



Web Presence Audit

Exercises to Improve Your School's Web Presence to
Strategically Target Stealth Shoppers

Table of Contents

Introduction. 3

Audit Overview. 8

Exercise #1: Assessing Website Accessibility 9

Exercise #2: Showcasing Convenience Factors. 11

Exercise #3: Providing Tuition Transparency 12

How to Use this Tool

The Web Presence Audit contains a series of exercises to conduct collaboratively with your school’s admissions, communications, and marketing teams. By working together, you can examine various aspects of your school’s web presence and think strategically about how best to communicate key messages to prospective families online that may not be directly reaching out to you to learn about your institution.

In the past, prospective families learned about an independent school through their interactions with a school's admissions team. Events such as open houses, parent coffees, or school tours were essential interactions as families made schooling decisions for their children.

Over the years, the number of stealth shoppers in independent schools has increased, resulting in fewer inquiries from prospective families:



This means that independent schools' websites, rather than their admissions teams, make the first impression on prospective families



\$

These factors help parents determine whether a school is the right fit for their family. Schools that do not provide this type of information on their websites in a parent-centered way, or do not include it at all, are potentially turning families off before even having an opportunity to interact with them.

Parent Decisions Are Based on a Range of Factors

Transportation, Childcare, and Cost Matter to Prospective Parents

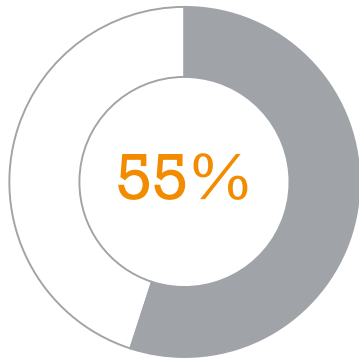
The messaging on independent schools' websites is mainly focused on general information about academics, clubs and activities, and other forms of educational enrichment, but stealth shoppers are also concerned with factors such as transportation, after-school care, and cost as they seek a school for their child. Unfortunately, websites are not explicit enough about many of these important factors, which causes some families to eliminate a school as a potential option.

The messaging of many schools' websites ignores the fact that family realities have changed from previous generations.

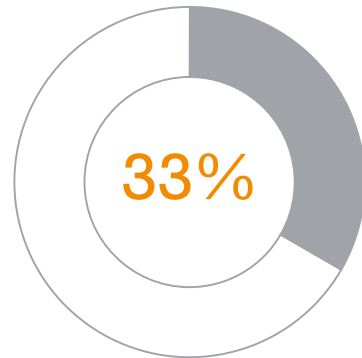
- ▶ **As of 2015, 79% of mothers with a college degree or higher were in the workforce¹**, meaning that the majority of independent school families likely have dual-income households. Unlike in previous decades, mothers today have additional constraints on their schedules, and need to rely on after-care and school transportation for their children.
- ▶ Furthermore, **between 1980 and 2015, the length of the average commute increased by 20 percent²**. As a result, a school's location matters more than ever for parents, as they are concerned about the effect of school drop-off on their commutes.
- ▶ Finally, **62% of prospective families are concerned about affording an independent school³**, which means that schools need to provide a nuanced explanation of affordability online.

Website Content Misaligned with Today's Realities

Member Schools Where Transportation Details Not Provided on Admissions Page
n=75



Member Schools Where After-Care Not Mentioned on Website
n=75



To address these factors, schools need to put parents' needs front-and-center, and showcase their transportation options, after-care services, and school cost directly on their websites to ensure they do not lose prospective parents at the very top of the funnel.

“Give clearer guidelines to provide applicants with an idea of if it’s worth their time, money, and effort to apply.”

Prospective Independent School Parent

“For some families, second best might be good enough when it comes to convenience.”

Director of Admissions, PreK-12 School

Address Parent Concerns with Information Up Front

Three Examples of School Website Messaging Centered on Parent Needs

Given the surge in the number of stealth shoppers, schools need to rethink the accessibility and messaging of key information about their institutions. To illustrate this point, we have provided examples on pages 5-7 of three independent schools that thoughtfully and deliberately used their websites to address prospective families' concerns about transportation, after-care, and affordability.

