



**A GUIDE TO RECRUITING
AND RETAINING DETROIT
HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

MICHIGAN FUTURE SCHOOLS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Anyone who doubts the importance of recruitment could learn a thing or two from one of the most successful team leaders in modern collegiate athletics, Alabama “Crimson Tide” football coach Nick Saban. Saban’s achievements include being the only coach to win national championships in two different college divisions and being one of the highest-paid coaches in sports – college or professional. Few people think it’s a coincidence that Saban is also perhaps the shrewdest and most ruthless recruiter in all of sports.

According to a 2013 *GQ* magazine profile, when the Crimson Tide won the national college football championship in 2012, Saban’s golfing buddy Steven Rumsey called to congratulate him.

Saban responded, seriously, “That damn game cost me a week of recruiting.”

*Rumsey at first thought he’d misheard. He asked for clarification. Saban repeated himself. He just knew that while he was preparing for the title game, enduring all the banquets and media bull**** that came with it, some other coach was in the living room of one of his recruits, trying to tip the kid. The thought was making him crazy.¹*

Saban’s obsessive commitment to recruitment may seem impractical for a high school leader. After all, principals and superintendents are responsible for much more than getting students into classroom seats. But the sad reality is that if your school doesn’t enroll and retain students, little else you do will matter. Without the financial resources that come with students, teaching and learning will suffer and, ultimately, a school cannot be successful if it is consistently under-enrolled.

This book has two goals: To inspire a Saban-like focus on recruitment and retention strategies for high school leaders who have their hands full with other tasks and to demystify the school recruitment and retention process. I don’t pretend to have all the answers. The fierce competition for secondary students in Detroit is a relatively new development and we’re all just finding our way through it. But the intense battle to attract students is not likely to go away any time soon. Here are a few things you should keep in mind:

Detroit has too many high schools

The demographic trends are clear: There are not enough students to sustain the number of high schools in Detroit. Detroit’s birth rate is in decline. Between 2000 and 2002, there were 15,821 babies born in Detroit. That number dropped to 12,325 between 2006-2008. Not only are fewer families choosing to stay in Detroit, there are fewer babies being born in southeast Michigan.

¹ *GQ* Magazine September 2013 issue

It has been estimated that there will be approximately 9,000 high school freshmen in Detroit each year for at least the next decade. Meanwhile, there are currently approximately 10,500 seats for high school freshmen in all Detroit high schools. That means only the schools with the most strategic and impactful student recruitment and retention plans will survive.

Suburban Districts Are Aggressively Courting Detroit Students

Inner ring suburban districts that once stood guard against Detroit students are now welcoming them with open arms. Michigan's demographic changes have hit the suburbs just as hard as they have the city. Districts like Highland Park and Inkster have been dissolved at least in part because of declining enrollment. Even communities that have traditionally shunned connections with Detroit find themselves fighting for Detroit's share of the market. In 1992, the city of East Detroit changed its name to Eastpointe, a move many viewed as an obvious attempt to distance the community from the reputation and woes of its urban big brother to the west. Eastpointe's school district kept the East Detroit name but also held fast to efforts to keep the district's student body Detroit-free.

Things have changed.

Today, the East Detroit School District rents billboards on Detroit Department of Transportation buses featuring images of black children and an inviting message for them to enroll in East Detroit and the district's website touts its open door policy.

This trend is likely to continue in suburban schools because of the region's dwindling population, which leads to our next point.

You Need a Plan

As the number of students declines, school leaders must be radically creative and borderline (or completely) ruthless in their efforts to get and keep students.

This book will offer information about the stark realities of Detroit's educational market, including an inventory of competitors' enrollment data and strategies to that obtain and analyze that information. It will offer an overview of why recruitment and retention strategies are critical to a school's success. It will talk about ways that a thoughtful recruitment and retention strategy can bolster a school's academic and financial stability. It will help you navigate a rapidly changing recruitment and retention environment so you and your team can focus on what's most important: preparing students for college success.

Chapter Two: Basic Recruitment Tools and Strategies

In 2011, Michigan Future Schools commissioned a report that analyzed how parents select schools in Detroit's shrinking educational market. It came as little surprise that word of mouth was the number one factor in selecting a school. There is a reason that Cass Tech and Renaissance High Schools don't recruit students. These schools have built and maintain reputations for excellence (deserved or not) that have made them the envy of other Detroit high schools.

So how does a school build buzz when what they are selling is aspirational instead of based on a concrete track record? Here are a few strategies:

Focus on the Factors that Make Your School Unique

All Michigan Future Schools have college graduation for their students as their defining goal. But let's face it, just about every high school in Detroit advertises college success as a goal, whether it really is or not.

When creating a marketing program, a school leader must identify one organizing message that defines your school. In other words, what is your elevator speech? If you were on an elevator ride with an important potential donor, ally, student or employee, how would you describe your school in two minutes or less? What are the things that set your school apart from other so-called college prep high schools?

For example, Michigan Future Schools have several organizing principles that drive our portfolio: Our schools are academically rigorous, small and focused on preparing students for college success. But if there is one factor that sets our schools apart from other college-prep schools, it's that our schools have college counselors who work with students through the often-difficult transition to college and freshman and sophomore years of college. It's not that the other factors aren't important. Teaching and learning are the heart and soul of our operation. However, high schools that offer college support for their alumni are rare indeed. That's what makes us unique and it's a strong selling point and would figure prominently in our elevator speech.

School leaders who have effective elevator speeches know how to package the factors that make their school strong with the factors that make their school unique. A smart school leader will engage faculty and students in the process of drafting a school elevator speech. Some strategies for doing that are:

- Staff brainstorming sessions. Sit down with your staff and tease out examples of your school's assets. Focus on the things that make your instruction and school

culture unique. What results do you have to crow about? What anecdotes can they share about individual student success stories?

- Student focus groups and surveys. Talk to students about what positive messages they would share with their peers about the school. Why would they recommend it? What needs to be fixed?

