. The tone was typically serious and the objective was to cram every detail about the school into the time allotted. These videos featured the obligatory welcome message from a bow tie-wearing head of school, and all had an eerily similar quality.

Today's families are more sophisticated consumers of media, and school videos have evolved accordingly. Rapidly shrinking attention spans can make one minute feel like an eternity, and the chance to create a lasting impression of your school can come down to a matter of seconds. *The Yield* sat down with **Victoria Muradi**, director of admission and financial aid at Durham Academy (NC), **Scott Allenby**, director of communications and marketing at Proctor Academy (NH), and **Lisa Pelrine**, director of admissions at Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School (MA), to talk about their recent video productions.

**Share an example of a video created by your school. Is the intended audience current or prospective families? What did you hope to accomplish when you created it?**

**VM:** We have admission-specific videos that are one to four minutes in length. They highlight the mission and values of the school through the perspective of a particular student, family, program, or faculty member. The audiences for these films are prospective families and potential employees. One of our most successful promotional videos can be found here: <https://vimeo.com/191699579>.

Durham Academy is a pre-kindergarten through 12 school, and the preschool is our biggest entry point. Although we have a strong academic brand, we're known as college preparatory; people don't necessarily think of us as an option for their preschoolers and kindergarteners. This video articulates a universal experience—the anxiety parents face when trying to find the right school for their little ones. It creates an immediate connection because every parent can relate to wanting the best for their child. This video follows a family through the process of making that choice. The family discovers and ultimately chooses Durham Academy, learning how the school partners with parents in raising young children. We hoped to soften our purely academic image by highlighting the constant movement that happens in a preschooler's day, capturing parent and teacher testimonials, showing the family in their home, and having conversations about the school's values and the nurturing nature of the program.

**SA:** There are several recent videos we're very proud of, but if I had to choose one, I'd go with "Who Are You?", found at <https://proctor.wistia.com/medias/takupel1f9>. It's a short (30-second) video of secondary footage set to "Who Are You?" by The Who. It quickly showcases the diversity of programs at Proctor and the idea that while at Proctor, you can define yourself through any number of different paths. Our target audiences were both prospective and current families. Our messaging to both is equally important—our current families need to be reminded of the value Proctor brings







to their children's lives and to make sure they are taking full advantage of the experience in which they have invested. And it also serves to introduce Proctor to prospective families in a fun and engaging way. The smiles on kids' faces tell a powerful story to both audiences: "My kid is happy. Those kids are happy. I want my kid to be like those kids."

**LP:** My favorite video is the Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall #InspirationVideo. You can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IKIUu2yCPlg>. In it, teachers at Chapel Hill-Chauncy Hall School surprise their students by sharing a personal message about how the students have inspired them. The emotional messages and the students' reactions were recorded as part of our InspirationVideo project. The intended audiences were current and prospective families. We wanted this video to capture the culture and climate that make our community so welcoming. For current families, we wanted this video to reaffirm that our teachers are invested in our students, above and beyond teaching them in the classroom. One of the biggest challenges in marketing a school is showcasing a true sense of your community; we captured the special connections that happen between teachers and students in a way that could be seen by an external audience, including prospective families.

#### **How did you quantify your video's success? Were there any concerns or complaints?**

**VM:** We posted the video on our website, and a shorter version was used as the primary content for external digital advertising and an ad timed to run during admission season on our social media platforms. People immediately began commenting that we captured the journey of prospective preschool parents. We generated about 68,000 impressions (17,000 unique impressions) with a .96% unique click through rate to our tours landing page. About 3,000 actions were taken (likes, clicks, shares) in reaction to the video. It is the most-watched admission video on our Vimeo account, with 1,844 views.