Example 1: Maret School Shares Detailed Information about Transportation

Based in Northwest Washington, DC, Maret School draws students from across the city, as well as parts of Maryland and Virginia. Recognizing that getting to school can be seen as an obstacle to attendance, Maret's website details various options for getting children to school, from carpooling, to public transportation, to a private shuttle. The screen shot below provides a snapshot of the information detailed on Maret's website.

Maret's "About Us" Section Provides Detailed Options for Getting to Campus



— Carpooling, Shuttle, Metrorail, and Metrobus

When driving on campus, please be patient, polite, and mindful of your speed (the speed limit is 10 mph), avoid cell phone use, and watch for students—large and small—crossing the driveway. Questions? Call the Main Office at 202-939-8848.

CARPOOLING

Maret encourages families to arrange carpools. You now are able to find families who live nearby you by using the online Directory. From the portal's homepage, click "Directory" at the top right of the screen, then choose "Nearby Families." [CLICK HERE](#) to access.

METRORAIL

Maret encourages faculty and older students to use Metrorail services. The School is approximately a 12-minute walk from the Woodley Park/Zoo Metrorail stop on the Red Line. DC resident students may be eligible for a metro student discount card. Virginia & Maryland students may also be eligible for a commuting stipend. Please see Ms. Wills for details.

MARET SHUTTLE

Maret runs a shuttle each morning at 7:40am and 7:50am from the Woodley Park metro for students and faculty.

Carpool Options

School provides resources for connecting families for carpool options

Public Transportation

- Information on accessing school via public transportation, including walking, shuttle service from Metro station
- Information on reduced fare cards also included

Web Page Highlights

- **Varied Transportation Options:** Highlights options to meet the varied needs of families based on their location and considers children's age (i.e. high schoolers may travel to school alone on the metro)
- **Accessible Information:** The transportation options are found directly in the school's About Us section, which makes them easy to locate on the website
- **Exhibits School Values:** The directions show how thoughtful the school is about its students and community, even for something as simple as driving on campus: "please be patient, polite, and...watch for students—large and small"

Parent Childcare Needs Addressed with After Care

Example 2: Lowell School Highlights After-school Care as a Convenient Offering

While many independent schools do offer after care programs, few of them make this information easy to find on their websites, nor do they provide a detailed level of information to showcase the importance of this offering for parents. Lowell School in Washington, DC provides families with a thorough overview of its program in one click on the "After School" tab on the school's website.



After Care Program Details Accessible from Admissions Page

AFTER SCHOOL

[AFTER CARE](#)

[ATHLETICS](#)

[MINICOURSES](#)

[MUSIC LESSONS](#)

[SWIM](#)

AFTER CARE

When the school day is over, children may participate in Lowell's After Care program from 3:15-6:00 pm Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Fridays and from 2:00-6:00 pm on Wednesdays. Families may choose to use After Care regularly or on a drop-in basis.

AFTER CARE PROGRAMS

Pre-Primary + Primary School After Care

The goal of After Care is to provide a safe, caring, and enjoyable atmosphere for children, where they can play, make choices, and hone social skills under the guidance of caring adults. Participants have opportunities to engage in a variety of indoor and outdoor games, and activities that take advantage of mixed-age groupings. A healthy snack is provided. Children who have homework are provided with a supervised quiet room to complete their assignments. There is quiet time for K-1 students, 30 minutes of reading for students in 2nd-5th grades, as well as, homework help from an After Care staff person.

Middle School After Care (Park After Dark)

The After Care program for Middle School students is a homework club where students can complete homework in a quiet environment with peer assistance or adult help, as needed. A healthy snack is served upon arrival. Snack is followed by a brief period of down time with friends before beginning homework.

Childcare on Conference and Professional Days

During Parent-Teacher Conferences, childcare is provided free of charge for Lowell students during the time that parents are in the conference. Full day camp is also available (for a fee) for PS and MS students between 8:00-4:00 on Conference Days, as well as Professional Days.