Use Math and Models to Develop Your Message

President Barack Obama’s 2008 and 2012 campaigns ushered in a new era of American politics where micro-targeting – or dividing voters by narrow segments and customizing messages to them – became the go-to winning strategy. Anyone who ever opened his or her email and found messages waiting from Michelle Obama or Sarah Jessica Parker for the Obama campaign or Clint Eastwood or Ann Romney for the Romney campaign has been micro-targeted. But candidate Barack Obama had an analytics team of some of the nation’s finest mathematicians, political scientists and behavioral scientists at his disposal – not to mention \$1 billion. Your school may not have access to this kind of sophisticated data mining operations, but you should still collect and leverage data to help you hone and deliver your message.

Michigan Future Schools recently commissioned a report from LB3 Management, a local marketing research firm, about parental decision making in the Detroit high school market. They developed parent profiles based on socio-economic dynamics, educational attainment and other demographic information and used the profiles to predict what factors are most important to each group when they are shopping for a high school experience for their child. They identified five questions that schools should consider when they are building a “sales plan” for potential students and parents:

1. Does the educational content (curriculum) provide my child with the real world knowledge that they will need for the work and higher education world?
 - Professional white collar, working class skilled and blue collar parents tend to seek schooling that can address these questions during the pre-enrollment phase up through the first year of enrollment. Because of their direct employment experiences, they are more attuned to the preparation necessary to achieve stable employment and succeed in the workforce. They will seek schools that can effectively demonstrate how their curriculum and teaching staff can prepare their children for college and career fields. **Per the parent profile composites, 50% of Detroit parents would need this question answered to enroll and maintain their child in the school for more than a year.**
2. Am I comfortable with the school environment (safety, technology, cleanliness, classroom environment, location, customer service, etc)?



- Working class skilled and blue collar parents and lower income non-college experienced parents seek schools that can address this question satisfactorily for them. The professional white collar parent will only select schools that have a reputation of having a safe, clean and educationally sound environment. The working class and lower income parents will look to address this either during the pre-enrollment phase or during the first two years of enrollment. The working class parent will be more likely to assign their comfort with the school to items of technology, customer service, classroom environment, etc.), than the lower income parent model. The lower income parent will look for safety and location to determine their comfort level with the school. If those standards are met, they will be more loyal consumers than the other parent models. **Per the parent profile composites, 89% of Detroit parents would need this question answered to enroll and maintain their child in the school for more than a year; with 39% seeking comfort with technology, customer service and classroom environment and 50% seeking comfort with school safety and location.**
3. Does this school (or system) offer my child the extracurricular activities that will enhance my child's quality of life?
- Professional white collar parents and lower income non college experienced parents look to seek schools that can address this question. The professional parent model will seek an equal balance of social, academic and athletic activities to help prepare their child for the high school and college environments. They will also desire extracurricular activities that will expose their children to suburban and children from affluent homes. The thought is that their child will be able to start building friendships with children of the same or higher social standing. Our lower income parent model will seek athletic activities primarily as a way to
 - Provide a path for their child to reach college. These parents do not see a direct path for their child's success without the inclusion of athletics. **Per the parent profile composites, 61% of Detroit parents would need this question answered to enroll and maintain their child in the school for more than a year; with 11% seeking social, academic and athletic activities and 50% seeking athletic activities only.**
4. Is this school a highly sought after destination by parents (Is my peer group moving their children to this school? Does it have high value in word of mouth perception?)?
- Professional white collar parents are the only grouping that seeks this question as a part of their buying decision. This parent is highly likely to be involved in Greek-letter organizations, business or professional associations and exclusive clubs (Jack & Jill, etc.). They tend to chase schools that their peers are flocking to as the destination for their child. The more exclusive and longer the potential waiting list, the better. **Per the parent profile composites, only 11% of Detroit**

parents would need this question answered to enroll and maintain their child in the school for more than a year.

5. Are the teachers and principal stable yet innovative (will my students have consistency with their teachers during their time at the school and will the school continue to evolve its educational approach over the life of my child's attendance)?
 - Professional white collar parent model and working class skilled and blue collar parents tend to seek schooling that can address these questions during the pre-enrollment phase up through the first year of enrollment. These parents will ask about teachers' tenure and innovations within the classroom experience during the early purchasing period. They want a school that has a stable and moderately tenured staff (5 to 10 years at the school) but has a continuing focus on innovating their classroom teaching methodology to meet changing student needs. **Per the parent profile composites, 50% of Detroit parents would need this question answered to enroll and maintain their child in the school for more than a year.**

Create Opportunities for Students and Parents to Participate in Recruitment and Retention Efforts

When it comes to building word of mouth, parents and students are the most credible voices a school has. School leaders put blood, sweat and tears into building a school's academic framework and reputation. But parents put their child's future on the line. That's why from an outsider's perspective, parents and students reign as ambassadors for a school.

There are few influencers with more sway for middle school student than a high school student. High school leaders can, and should, deploy students for supervised interactions with middle school students who will be choosing a high school soon. For example, Delta Preparatory Academy can host a social justice camp where students train 7th and 8th graders on how to organize around an issue. Events like this can have the potential to build relationships and trust with the families of students who are seeking a positive high school experience.

Additionally, students who are effective communicators should be deployed to middle schools for "high school nights," and quotes from them should be featured in brochures, school videos, and in social media.

Parents: Your Best (or Worst) Surrogate

Parental buzz about a school can make or break its reputation. School leaders who know how to leverage parental word of mouth will have a serious leg up in the recruiting game. Some strategies for positive parental buzz development:

- Build a strong parents group that feels invested in the school's success.
- Create incentives for parents to invite their peers to open houses and other recruitment opportunities.
- Give them something to crow about: Constant communication via online newsletters, and social media will expand your opportunities to arm parents with positive stories to share about their kid's school.

Deploy Community Partners to Build Your School's Brand

Schools don't exist in a vacuum. In addition to the students who attend schools and the parents who send them there, schools are surrounded by neighbors and supported by partners who feel a connection to them. Smart school leaders know how to build – and maintain – ties with potential community partners. When the relationship is strong, community partners can be powerful allies in building a school's reputation.