**SA:** There are both statistical and anecdotal measures of success for videos, and it's important to recognize that they do not always align. It's more important for us to be sure a video is getting in front of the right audience than it is to go viral. With this perspective in mind, the viewership numbers for this video were solid, but far from our most viewed. The feedback our admission team got and that we received through comments on the video link and social media were incredibly positive. As one parent wrote in the comments section of the video, "WHO



**Victoria Muradi**

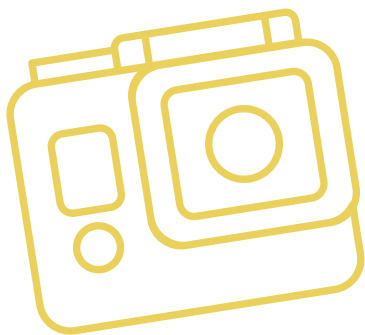


**Scott Allenby**

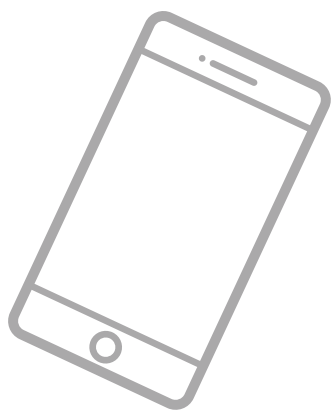


**Lisa Pelrine**

*Continued on page 33*



"We believe this simple, short video was spot-on in terms of reinforcing our brand to our constituents and to the marketplace as a whole."



am I? A GRATEFUL Proctor parent!!!" The video resonated well with three constituencies, each in a different way. It simultaneously got prospective families excited about what is possible at Proctor, while reinforcing to current families the hands-on approach to learning their children are experiencing. A third audience that we did not create the video for, but received positive feedback from, was alumni. The video resonated with them and brought them back to their Proctor experience, leaving everyone with a smile. We believe this simple, short video was spot-on in terms of reinforcing our brand to our constituents and to the marketplace as a whole.

**LP:** We submitted the video, along with a press release, to local news stations and education-based news sites, and it was picked up by a few, including Boston's CBS affiliate WBZ-TV and Inspired School Marketers. While the video and news story received thousands of impressions, and we saw a spike in visitors to our website during its release, it can be difficult to quantify its exact success. We use this video as a marketing tool in emails, on our website, and at on-campus events. We've heard great feedback from both current and prospective families.

**Did you work with a professional videographer, or did you produce the video in house? Please elaborate on choice and provide details.**

**VM:** We produced the video with StoryDriven Media, a local professional video marketing company. We have worked with them for about four years. Their approach is unique in that there is no script. Initially, they met with me and our director of communications to strategize about the concerns of our prospective preschool parents. Then, we strategized together about how we might showcase one specific family's journey. StoryDriven took it from there in terms of interviewing the family, capturing them at home and school, and editing. They submitted a rough cut and we provided feedback in terms of narrative and visuals, fine tuning it until we felt that we had exactly the story we wanted to tell. The budget was between \$10,000-\$12,000.

**SA:** We have an in-house staffer on our communications team who shoots and edits videos for us. She has worked with the school for almost 15 years, has had two children attend Proctor, and knows us inside and out. Having this institutional knowledge and brand native expertise is critical to the video content we produce each week, not just this video. She used a Canon C100, go-pro, and iPhones. We had no additional budget for the video—it was just part of our weekly workflow.

**LP:** The video was produced in-house by our assistant director of marketing and communications, who has previous experience working in TV and film. There was no budget for this video, other than equipment that the school already owned. It was shot using a Canon T3i camera and Rode Microphones VideoMic. The planning, shooting, and editing took about 20 hours to complete.



# International School of the Peninsula

International School of the Peninsula

## School Overview

**Palo Alto, California**

**Enrollment: 545**

**Type of school:**  
Coed, pre-Kindergarten to grade 8  
day school providing French and  
Chinese language immersion.



## International School of the Peninsula *(continued)*

### **Maile, when did you start working at the International School of the Peninsula (ISTP)? What brought you to ISTP?**

I joined the International School of the Peninsula in 2002. Prior to joining ISTP, I was an IT consultant for a Big 5 consulting firm. I came to realize that it wasn't the right environment or career path for me, so I left the consulting world and searched for opportunities with a different pace and focus. In college, I worked in development, so it felt like a natural fit to join ISTP's development department. I then became the director of communications. Now, I serve as the director of admission.