Dehejia Butler
After Care Director

**FOR MORE INFORMATION
CONTACT**

Dehejia Butler
202-577-2024
dbutler@lowellschool.org

REGISTER

Web Page Highlights

- **After School Options:** "After School" section on website conveys that after care is an extension of school by detailing all after-school activities, childcare options, and director contact information
- **Services by Age Group:** Organization by age makes finding the right information easy for parents
- **Additional Care:** Information about childcare options shared during parent-teacher conferences, teacher professional days, which highlights how thoughtful the school is of parents' childcare needs

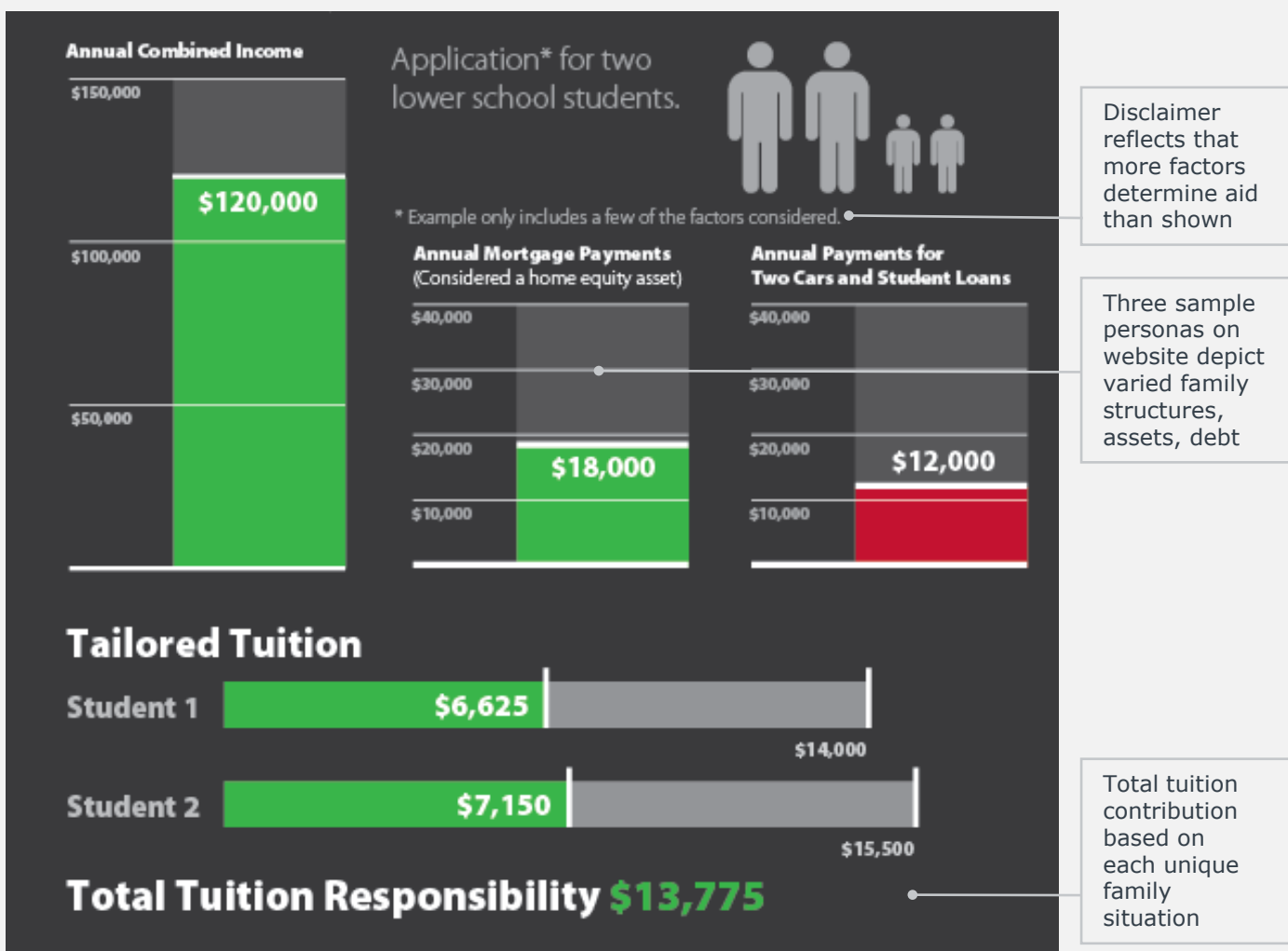
Financial Aid Scenarios Illuminate Aid Options