Leaders at start-up schools who want to be competitive with established schools often find themselves stretching to create extracurricular activities that will help them attract and retain students. However, with tight budgets, smaller staffs and necessary focus on academics, it's often hard to keep up with demand. Schools should instead consider partnering with existing nonprofits that work with high school students. A partnership with an external organization with a strong reputation can potentially serve three purposes:

1. Give your students access to service learning opportunities that may elude them during the school day.
2. Allow your school to benefit from an affiliation with an organization that has credibility and a reputation for excellence.
3. Create opportunities for the students to get the school media coverage for positive action. For example, Ben Carson High School for Science and Medicine partnered with Detroit Medical Center for the "Say No to Soda" campaign. The campaign allowed Carson students a platform to address a Detroit City Council meeting; speak at a press conference and appear on local media outlets about how drinking soda contributes to obesity. The students' strong communication skills helped boost the school's reputation, even though the campaign wasn't a direct marketing ploy for Ben Carson High.

Work with Vendors and Businesses to Build Buzz about Your School

When dealing with business owners, it is smart to assume that any action they undertake will be motivated by one consideration: What's in it for my business? Since school leaders are reined in by tight budgets, they need to be creative about how they build relationships with vendors and small business owners. Some approaches include:

- Bartering: For example, steer your students to a particular school uniform store in exchange for a counter space at the store to display your school's collateral materials.
- Heighten awareness about your school by leveraging its relationship with a local business. For example, give a business owner a plaque that celebrates the school-business ties. Example: "DEPSA salutes Detroit Dry Cleaners, our partner in quality education"

Give a neighborhood store a sign that boosts school pride and awareness. As in: "This is Carson Country!" or "Detroit Leadership Academy Families Shop Here."

The Elements of Great Collateral Materials

You've drafted powerful student and parent ambassadors to help market your school. You've thoroughly trained your staff on message and from janitor to principal, your team is singing with gusto from the same marketing hymnal. But no matter how great your verbal pitch is, your school is going to need to have written materials to give to potential parents and students. Collateral material is an umbrella term for printed materials that are used for marketing purposes. Collateral material include:

- Fact Sheets
- Brochures
- Direct Mail Pieces
- Flyers

Building Your Brand with a Strong Logo and Motto

Close your eyes and think about Coca Cola. You may get an image of brown bubbly substance. But it's just as likely that you'll think of white script on a red background. How about McDonalds? You're as likely to think about Golden Arches as golden French fries.

A logo is your school's graphic calling card. A strong logo can inspire positive associations with your school. Conversely, a bland or generic logo suggests a lack of attention to detail that could undermine your outreach efforts.

A motto is a short phrase that conveys a school's guiding principles. For example, Jalen Rose Leadership Academy's motto - "Enter a Learner. Exit a Leader." - conveys the school's central aspirations: Educating a new generation of leaders.

Does your school have a strong logo and motto? They are essential building blocks for the development of your collateral materials.

Creating Brochures That Sell Your School

A school brochure is one of the most basic, yet important, documents that a school can use to tell its story. A brochure is your school's calling card and it indicates to potential students, parents, funders and partners that your school is professionally-managed and image conscious. A bad brochure has the opposite effect: It suggests that the school is managed by leaders who do not take the school's image and reputation seriously. If you can't produce a brochure that looks good and tells a compelling story through graphics, pictures and words, it's better to not distribute one at all - which isn't an option. So here are a few keys to creating effective brochures:

- Hire a high-quality graphic artist: Generic clip art in a school brochure indicates a lack of investment in quality. A potential parent, community partner or student might think that if you cut corners on something as fundamental as a brochure, you might cut corners on your academic program. A graphic artist can play with the layout, graphics, and images to create a brochure as unique as your school.
- Don't be afraid to be different: If you want your school to stand out from the crowd, a basic, six-panel brochure may not be good enough. Bright colors, bold graphics, odd sizes and different textures are just a few of the ways that your brochure can stand out from the pack.
- Have strong copy: A brochure needs to communicate more than your school's "who, what, when, where, and why." It has to make a potential student or his or her parent FEEL something: Inspired. Curious. Jealous. A good brochure will make a potential customer want to know more about a school.
- Feature a personal testimonial from students, staff or community partners. Parents want to have their hunch that your school is great validated by people who have credibility with them.
- Use photographs to tell a story: You want to have images of students who look like they are excited about learning. If you have an impressive-looking building, spotlight images

of it in your brochure. Often a compelling photograph can be the difference between a potential family reading and skipping your brochure.

Using Words with Power

There is an art to writing copy for collateral materials. You may have earned a doctorate degree for your ability to create turgid documents full of multi-syllabic words. But the goal of collateral material is accessibility. A major barrier for some parents – especially those who are not educated – is getting past bloated language in school written materials. Write clearly and succinctly. Use action words.

You may be tempted to write about everything that makes your school great, but too much copy can significantly undermine the readability of your piece. A strong brochure will have a few key messages, a couple of strong testimonials, compelling photos. Don't overwrite!

A Picture = A Thousand Words

Visually compelling photographs are a must. When a student picks up a brochure, they want to see images that look like them. Parents want to see images of students that look like who they want their child to be.

Give the Shopper Homework

You want to take advantage of every opportunity to connect with a potential student. Ideally, when a potential student or parent reads your written material, they should want to take action to learn more. Make sure your material gives them something to do. Examples: "Check out our website." "Friend us on Facebook." "Follow us on Instagram or Twitter."

Looks Matter

Your written material should be inviting and bold but not overwhelming. Always leave sufficient white space on the page so your reader doesn't get overwhelmed. Too much copy or even too many images can make a potential shopper check out visually. Among the visual components that you should discuss with your graphic designer are:

- Font (type and color) – Many graphic artists recommend the use of serif types because they are easier to read.
- Use of graphics and charts – Only include these if they are really adding something to your message. With brochures, less is often more.
- Paper size and configuration – Don't be afraid to be bold. Creating a document outside the 8.5 by 11 standard paper size could pay off by making your piece stand out from the crowd.