I think that the better question to ask is not what brought me to ISTP, but what has kept me here for 15 years! ISTP has a strong, experienced, tight-knit senior administrative team of which I am proud to be a part. It is a privilege to work with a skilled team that is open minded and willing to reflect on itself as a team, the school, and the student and family experience, and to adjust, change, and evolve as necessary. The school has definitely evolved over my 15 years here. It's amazing to see how far we've come—who we were, who we are now, and who we hope to be. Everyone works in tandem with each other to propel our school forward and to serve our students and families as best we can.

### **What are the biggest challenges/advantages as an office of two?**

First off, Ninva, my colleague in the admission office, is amazing. She has been with the school longer than I, and also worked for the previous director of admission. Therefore, she carries with her a lot of history and knowledge, which I admire and respect. I trust her innately and respect the responsibilities that she has.

I think the largest challenge that we face is the ability to do everything that we want to do with the amount of manpower we have. We have a clear line of responsibilities, and have it divided pretty well. However, as technology changes, as the needs of the parents change, our jobs and the expectation of what we should be doing continues to evolve.

### **Is there an area of your work that you wished specific professional development training was available?**

The ways marketing admission has evolved over the years is mind boggling. Today, we focus a lot on inbound marketing, how to widen our funnel, and the balance between personalization and automation. There is so much information out there about inbound marketing—it's a lot of noise you have to filter through to find the nuggets of information that are going to be useful in our arena. Honestly, I wish there were more trainings available about this, specifically for private school admission. The game is the same, but how we play is changing—and it would be helpful to have some great coaching!

### **Which key metrics do you refer to on a daily, weekly, or monthly basis to best assess your enrollment strategies? How do you gather this data and with whom do you share it?**

When our admission season begins, the head of school and I monitor our funnel very closely. Inquiry metrics can be tricky, since a parent may or may not actually fill out an inquiry form. Therefore, I'm monitoring how our online advertising is doing, as well as the hits we have to our promo landing pages. I then analyze the interest—how

*Continued on page 37*



## **Meet The Team**

### **Maile Uohara Director of Admissions and Variable Tuition**

After years of working in the private sector, Maile began her career at the International School of the Peninsula in 2002, in the office of advancement. In 2007, she became ISTP's director of admissions and variable tuition. Maile is originally from the aloha state of Hawaii and although she misses her family and hometown, she enjoys everything the Bay Area has to offer.

### **Ninva Simono Assistant to the Director of Admissions and Variable Tuition**

Ninva graduated from the University of Bordeaux II with a degree in social anthropology. She has been with ISTP since 1995. In addition to answering prospective parent questions, Ninva is responsible for maintaining the prospect database, coordinating admission events, and ensuring that the admission office is running smoothly.

many people are signing up for tours, information, etc. and pay attention to the conversion from that into applications and enrollment. We also have comparisons through our BADA (Bay Area Admission Directors) group that have been incredibly helpful as well.

**Do you present data directly to the board, or do you give the information to your head of school to share with them?**

I update my head of school on a monthly basis, and he shares that with our board. Every spring I present an admission report to the board. I also participate on the board's finance committee, which has been extremely valuable because it means I can participate in conversations related to enrollment management.

**What are some of the unique challenges to enrolling a bilingual immersion day school? How does this influence the way you recruit new students/families?**

I think the biggest challenge is communicating to families the value of a bilingual school. The truth is that a bilingual education is about so much more than language—it provides cognitive benefits and cultural literacy, it helps children think and see in different ways and find multiple solutions to problems, and it helps them be more open minded, better communicators, with an international mindset. This is a lot to explain to a family when they are looking at schools.

What we've done is to have very small, personalized tours that give our prospective families the time to visit our classrooms, to see what happens, to ask questions, to be a part of an in-depth discovery of the end result of a bilingual education. It's definitely a lot of work to give such personalized attention, but it's worth it if prospective families are able to understand how transformative an ISTP education is.

**As you look to the future of enrollment, what excites or concerns you the most?**

Similar to many schools in our local area, the rising cost of living is one of the greatest concerns for us. In the Bay Area, we are finding that mortgages are our largest competitor, not other schools.

**Have you employed any new marketing strategies or tactics to effectively recruit and/or retain students? How have they varied based on your recruitment levels/enrollment needs?**

Last year, I started to plan a transition to an inbound and content marketing strategy. I worked closely with my IT director and my director of communications, as I knew I would not be able to execute a robust marketing effort without their assistance. I work on the plan, but the content is developed by the director of communications and her assistant.

