

What comes before increasing enrollment?

The three benchmarks for growth

“Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends.”

Walt Disney

Have any of you tried to teach students how to multiply before they understood addition? In much the same way, it is important for you to help your staff and board members understand that increasing enrollment needs to be preceded by two earlier steps.

So, today we'll talk about benchmarks you can use with your staff and board to measure your school's progress toward healthy, sustained growth in your ministry.

#1--Gloriously happy parents

Last week, we talked about why it is vital for *potential* parents to hear about your school from people they know and trust. (If you didn't catch that, look at the page just before this one.) The best people to share that message are those who are knowledgeable and enthusiastic—hopefully, your *current* parents.

So, how do you quantify their satisfaction with, and willingness to refer to, your school?

- I strongly recommend using the Net Promoter Score (NPS), developed by Fred Reichheld, author of several books and eight journal articles in the *Harvard Business Review*. NPS is based on a specific scoring methodology for the question: On a scale from 0 to 10, how likely are you to recommend _____ to a friend or colleague?
- This customer satisfaction question is so well-respected and well-used that Survey Monkey offers it as the first option in their question bank for customer feedback or satisfaction. If you use Survey Monkey you just click this option--it will drop in the question and will score your responses appropriately.
- When you survey parents, please don't ask just this one question. At the least, you should also ask two open ended questions: What are we doing well? What would we need to improve for you to give us a higher rating?
- Don't ask parents for their input unless you plan to address their concerns. Not responding just tells them that you don't value the time they invested in answering your survey or their opinions.

Benchmark #1: An NPS of 65-75 will put your school in the 70th to 85th percentile amongst Christian schools in the nation. And regardless of where your school currently is, you can set goals for percentage improvement.

#2--Retention

A healthy retention rate is critical for two reasons.

First, it indicates that your parents are at least happy enough to continue investing the dollars, time and emotion that private education requires. If this is not the case, new families who try your school for a year or two and then go elsewhere are simply adding to the pool of unsatisfied customers (and likely detractors) in your community.

Secondly, and just as importantly, it is counterproductive to bring new families in to a school where current parents are complaining to each other in the parking lot each day. That is a recipe for changing enthusiastic supporters in the doubting skeptics.

So, how do you quantify retention?

- Retention is measured as the percentage of students who returned from one year to the next. Here's how.
- Take the list of students from opening report a year ago and cross off all those who:
 - » Graduated,
 - » Moved out of the area, and
 - » Your school asked not to return.
- Calculate what percentage of those remaining on the list returned this school year.
- Please note two items:
 - » New students are not part of this calculation at all.
 - » You do not get to cross off students because their financial status changed, their parents are divorcing, or for any other reason.

Benchmark #2: Healthy, private schools have retention of 93% or better (and this assumes you calculate retention as outlined above).

#3--Enrollment

Enrollment goals are a valuable and important third component of your marketing goals, as long as you are setting and measuring those first two components as well.

Clearly, there is not a national benchmark since your enrollment goal will vary based on your local population, school's mission and facility capacity. But I encourage you to create a goal as a percentage of growth on an annual basis.

Delegating:

A volunteer can design, administer and tabulate surveys and can calculate retention for you. But you need to be involved in the goal setting for each of these areas.

Binder tab: Put this in front of the January tab, with the pages for "ongoing" projects

School size: All

Marketing process step: This is a big picture overview, rather than a specific 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?