- Paper texture, weight and color – Be mindful of your budget. You don't want to use copy paper that will look unprofessional but you need not invest in wedding invitation-quality cardstock in order to have a good looking document.
- Photographs and illustrations - Only use professional quality photos and illustrations for your document.

A Final Checklist

Before you sign off on your collateral material, here are a few questions you should ask yourself about it:

- Will this document help your employees and other stakeholders explain the school's mission and strengths?
- If you leave it with a potential student or parent, does it answer every basic question they might have?
- Does the piece fully convey the factors that make your school unique?
- Does the piece cover all potential audiences (students and parents)? Do you want to create two different targeted pieces (one for students, a different one for parents)?
- Have you included testimonials from credible stakeholders and supporters (high-profile board members, community leaders)?
- Have you told the truth? It's tempting to overpromise when you're selling your school but outrageously ambitious claims will often send up red flags instead of perked ears. Brag but don't lie. Once your credibility is gone with a consumer, you can't get it back.

When you can answer yes to all these questions, you're ready to print and distribute.

Printing

Only use printers that have a strong track record and can offer you samples of past jobs to review.

Because of Detroit's history as a union town, you also may want to ask your printer if the shop is unionized. If so, ask them to print their union "bug" – or logo representing the shop's unionized status - at the end of your document. While the influence of organized labor may be waning in Michigan, you don't want to unnecessarily offend parents who pay attention to such details. Below is an image of a union bug that lets readers know that the printing of your material was done in a unionized shop.



Distribution

Once your team has designed and printed your collateral material, you need to think about how you will get it into the hands of potential shoppers. There are obvious occasions and locations for brochure distribution like your school's open house(s) or high school nights at area middle schools. But you should also explore the possibility of displaying your written material at other, high-traffic locations such as neighborhood grocery stores, barber and beauty shops (especially those catering to children), nail salons, school uniform stores, etc. Here are some of the questions you need to consider when making a distribution plan for your collateral material.

- How many pieces of literature do you want to distribute?
- Where does your target audience congregate?
- If you are going to drop off collateral materials at external locations, do you have a plan to monitor whether the materials need to be replenished?

If you decide to distribute your literature using direct mail, you should know that mailing lists from paid list providers are notoriously inaccurate. It is likely that many of the homes you will mail to will not have a child in the age range you are targeting.

ONLINE MARKETING

Building a Great Website

Not too long ago, a website was a “bells and whistles” marketing feature. It was nice to have but not necessary. No longer. A school that doesn't have a website will not be taken seriously by a selective school shopper. Period.

Luckily, creating a website is easy now because of the proliferation of “drag and drop” platforms. Instead of having to rely on coding and graphics experts to build your website, these platforms allow school leaders to insert their school's information into attractive pre-made web designs. Examples include Wix, Weebly, Website Builder, Impress.ly, and Site Builder.



No matter what platform you choose, your website must include a few essential features:

- Contact information: This information should be easily accessible.
- School Mission: Short and descriptive.
- School leadership team: Administrators, instruction team and school board members
- Testimonials from students and parents: The more personal, the better.

Maximize Search Engine Results

When a potential shopper goes on line to search for a high-quality Detroit high school, how likely is it that they will find your school? Ideally, you want your school's website to be among the first names that emerges when a parent does a search engine search for a quality high school.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a complicated process that requires an expert-level understanding of analytics. However, Google, which is the world's most popular search engine, does provide basic information for webmasters who are looking to boost their SEO on the Webmasters Tool interface: <https://www.google.com/webmasters/tools/home?hl=ens>

Here are a few tips to boost your SEO:

- Use a short, descriptive phrase for your page title.
- Emphasize keywords that are exciting to potential parents.
- Study your competitor's pages, especially those whose websites have high SEO rankings

A Few Essential Social Media Tips

- Have a social media calendar. Infrequent updates to your social media platforms convey negative messages about the school's professionalism. Set reminders on your calendar to tweet and post.
- Explore social media ads. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter offer paid ads at a very reasonable price that are highly targeted. Learn more here: https://www.facebook.com/business/products/ads/?campaign_id=1604904836426745 and here: <https://business.twitter.com/?ref=us-ps-go-branded-sitelinks-ads&gclid=CPv27-U6MsCFQ6maQodGw0JNg>
- Use lots of images. Studies have shown that high school students value pictures social media above all other forms of communication.

PAID MEDIA

Schools have a lot of priorities for their precious budget dollars so paid media purchases can seem like an expensive gamble. Paid media advertising often relies on little more than sophisticated hunches to target an audience. For example, a radio station with an adult

contemporary rhythm and blues format may boast of research that shows that its audience is largely composed of African Americans between the ages of 35 and 50, but there is no guarantee that the kind of parents who are shopping for a high-quality college preparatory high school for their child will be listening when a school's commercial airs. The general rule of them for message penetration is that a message needs to be heard eight times before it breaks through a listener's consciousness. This is an expensive gamble indeed.

Before you choose what kind of paid media buy you will make, you should know your audience. It's likely that you will need to buy multiple ads, so it's important to have a good sense of the pros and cons of advertising platforms.

Print Ads

Print ads are advertisements that appear in printed magazines or newspapers. Print ads are sold based on the size and location of the advertisement.

Pros: Regular readers of periodicals and newspapers are likely to be sophisticated shoppers. Placement of an ad in a print publication that they trust can lend your school credibility with parents who are shopping.

Cons: Print ads can be very costly. For example, a full page in the Detroit Free Press on Sunday can cost in the range of \$30,000- \$50,000 and a full page in the Michigan Chronicle newspaper is more than \$7,000. Another problem with print advertising is that it's often seen once then discarded. It has been estimated that a person needs exposure to a message eight times before it is absorbed.