**How do you show the unique value of your school during family visits?**

Our classroom visits are perhaps the most illuminating for our families. We have two bilingual programs (Mandarin and French), and seeing this in action speaks volumes. It's definitely a selling point to tell them that we are the longest-running bilingual immersion school in Silicon Valley—we have close to 40 years of experience. We are also a candidate to become an IB (International Baccalaureate) World School, and we educate our parents on the IB learner profile and its inquiry-based methods, in combination with our outstanding bilingual program during visits.

**What is BADA, and what is your role in it?**

The Bay Area Directors of Admission (BADA) is the local consortium for (mainly) PreK-8th grade schools. We serve schools from Marin/Sonoma to San Jose. Fifteen years ago, BADA was started as a collegial grassroots organization by a few San Francisco admission directors who wanted to ease the independent school admission process for families. In 2014, BADA formally established itself as a nonprofit to better meet and serve the needs of its members. BADA currently has 70+ member schools, holds an annual professional development symposium, and spearheads the Bay Area-wide spring admission survey to better inform area independent schools with timely and relevant admission data. In May 2017, I was elected president of the organization and I am currently working with the board on formalizing a three-year strategic plan. My vision for the organization is that we remain true to BADA's roots, and remain a highly collegial organization whose mission is to educate and assist families with the admission process.



Maile Uohara (l) and Ninva Simono (r) with ISTP Head of School Philippe Dietz.



# Four Skills to Master for Effective Leadership

When I decided to apply for the USC CERPP Leadership in Enrollment Management certificate program, many people asked why I would undertake the work of the program if I wasn't considering a move back to the enrollment director's seat anytime soon. But for me, it wasn't a question of whether to do it. A quote from John Maxwell's *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership* comes to mind: "Leaders are readers," constantly on a quest for knowledge. No matter where in your career you find yourself, if you are a leader (or want to be), you must make continued education a priority.

To be honest, I wasn't 100% sure what to expect from the CERPP program. I read the syllabus and have certainly read some of the articles and attended presentations offered by the program's faculty (and it's an impressive faculty, to be sure). But I'd been a director of admission and I work with enrollment professionals on a daily basis, so I expected it would simply be a deeper dive into topics affecting our work. While there is a certain element of that in the program, I was immediately checked by the things I didn't know, or at least the things to which I hadn't given due credit as critical skills needed for our work in this profession.

One of the most important aspects of this program has been the time participants have to reflect on our experiences and look ahead to planning for continued growth. Recently, we dove in to the topic of personal leadership. Our studies in this program have introduced us to a number of different leaders, all with different capabilities, and we were asked to craft our own vision of leadership. That started me thinking about the leaders I have had the opportunity to work with thus far in my career.

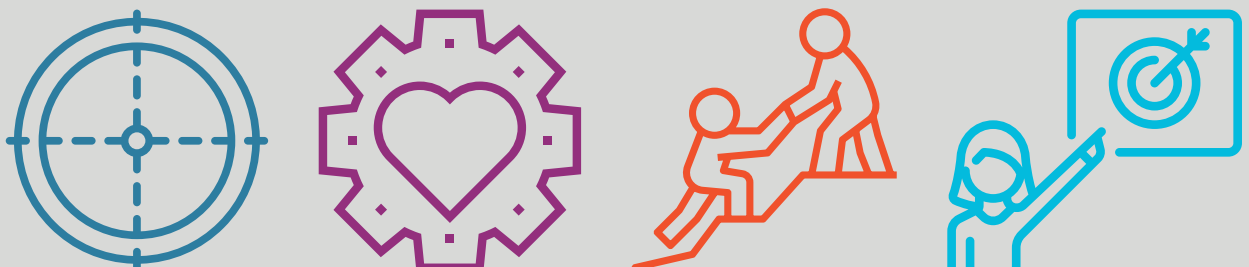
As a result of this exercise I have come to realize that for me, a leader is synonymous with a teacher. Every encounter I have had with leaders and leadership has taught me something—skills and styles to incorporate into my own practices, or cautionary tales and behaviors to be avoided; either way, a lesson. I share my thoughts here with you and I encourage you to take a few moments to think about who you are as a leader, or who you could be.

