

Motivate parents to commit now for next school year

Using both a carrot and stick to motivate enrollment/re-enrollment

“If an organization has a carrot-and-stick approach or policy, they offer people things in order to persuade them to do something and punish them if they refuse to do it.”

Collins English Dictionary

Last week I talked about incentives for motivating parents to enroll their children for next year. Lisa Bissell Paulson at Pleasant Hill gave us an excellent example of effective rewards (aka "carrots") for students and parents. That is half of the equation: you also need a "stick." Why?

If there is no risk, there is no commitment

If parents are not spending any money to enroll/re-enroll, the temptation for them will be to go through the enrollment process to please their children, please the school, or hold their child's spot "just in case"--but they may well be undecided.

Enrollment numbers that didn't require true commitment from parents, may or may not be accurate when the first day of school rolls around.

So what to do instead?

1. Require a substantial, non-refundable enrollment fee now

I love Lisa's tiered approach to enrollment fees, (i.e. \$xx if enrolling before this date and this will increase substantially if you enroll after that date).

The one difference is that enrollment fee needs to be expensive enough that it would be painful for parents to lose. How much that is will vary between communities. In some areas \$75/child will be enough to ensure that parents stay after paying that fee. For other schools it may need to be \$150/child or more.

2. Double that fee for enrollment after your deadline

The "stick" is the enrollment fee will increase substantially if parents don't meet the deadline you publish. I strongly suggest this be double the fee needed to enroll before the deadline.

3. Set the deadline for before your budget and hiring decisions are due to the conference

Next week I'll explain timing and communication in detail for next year. But, for now use these basic principles.

- Don't change your system if you can't:
 - » get your school board's support,
 - » communicate it at least three times between now and when you implement it,
- Explain (all 3+ times you announce this) that you are doing this because:
 - » Your school needs to be responsible stewards of its resources.
 - » Everyone has to balance their budgets (except, sadly, the government).
 - » Since employment costs are the single largest expense at your school, you must know that before you can create a sustainable budget.
 - » You must accurately project the number of students in order to accurately project the teachers and staff needed
 - » You need to know next year's numbers in order to hire/re-hire teachers in a timely way and be a responsible, ethical employer
 - » Note: the NCC deadline for you to submit a budget will not be a persuasive argument for your parents.

Delegating:

You can't delegate this, but you can't do it on your own either. You will need to work through this with your board and then communicate it often to your parents.

Binder tab: January

School size: All

Marketing process step:

- 1) Who are we?
- 2) What do families want?
- 3) What needs to change?
- 4) How do we tell our community?
- 5) How do we track results?