Radio Ads

Radio advertisements are sold based on the length of the ad (generally 30 or 60 seconds) and the time that it runs. An advertisement that is played during morning drive time (6 a.m. until 10 a.m.) is most expensive because that is generally the peak listening time when drivers are likely in their cars. An advertisement that is played during afternoon drive (3 p.m. until 7 p.m.) is second most expensive time for the same reason.

Pros: Radio ads are relatively inexpensive. Because radio is an intimate form of communication (not normally a shared experience like television viewing) listeners typically pay closer attention to radio commercials. It's relatively easy to target the gender, age and economic status of potential shopper you want with a radio ad.

Cons: The Detroit radio market is overrun with ads for school. It's hard to cut through the clutter with a message that resonates.

Internet Ads

Pros: Banner ads that appear on the internet can be easily targeted and are relatively inexpensive.

Cons: The digital divide still exists in urban communities, limiting the reach of internet ads to some potential shoppers.

Television

Pros: A well-placed television buy has the potential to have deep penetration of the market. Former Detroit Mayoral candidate Lisa Howze gambled on a one-time Super Bowl ad (that only aired in the local market) because of the number of households that would be tuned into the game. (It should be noted that she lost the primary race- badly). More than 95% of American households own television sets. The availability of ad time on cable networks and 24-hour broadcasting could make a television ad time affordable.

Cons: Technology is making it increasingly easy to skip commercials. DVRs, TiVO and On Demand viewing tout the ability to avoid commercials as a selling point. Even with the availability of less expensive ad time on cable, television commercials are too expensive to produce for most independent schools.

Billboards

Billboards come in two sizes: poster boards that cost \$2,500 or more per month and bulletin boards that can cost up to \$25,000 per month.

Pros:

Billboards are most effective for schools that are already established. If a school has a highly credible spokesperson, a billboard can garner attention for a new school, but they are most effective for maintaining name recognition. Billboards also allow for customized placement: You can place your ad where there is a geographical advantage. If you are targeting a certain neighborhood, a poster board in a high-traffic area will likely be seen by potential customers.

Cons:

Billboards rely on visual clues instead of words because they are viewed so quickly. Even if you've got a great pitch to distinguish your school from others, you won't be able to fully tell your story on a billboard. On average, a person will view a billboard for two to three seconds, not enough time to fully digest a significant amount of text. Most schools will find it difficult to boil their message down to one powerful phrase or sentence. Billboards require a long-term commitment (usually three months or so) and offer no flexibility to change if the message is not penetrating.

Direct Mail

Pros: It's easy to track your return on investment because you know exactly who has received your message. With a good list, you can target the parents you want instead of the scattershot approach of other paid media platforms.

Cons: It's very difficult to target parents of rising 9th graders by direct mail. Local lists are notoriously unreliable. Your school's mailing will likely wind up in your target's junk mail pile.

EARNED MEDIA

Most schools have a limited budget for paid media but there are other options for broad distribution of your message that don't involve money. Understanding how reporters and editors function – and respecting their process, deadlines and time – are key to successful media relations. With savvy media relations, you can tell your story through outlets like newspapers, television news shows and radio. Despite criticism of news media coverage, it is still by and large how people get their information. And it remains the foundation for people's attitudes and opinions about public figures and issues.

You can reach thousands, even millions, of people through television, radio, newspapers and the Internet. Regular simultaneous media consumption for online, newspaper, magazines, radio, television and direct mail is up anywhere from 1% to 35%, depending on the media, BIG Research found.

When it comes to people of color, while television is a preferred news source, news from minority-focused radio stations is overwhelmingly preferred and viewed as the most credible and trustworthy.

What will get your story picked up by the media?

- **Convenience:** A story that will force reporters to drive for 45 minutes to cover will likely be ignored.
- **Surprise:** Do you have a “man bites dog” element that you can sell? What is makes your story unique.
- **Visuals:** If you want your story on the front page or to lead the news broadcast, visuals are important. Some media outlets, like weekly newspapers with small over- taxed staffs, will gladly publish a photo and news release you send if the photo is compelling.
- **Deploying surrogates:** Surrogates are individuals who can serve as third party validators. A strong surrogate can sometimes be more effective than a paid staff

News releases that get your school covered

News releases are the documents you send to media outlets to gain attention for the story you want told. They can lead to a mention on a television news broadcast, a brief in the newspaper, a full-blown news article or even an editorial. Here are a few basic rules for writing news releases:

- Include your contact information at the top of the page. Make sure you include a number where a representative of your school will easily be reached, such as the principal's cell phone number.
- Cover the "5 Ws" – who, what, when, where and why
- Include dates, times and addresses.
- Quote a person of authority
- Include key statistic or numbers
- Send the release out a few days before the event and follow up with relevant reporters or editors.
- If you want your event listed in a newspaper calendar, you'll need to send it out even earlier.

Following is an example of a positive news story a MFS school generated.



Posted: March 12, 2010

Detroit charter school seen as a role model

BY CHASTITY PRATT DAWSEY and ROBIN ERB
FREE PRESS EDUCATION WRITERS

To get an idea of the kind of schools philanthropic leaders want to create in Detroit, look no further than Detroit Edison Public School Academy.

Students take high school algebra in eighth grade, study French and Chinese, beat the state averages on the MEAP test and are assessed every eight weeks to ensure that they are grouped in reading classes according to achievement levels, not age.

The K-8 school plans to open a high school campus this fall. It'll be the first new school to be funded by a grant from members of Excellent Schools Detroit, the coalition seeking to spend about \$200 million to open 70 new schools for Detroit kids by 2020.

Leaders of the coalition publicly released their education plan Thursday at the Skillman Foundation's headquarters in Detroit. The sweeping proposal envisions shutting down failing schools and opening private, charter and traditional public schools that are modeled after schools proven to work.

An array of local community leaders showed up

to support the plan, expressing relief that the focus is on children and not money and power.

"This is not about contracts, this is about children," said Charles Pugh, president of the Detroit City Council. "Finally!"

Leaders who typically compete for Detroit students also were there. They came from places such as Cornerstone Schools and Detroit Public Schools and plan to apply for funds to open schools.