## 1. Drive:

There are a number of skills most valuable for authentic and productive leadership. The first key, for me, is an inner drive for excellence or achievement toward a goal. It does not matter what the goal or objective is—this skill can be translated into achievement across many products, disciplines, or industries.

## 2. Passion:

The second key is passion. To me, passion is at the root of why you do whatever it is you do, and though you can find some measure of success with drive alone, passion will enable you to push and grow beyond mere achievement of a goal. Passion is infectious, and as renowned author Simon Sinek notes, people will be inspired to work with and for you if they also believe in why you do it.





### 3. The Ability to See, Embrace, and Encourage Talent:

The third key is the ability to recognize, embrace, and encourage talent and leadership in others without fear. A strong leader knows s/he is better when surrounded by a strong team, one that represents a variety of accomplishments and skills that no single person could possess. In a 2014 essay by Kathleen Massey, then the university registrar and executive director of enrollment services at McGill University, she wrote about this aspect of her experience while moving through her career: "I learned [through this experience] that the wisdom and experience to make changes and improvements often exists within the community doing the work and benefiting from the services. It's our job as leaders to find a way to unleash that knowledge and create a setting where people are empowered to make changes. This means developing the courage to let your own ideas be transformed by the influence of those around you. It also means being comfortable with crystallizing and communicating a vision and setting the bar high for performance and holding people accountable to it."<sup>1</sup>

This insight has stuck with me in the years since. The need for hierarchy is present only for measures of accountability, not ladder climbing. No one works to undermine another, only to develop and highlight the skills of those around them.

### 4. The Articulation of the End Goal:

The fourth key to effective leadership is to clearly articulate the end goal. Not just the why, but the how and the what must be clearly envisioned. The ability to see where you want to finish or what it is you hope to achieve allows you to get there as effectively and efficiently as possible. This includes the ability to reverse engineer that end goal to understand the work needed to get there, and to create measures and mechanisms for accountability along the path to the end goal. Effective leaders stay out of the weeds and keep an eye on the big picture, because they have talented teams to manage the details when needed.

I think these four skills are universal to strong, effective leadership regardless of the product, industry, or end goal. In my mind, one must have a vision for leadership before determining how to lead. To that end, I could list countless important traits one might possess to demonstrate their leadership—things like kindness, strong listening skills, content knowledge, honesty, understanding, and empathy are all valuable. I don't list them here as an afterthought; they are certainly worthy of their own development and attention, but they are the skills that I believe are most open to variation based on who the leader is, not how they must lead.

As you think about the leadership you've experienced and the leader that you are, I encourage you to keep learning; being a constant "reader," if you will. And if you're looking for that next challenge, you might want to consider checking out USC's Leadership in Enrollment Management certificate program, or their newly formed Master of Education in Enrollment Management and Policy.



**Kate Auger-Campbell** is director of outreach for EMA.

<sup>1</sup> Massey, Kathleen. "Moving Up in the Profession: Personal Essay 1." from *Career Paths for Admission Officers: A Survey Report*. NACAC, July 2014.

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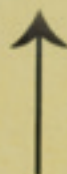
- + Search for openings
- + Set up job alerts
- + Filter results for your skill set
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## Questions?

Contact Lauren Von Euw at  
[lvoneuw@enrollment.org](mailto:lvoneuw@enrollment.org).



# Open Seat Listing

**Helping schools and students  
find the match they need**

Can you admit students after traditional deadlines?  
Many students still haven't found their dream school,  
or are latecomers to the admission process.

If you have rolling admission or can accept students after traditional  
deadlines have passed, we offer the Open Seat Listing service.

Essentially a filter on our SSAT school search, the Open Seat Listing  
enables you to post availability, allowing students and colleagues  
with excellent applicants they can't place to find you.

