

Don't offer deep discounts for first year students

Understanding parent motivators

“Even two years in to the Great Recession, Adventist parents whose children are not in our schools ranked tuition in the bottom half of 40 factors affecting school choice.”

Carol Tilstra Nash
(data from the 2010 survey of NCC members)

If your school board believes the school can afford it, why would you not do this?

There are three primary reasons, the first of which I talked about last week.

Families who begin by "trying out" your school are less likely to be satisfied.

People who start something with a try-it-out mindset will create a balance sheet in their heads. Future interactions will all be tallied in the credit or debit columns. Even if most of their interactions and observations are positive, they are more likely to notice and remember negative ones if they view their first year as a trial run. Likewise, negative impressions will loom larger in their minds than if they were excited to start with.

Research here in Northern and elsewhere indicates finances are not the issue.

I know this one is very hard to believe. People doubt this for two reasons. First, since our biggest competitor is free we assume finances drive the decision. Secondly, most of the time when families are asked why they left our schools or why they don't enroll in the first place, their first answer is finances. But we also know that further questioning nearly always reveals there is a bigger issue that is more complicated and harder to communicate without hurting someone's feelings.

But it is true—finances are not the main issue. Here is what we learned when we surveyed Adventist members in Northern about their local schools (and yes, we did get enough responses to be statistically valid). Keep in mind, this was in 2010--two years in to the Great Recession.

- Adventist parents with **children in public schools** rated "**reasonable tuition**" as a school factor they were pleased with but was **unimportant to them!**
- **Homeschooling** Adventist parents were less sure that tuition was reasonable--but they still **rated it as unimportant.**

- For all respondents "reasonable tuition" was in the **bottom third of the 40 factors** they were asked to rank about their school.
- **Financial issues overall came in dead last** as a correlate of satisfaction. FYI: #1 was "student care" issues (teachers show care and concern for their students, and teachers work well with parents), #2 was top academics, #3 was Christian aspects.

These results in Northern parallel results for Christian schools across the country.

Discounts tend to be more effective for short-term, repeat purchases of products.

Education is a long-term, high-investment, (hopefully) repeat-purchase, professional service. As you and your board are thinking about how to promote your school, it may be helpful to think about what would work for promoting a physician or hospital. These are also longer term, high investment professional services. Would you be motivated to choose a physician because he/she offered 50% off for your first visit? Would that offer convince you she/he provides an excellent service?

Delegating:

Since this is something NOT to do, here is nothing to delegate.

Binder tab: February

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?