"I believe great schools will be created that will attract people from the suburbs," said Clark Durant, co-founder of Cornerstone, a private school that also has two charter school campuses.

That's what Edison does, with students hailing from cities such as Southfield and Pontiac.

Ralph Bland, superintendent of the 12-year-old charter school, which got \$850,000 in start-up funds to create a high school campus, said he believes its success can be copied statewide.

"Replication is easy if you have the right things in place to replicate," he said.

DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING

When done right, door-to-door canvassing can help you build your school's profile, build good will and – most importantly, help you snag new students. But there are many canvassing pitfalls. What follows is tips from Detroit political operative Jamiel Martin about best practices for door- to-door canvassing in Detroit. Martin has both led and participated in canvassing operations in Detroit and other major cities since the late 1990s.

Best Practices for Door-To-Door Canvassing in Detroit

1. Know the message: Canvassers should have uniform talking points. More importantly, canvassers should have an emotional connection to or stake in the school. Teachers, parents and other faculty members make the best canvassers. School leaders should host a training session where those who are canvassing are trained on the message, do mock sales pitches and are trained on safety issues. Canvassers should have a well written script for the targeted audience.
2. Walking lists and maps: Canvassers are more efficient and confident when they know exactly where and who they are canvassing. Walking lists are created by targeting a specific population (for example, parents of students ages 11-15) in a specific geographic area. Often, political consultants are adept at the art of creating high-quality walking lists.
3. Leave them with something to read: Canvassers should distribute literature explaining the who, what, when, and why they are canvassing.
4. Look like a professional: Canvassers should be dressed as similar as possible to give a look of professionalism and uniformity in the field. Comfortable shoes are a must!!
5. Document the results of the visit: Canvassers should have tally sheets to track the results of the canvass. The tally sheet should note whether the parent/student is interested in more information or – if it was not documented it was not completed.
6. Identification: Canvassers should have picture I.D. at all times and a badge, sticker, or t-shirt that identifies them with the school they are representing.
7. Safety first:
 - a. Work in teams of at least two canvassers per street. If possible, blitz areas with entire teams to create massive visibility. Never should one person canvass alone.
 - b. Never go into anyone's home or out of view from your canvassing partner.
 - c. Know your environment. Look around for signs of danger as you canvass. Don't walk with your head down.



- d. If you are not comfortable with a certain house, then skip it. Better safe than sorry.
 - e. After ringing the doorbell or knocking on the door, canvassers should take a giant step back from the door. This helps put the person who answers the door at ease. The sight of a stranger standing directly in the door may put the door opener on the defensive.
 - f. Be polite and never argumentative.
8. Timing: Canvassers should be in the field during the hours that the targeted audience is most likely to be home but not as early as to disturb the neighborhood and not so late as to put the canvasser in danger after dark.
9. What you should not do:
- a. Do not put the school's literature in a homeowner's mailbox. Doing so is a federal offense.
 - b. Do not go to houses with no soliciting signs. Doing so may be seen as being confrontational.
 - c. Do not walk on a homeowner's lawn. Always remember that everything you do reflects upon the school you represent. Don't tear down the school's reputation with a trivial action like walking on grass.
10. Make sure you bring supplies such as clipboards, pens, and sufficient brochures. Also have a car nearby that is stocked with water, snacks and first aid items.

OPEN HOUSES

An important element of your recruitment strategy will be inviting parents and students to events to hear about your school in person. An open house is a chance for parents to see your campus and meet your students and staff.

How to get potential students and their parents to attend your school's open house

The best measure of an open house's success is the number of students and parents who attend. But convincing busy middle school students and their parents to take time from their schedule to come to your school for a visit can be difficult for all but the most serious shoppers. Here are a few strategies.

- Partner with organizations that parents and students trust. Examples can include church youth ministries, Boys and Girls Clubs, groups like Jack and Jill, Boys and Girls Scout troops and youth sports leagues.
- Incentives. School leaders are rightfully skittish about offering prizes to parents to get them to show up an open house. However, giving potential students and parents desirable items with your school's name on it boosts your school's profile among the most important demographic groups.
- Word of mouth is the most effective and most difficult approach. With their many obligations, students and parents are often not particularly focused on efforts to help their schools find new students. One way to boost attendance is to offer incentives to parents and students who help schools get potential students to show up at an open house.

Who should speak at an open house

The principal should be the school's lead spokesperson. She or he sets the tone for the event and is the best ambassador for the school's culture. An open house should also include presentations from:

- At least one student who can speak with passion about how the school makes him or her feel. You want the student to convey that teachers and school officials make her or him feel cared for and valued.
- A parent who can speak about why they chose the school for their child and how their choice has paid off for their family.
- A highly-effective teacher with charisma to describe how teachers at the schools make their lessons relevant and rigorous.

Preparation checklist for an open house

- Sign in sheets
- School brochures
- School video
- Application packets
- Merchandise featuring the school's logo



Chapter Three: Moving Students from Signed Up to Enrolled

You've completed door-to-door canvassing. You've held open houses. You've visited countless middle schools. You've met face-to-face with parents. Your hard work has paid off and you have a list of would-be freshmen all signed up and ready to attend your school. Now you can relax, right? Of course not!

Just as Nick Saban constantly worries about other coaches sneaking into the living rooms of his recruits, a smart school leader doesn't assume that a student is really theirs until Count Day. That means that even after the ink is dry on an application and the admission letter is mailed, a student is still very much up for grabs. School leaders who assume that all of their peers are hoping to steal their freshmen to fill their own seats will be much more strategic about protecting the students who have indicated they're coming to their schools.

Moving a student from interested to enrolled means playing a game that is equal parts of strategic offense and bone crushing defense. It's not for the faint of heart. While it may be tempting to celebrate every filled-out and turned-in application, school leaders would do well to remember that many students apply to multiple schools. The key to being the school a student and parent actually selects is building relationships and personal connections that make a family feel personally invested in your school. This chapter will outline strategies to move students from applicants to your school to enrollees. Doing so requires hard work, investment and savvy.