**Want to learn more?**

**Ask our membership team  
or your outreach director.**

**[Enrollment.org/openseat](https://enrollment.org/openseat)**



## The Power of Space

by Rohan M. Arjun, Yocelin S. González, Kemi T. Nonez, and Donnie R. Smith

An important and familiar pillar of independent schools is the creation of space to establish “community.” In admission, one of the many priorities is to create comfortable, welcoming, and safe spaces for our students and families throughout the process from recruitment to yield and beyond. Correspondingly, EMA’s Annual Conference is a space for admission and enrollment management professionals to discuss trends, unveil new ideas, and build networks. With changing trends and demographics in both admission professionals and prospective families, it became clear that a space for admission professionals of color needed to be created.

Starting in the spring of 2017, our newly-formed committee on people of color in admission began engaging with EMA over the course of a year to think critically about any perceived voids within the organization and the need for support of people of color within the industry. Early conversations unveiled a lack of representation of admission professionals of color within our school communities and in the data that was previously captured. We found that in many of our schools, race was often omitted during conversations surrounding professional growth and organizational structure. We realized that creating a shared affinity space would help with retention of admission professionals of color and add to their professional growth and satisfaction.

We are struck by the overwhelming success of our partnership with EMA. From the infancy stages of our committee, we assisted in developing a mentor program for admission professionals of color and hosted the first ever People of Color in Admission reception at the Annual Conference in New Orleans. It was no surprise to us that the created affinity space was both needed and welcomed. The reception allowed folks to connect, collaborate, and rejuvenate. While the reception offered a casual atmosphere, you could hear courageous ideas starting to brew around the room and informal think tanks starting to form. The large attendance proved we were not alone in valuing the importance of a shared safe space.

We look forward to hosting the reception once again at this year’s annual conference in San Diego and continuing the conversation with all of our colleagues on race, class, and becoming an industry filled with culturally literate admission professionals. The landscape of our independent school community varies in many ways, but one consistent theme shared was the urgency to have the most diverse and equitable school environments. The future of admission will require individuals who understand, empathize, and are committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion in all forms.



Sharing a space is one of the first steps toward systemic change. It is important that we all participate in propelling this work forward and lean in to our discomfort. Diversifying our offices will yield the same beneficial results as do diverse school communities. Please join us in supporting EMA’s commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**Register to attend the 2018 People of Color in Admission reception at this year’s Annual Conference. RSVP during your conference registration. [ac.enrollment.org](http://ac.enrollment.org)**



l-r: Rohan M. Arjun, Director of Admission, George School (PA); Yocelin S. González, Director of Community Partnerships, Meadowbrook School of Weston (MA); Kemi T. Nonez, Associate Director of Enrollment Management, Durham Academy (NC); Donnie R. Smith, Associate Director of Enrollment for Middle School, Brooklyn Friends School (NY).



# Making Applying Easier—The SAO

The 2017-18 Standard Application Online had a record-breaking year with 16,178 families submitting 45,106 applications to 350 participating schools. The result of extensive user experience testing with more than 40 parents and students, school feedback, and direction from our SAO Advisory Board, this year's SAO featured a modernized interface for families, the ability to connect multimedia submissions, list achievements and interests, view open houses and events, and submit transcripts as they became available. The entirely-online process was a hit with families who, according to our survey of 2,700+ parents following the 2016-17 admission season ([enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017](http://enrollment.org/whytheyapply2017)), are actively seeking ways to ease the time-consuming, often confusing application process.

Feedback we received from schools during our user experience process indicated that they appreciated the easy setup, the new application overlap report, grade level personalization, updated teacher recommendations and parent statements, an extensive library of pre-built forms. They also liked the ability to list events, build their own supplements, and easily reconcile application payments.

## Providing Access

The SAO community-based organization program (SAO CBO) also boasted expanded numbers as additional organizations joined the ranks to provide their students with a simpler way to apply that included automatic application fee waivers and free use of the tool itself. 352 students from 10 community-based organizations submitted 1,886 applications to independent schools through the SAO CBO program.

## Better Tracking of the Stealth Applicant

One aspect of the SAO that was modified for 2017-18 was the ability for parents to work on and save a school application prior to paying that school's application fee. While this feature was repeatedly requested by families during the user experience development phase, it also caused considerable concern on the part of schools. Families are identifying themselves later and later in the admission process (see *The Yield* Spring 2017 cover article, "Tracking the Stealth Applicant," for more on this phenomenon), and this trend was amplified by the ability of families to delay payment (and therefore, identify themselves to schools) until later in the cycle. In response, EMA began emailing weekly updates to schools on potential applications that had been started in the SAO system by families, in addition to those fully submitted.

