

Don't offer tuition incentives

Why large financial incentives for recruiting can backfire

“One of the dumbest and most expensive referral ideas... was that the dear people who made successful referrals should receive big cash payments, such as a month or two of free tuition.”

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As you are preparing for recruiting season (Jan/Feb) you may have board members suggesting the school offer big discounts to families who convince new families to enroll. While this is fairly common (though not because it has been proven effective), I strongly recommend against it for the following reasons.

#1 -- It creates skepticism in newly recruited families

When a newly recruited family learns that the people who strongly encouraged them to enroll were rewarded financially for their choice they rightly question the motives of their referrers. "Did my friends talk so positively about the school because they truly believe it's great and would be good for my kids--or just because they wanted a month of free tuition for their kids?"

#2 -- It shifts the recruiting responsibility to the wrong people

Happy parents (and others) are the source of positive referrals. But you are the education expert who can help parents decide if your school is the right fit for their child. You need to reward people for encouraging their friends to come meet you and see the school. You are the person responsible for helping those visiting parents make an informed decision--and deciding if they are a good match for your school. And this needs to be based in ministry, not the financial motivations of current parents.

#3 -- It creates no incentive for non-parent referrers

Your pool of referrers can and should be much larger than your current parents. Church members, alumni, pastors of Adventist and other churches, parents of prior students, community members are all potential referrers--but if they don't have school-aged kids, free tuition will not be an effective incentive.

After the holidays I'll talk about a better way to handle incentives.

Delegating:

Since this is something **not** to do, there is nothing to delegate.

Binder tab: Ongoing

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?