The Application Process

There is no doubt that by ninth grade, students have a voice in what school they will attend. They will often make decisions based on factors that are important to a 14-year-old child such as where their peers are going to school and the prominence of the school's sports teams and extracurricular activities.

The factors that motivate parents to select a high school for their child often differ from those that students consider. And parents are the ultimate decision makers.

So it's important that you know what motivated parents to select your school and then invest energy into assuring them that they made the right choice. This is why your enrollment materials are important. Enrollment forms should give your school a mini-profile of an entering family. Instead of just capturing basic demographic information, use the enrollment form to ask more probing questions like:

1. What was the most important factor that made you select this school?
2. Is your family also considering other schools? If so, which one(s)?

3. School begins at ___ a.m. and ends at ___ p.m. Do you anticipate transportation challenges with getting your child to school at home on time?

Once you have collected information for your family profile, you should disaggregate the data and send out tailored messages to parents. For example, parents who are especially interested in safety could receive an email blast introducing the school's security team. Parents who prioritize extra-curricular activities can get messages about that topic.

Lottery

If you have had a particularly successful recruitment strategy, your school may need to conduct a lottery to select students. Your lottery process must convey professionalism, fairness and consistency. Parents should:

- Consider videotaping the lottery
- Have names drawn by an independent third party
- Establish a protocol for updating waitlisted parents. Because students often apply to multiple schools, you want to keep as many potential students as possible in play until Count Day.

Admission Letter

All parents and students who are admitted should get a letter welcoming them to the school. The letter should convey that they should feel special for being accepted at your school. You want both parents and students to feel a sense of inclusion and accomplishment.

School leaders should consider sending home at least one newsletter before school starts. The newsletter can address concerns about school culture (uniform, code of conduct) but it should also convey excitement about the coming school year and spotlight students who are thriving at the school.

How to Keep Students Interested in Your School

The Personal Touch

Adolescence can be a fragile time for a child's ego. Smart school leaders should use their follow up opportunities with students with highly-personalized contacts that make them feel valued and important. Examples:

- A framed certificate celebrating their admittance to the school.
- Personalized school paraphernalia
- A home visit to discuss school culture, expectations and academics

Peer Pressure

Schools should consider assigning upperclassmen to serve as mentors to entering freshmen. The job should entail specific duties such as a designated number of in-person contacts and social media contacts. Make it easy for the student by training them and giving them talking points they can use and draft letters they can send. A hand-written letter from an upperclassman welcoming them to your school could work wonders for an incoming freshman who feels uncertainty about his or her school selection.

Summer Programming and Assignments

Schools can and should have summer orientation activities for entering freshmen that will prepare them for the school's culture as well and deepen students' ties to it. Examples include team building exercises and trips to college campuses.

Troubleshooting

There is a myriad of factors that go into a parent's decision about choosing a school. A school leader can address or at least manage many of them. School leaders who hope to hold onto to students who have signed up need to be aware of the barriers that parents and students face in choosing your school. For example, if a fair number of students who have applied for your school don't live nearby and have parents with unreliable transportation options, a school leader should consider whether it makes sense to offer transportation. It's better to know potential retention challenges long before Count Day than to learn too late to address them.

Conclusion

The bottom line is that having a student on your admissions list in no way guarantees that a student is going to be in a seat at your school on Count Day. The good news is that this works both ways, so no school leader should be above stealing another school's recruits. When it comes to recruitment and retention, if your school is not at the table, you could find it on the menu.

Chapter Four: Retention Strategies

Your students are still in their seats on Count Day and you may be tempted to relax. Not so fast. In order for your school to maintain a stable enrollment base, your school needs to retain the students you recruited.

Research

Often, educators become aware of problems when students and their parents have already made plans to leave. Consistent research can help school leaders troubleshoot issues and retain students. The goal of regular surveys is to build a feedback loop that makes parents and students feel valued.

Potential Retention Questionnaire Topics:

- Measuring satisfaction with the rigor of homework and classes
- Measuring satisfaction with pedagogical strategies
- Evaluating parent/student satisfaction with school safety
- Evaluating external barriers to continued attendance (transportation, family circumstances)

Give Parents Homework

Parents are an integral partner in school and student success. Often, they want to be made to feel that they matter to the school community. Beyond the

- Share small classroom wins and challenges on a regular basis with parents.
- Encourage the development of family book clubs where parents and their students can have rich conversations at home about reading material.
- Share articles about ways to make the home environment more

Make Communication Easy

There are several apps that teachers can use to easily connect with parents and students. The goal should be ease of use. Examples include TeacherKit, which Mac/Life described as a “teacher’s Swiss Army knife” and BuzzMob which is designed to allow teachers to provide swift and secure updates to parents and students via mobile platforms.

Home Visits

Home visits by teachers have been popular among pre-K and elementary school educators for many years. In fact, Head Start requires teachers to make two annual home visits for each

student. But the concept of mandatory teacher home visits for high school students is somewhat novel. There is no denying, however, that the benefits of home visits are real. Home visits by teachers can convey messages about the school's commitment to a student's success; empower parents to connect to their child's education in a meaningful way and help teachers better understand the challenges the home environment can present to a student's learning.

Before sending your teachers out to visit homes, consider the following:

- The goal: What do you want your teacher's to accomplish with a home visit? Are there specific questions you want parents and students to answer? Do you want to help students understand school culture? You should have a strong plan of action with specific goals.
- Safety: Have safety protocols for teacher visits. Some schools require teachers to travel in pairs. Teachers should have their travel schedule mapped out and the school should be aware of his or her location at all times.
- Don't get frustrated: The transient nature of low-income Detroiters can make arranging home visits a difficult task. Parents often move and efforts to reach them can be frustrating. Keep trying. The payoff is worth it.