## SAO Affiliate Membership

EMA also welcomed two associations to our newest partnership offering, the SAO Affiliate Membership program. Regional associations that decide to use the SAO as their official online application can now offer complementary EMA SAO Affiliate Membership to their member schools. The Affiliate Member program provides schools with access to all the advantages of the SAO, giving them a free, comprehensive online application, an expanded pool of potential applicants (schools that adopt the SAO see up to a 20% increase in applications the first year), and real time and historic individual, regional, and national data at their fingertips. SAO Affiliate members are eligible to join EMA as full members at any time. The Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) and the Association of Independent Maryland Schools (AIMS) joined the New Jersey Association of Independent Schools (NJ AIS) and Independent Schools of St. Louis (ISSL) in taking advantage of this benefit for their member schools.

**For more information about the SAO, the SAO CBO, and the SAO Affiliate Member program, visit [enrollment.org/sao](http://enrollment.org/sao).**



## New SAO Features for 2018-19

- + New functionality allows you to engage with prospective applicants before they submit applications
- + Streamlined delivery of student activities/interests/achievements and uploaded attachments
- + Updated, efficient family experience based on extensive user testing
- + Receive individual year transcripts as they are uploaded
- + Enhanced collection of parent/guardian data





## It's clear. We're not all alike.

It's also clear that no two schools are alike. This is not a guess—we know this firsthand. For over 17 years we have spent countless hours on school campuses and we have learned that each school has a personality, a feel, a strength that defines them. At Square Spot Design we offer a fresh approach to independent school communications—one that helps each school stand out because of **who** they are and not **what** they offer.



brand strategy



logo/identity



messaging



photography



advertising



viewbooks

# square | spot | design

We are a clever agency with some big ideas, and we'd love to meet you.  
Email [lisa@squarespotstudio.com](mailto:lisa@squarespotstudio.com) to say hello.

[www.squarespotdesign.com](http://www.squarespotdesign.com)



## Calendar

JUNE	
<b>4</b>	ALC Seminar—Toronto, ON, Canada
<b>6</b>	Webinar: What's Possible: Making the Most of Your EMA Membership (enrollment.org/webinars)
<b>9</b>	SSAT Standard Administration
<b>10-13</b>	The Erdmann Institute—The Migis Lodge on Sebago Lake (Southern Maine)
<b>18</b>	ALC Seminar Series—Vancouver, BC, Canada
<b>19</b>	Webinar: A Field Guide to Your IT Director (enrollment.org/webinars)
<b>19-21</b>	FinalsiteU—Leesburg, VA
<b>25-27</b>	The Crow's Nest Institute—Kennebunkport, ME
<b>25-27</b>	Blackbaud K-12 User Conference, Seattle, WA

JULY	
<b>15-18</b>	AISAP Annual Institute—Nashville, TN
<b>24-26</b>	Future Leaders – Detroit, MI – enrollment.org/futureleaders
<b>24-26</b>	TABS Summer Session Admission Academy – Boston, MA
<b>31</b>	Membership Renewal Deadline

AUGUST	
<b>1</b>	SSAT Online Registration Opens for 2018-19
<b>1</b>	SAO opens for 2019 Application Season <i>(be sure to set up your application prior to this date!)</i>

SEPTEMBER	
<b>11-12</b>	Admission Training Institute—San Diego, CA (ac.enrollment.org/ati)
<b>11-12</b>	Admission Directors Institute—San Diego, CA (ac.enrollment.org/adi)
<b>13-15</b>	EMA Annual Conference—San Diego, CA (ac.enrollment.org)

## 2018-19 Test Dates

**Saturday,  
October 13, 2018**

**Saturday,  
November 10, 2018**

**Saturday,  
December 8, 2018**

**Saturday,  
January 5, 2019**

**Saturday,  
February 2, 2019**

**Saturday,  
March 2, 2019**

**Saturday,  
April 27, 2019**

**Saturday,  
June 8, 2019**