The following *New York Times* article and video and *Today Show* video explore how teachers at a high school in the Bronx borough of New York set up and execute home visits to help their students:

Before the First School Bell, Teachers in Bronx Make House Calls by Fernanda Santos:

http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/04/nyregion/before-the-first-school-bell-teachers-in-bronx-make-house-calls.html?_r=0

Learning Begins at Home by Rob Harris:

<http://www.nytimes.com/video/education/10000001024995/learning-begins-at-home.html?action=click&contentCollection=education&module=lede®ion=caption&pgtype=article>

Teachers make house calls, see payoff in classroom:

<http://www.today.com/video/today/53216428#53216428>



Chapter Five: Recruitment and Retention Planning Tool

Use the grids below to track your progress on key recruitment and retention tasks for your school.

Planning Year Recruitment and Retention Task List

TASK	CATEGORY	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?	DUE DATE	If not complete by required quarter, provide details on progress, expected date of completion, needs for assistance
Quarter 1 Tasks (July – September)				
Understand parents-as-shoppers research.				
Understand market realities: declining student population, growing competition.				
Articulate school brand	RECRUITMENT			
Develop school marketing and student recruitment strategy (including strategy for ensuring matriculation of students who enroll).				
Develop “elevator pitch.”	RECRUITMENT			
Train board / school leader on delivering elevator pitch.	RECRUITMENT/RETENTION			
Quarter 2 Tasks (October – December)				
Design school logo.	BRANDING			
Develop website, letterhead, etc.	BRANDING			
Develop marketing materials.	RECRUITMENT/BRANDING			
Develop student intake process.	RECRUITMENT			
Develop application and enrollment forms.	RECRUITMENT			
Develop initial recruitment postcard	RECRUITMENT			



Identify targets for recruitment outreach (geographic, feeder schools, etc.)	RECRUITMENT			
Quarter 3 Tasks (January – March)				
Establish social networking presence.				
TASK	CATEGORY	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE?	DUE DATE	If not complete by required quarter, provide details on progress, expected date of completion, needs for assistance
Develop family/student handbook.				
Send initial 2013 recruitment postcard to potential students/parents	RECRUITMENT			
Host first school open house	RECRUITMENT			
Finalize paid media plan	RECRUITMENT			
Train staff and strong student surrogates on recruitment strategies and elevator pitch	RECRUITMENT			
Quarter 4 Tasks (April – June)				
Plan and hold lottery (if applicable).	RECRUITMENT			
Continue to host recruitment open houses	RECRUITMENT			
Hold orientation for enrolled students and their parents	RETENTION/RECRUITMENT			
Do home visits for students (if applicable).	RETENTION/RECRUITMENT			
Develop marketing plan for student retention.	RETENTION			



<p>Develop and mail pre-summer letter to parents/students with summer to-do list (reading lists, etc.) and school community-building messages.</p>	<p>RETENTION</p>			
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Recruitment and Retention Task List for Open Schools

Task	Category	Who Is Responsible?	Completed? (Y/N) If not complete by required quarter, provide details on progress, expected date of completion, needs for assistance
Quarter 1 Tasks (July – September)			
Review student and parent questionnaires about school satisfaction	RETENTION		
Meet with staff to troubleshoot and address concerns raised in student and parent questionnaires.	RETENTION		
Schedule and begin to execute home visits with existing and new families	RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION		
Host summer team building/orientation events for new students	RECRUITMENT		
Brainstorm with staff to tweak elevator pitch and collect positive anecdotes/success stories for marketing efforts	RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION		
Train staff on updated elevator pitch	RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION		
At least three contacts with newly-enrolled students and their parents by staff and student leaders	RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION		
Outreach to stakeholders such as local community groups	RETENTION		
Quarter 2 Tasks (October – December)			
Revisit marketing material (add new testimonials, update offerings)	RECRUITMENT		
Reach out to local middle schools to develop a calendar of “high school nights” visits and other recruitment opportunities	RECRUITMENT		
Plan budget for paid media	RECRUITMENT		
Review/Revise application and enrollment forms.	RECRUITMENT		
Develop initial recruitment postcard	RECRUITMENT		
Identify targets for recruitment outreach (geographic, feeder schools, etc.)	RECRUITMENT		
Quarter 3 Tasks (January – March)			
Establish social networking presence.	RECRUITMENT		
Develop a plan to communicate with parents for both recruitment and retention purposes.	RECRUITMENT		
Host first school open house	RECRUITMENT		
Finalize paid media plan	RECRUITMENT		
Train staff and strong student surrogates on recruitment strategies	RECRUITMENT		



Task	Category	Who Is Responsible?	Completed? (Y/N) If not complete by required quarter, provide details on progress, expected date of completion, needs for assistance
Quarter 4 Tasks (April – June)			
Plan and hold lottery (if applicable).	RECRUITMENT		
Continue to host recruitment open houses	RECRUITMENT		
Hold orientation for enrolled students and their parents	RECRUITMENT		



Chapter Six: Resources

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Metro Times

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Michigan Chronicle

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Monthly Publications

BLAC Magazine

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Metro Parent Magazine
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Inside Detroit
WCHB-AM 1200
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Phone: 313.259.2000
(Show airs M-F from 10 a.m. – 2 p.m.)

Detroit Today
WDET 101.9 FM
Host: Stephen Henderson
Phone: 313.577.7685
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(Show airs M-F at 10 a.m. and 7 p.m.)

Television

Detroit Black Journal
WTVS – TV 56
Host: Stephen Henderson
Producer: Daphne Hughes
248.305.3788
(Show airs on Sunday at 9:30 a.m. and Wednesday at 7:30 p.m.)

Live in the D
WDIV – TV 4
Hosts: Chuck Gaidica and Tati Amare
Producer: Jay Kuhlman
(Show airs M-F at 10 a.m.)

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Big Book of Schools is published in May (copy deadline is in April)

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*Special Publication: “Achieve School Choice Guide” is published twice a year – in May and September. Deadlines are typically two weeks before publication date.

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iHeartMedia
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WMXD 92.3 FM (URBAN ADULT CONTEMPORARY)

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WDMK-FM 105.9 (URBAN AC)

kissdetroit.com

WGPR-FM 107.5 (HIP HOP)

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