Example 3: North Cross Uses Personas to Demonstrate Affordability

Affordability is a major concern for prospective families. As a result, many families experience “sticker shock” when reviewing a school’s tuition page. To address parents’ concerns, North Cross School provides detailed family personas on its website to show the variety of families that apply for and receive aid through their “tailored tuition” model. In doing so, the school shares valuable, concrete information with prospective families about the factors they consider when awarding aid, increasing the likelihood that families will consider their school when looking at their educational options.



North Cross Personas Illustrate Variety of Aid Recipients



Web Page Highlights

- **Easily Accessed:** Ensures personas are located conveniently on the admissions page
- **Real-Life Examples Shared:** Depicts real-life examples and families the school wishes to attract
- **Disclaimer Provided:** Highlights select details of family circumstances with a disclaimer
- **Tailored Tuition Model Highlighted:** Financial considerations of applicants reflect school’s values and general process for awarding aid

Web Presence Audit Overview

How to Use this Audit to Improve Your School's Website

As prospective parents' priorities have shifted and more families research their children's educational options online, independent schools must consider how best to ensure that their websites are accessible and contain information that will appeal to parents at the top of the enrollment funnel.

This tool contains a series of exercises to conduct collaboratively with your school's admissions, communications, and marketing teams. By working together to complete these exercises, you can examine various aspects of your school's web presence and think strategically about how best to ensure that your website is accessible and effectively communicates key messages to prospective families online. This tool contains the following three diagnostic exercises:

1 Assessing Web Presence

2 Showcasing Convenience Factors

3 Providing Tuition Transparency

After completing these exercises, make adjustments as needed to your website's content and design to ensure that you are marketing your school with stealth shoppers in mind. To establish a baseline of your website's performance and determine whether your changes in messaging are effectively reaching prospects, we recommend collecting and analyzing data about your website.

▶ The following are examples of the type of data schools should regularly review:



What are the high-traffic landing pages for your website? On average, how much time do people spend on these pages?



Where are visitors clicking? Where are they hovering? What is your website's bounce rate (i.e. the percentage of visits that only go to one page before exiting the site)?

http:

How do people find your website (e.g. search engines, referring sites, direct traffic)?



What is the average length of visit on your website? How many times does the average visitor visit your site?



What is your conversion rate? What is your conversion rate by traffic source?

If you do not already do so, we advise you to begin collecting this type of data, which will help you to understand how online information about your school is being accessed by prospective families. In addition, this data will help inform you in making strategic decisions about the content and design of your online resources on an ongoing basis.

Assessing Your School's Online Presence

What information are prospective parents finding online about your school?

Admissions directors are no longer the “gatekeepers” for school information, as stealth shoppers can use a simple internet search to conduct research about your school without becoming an official inquiry. As a result, it is important to be deliberate about your online presence to ensure that parents do not opt out of the top of the funnel.



Complete Exercise #1 below to determine how information about your school appears online to stealth shoppers.

1

When using a search engine to find your school online, what information appears in the top three results (e.g. school website, Wikipedia entry, Niche rank)?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

2

When searching for an independent school in your region (e.g. “private school in Washington, DC”), where does your school appear within the results? How many other competitor schools appear before yours?

3

When searching for your school on Google, do reviews appear? If so, what type of ratings and information is included? Are you surprised about anything that you see?

Assessing Your School's Online Presence (cont.)

What information are prospective parents finding about your school online?

4

Which websites contain information about your school (e.g. Niche, GreatSchools)? Is this information up-to-date and accurate?*

5a

Are there unofficial sources of information about your school found online (e.g. parenting blogs)? What is the chatter about your school?

5b

How could parent ambassadors play a role in combatting negative perceptions that may exist? How can they promote positive news and information about your school?

***Tip:** Create an account with Niche to update your school's profile and track user data. You can also submit a request to GreatSchools to report incorrect information.

Showcasing Convenience Factors

How does your school prioritize parents' needs?

Websites offer an important opportunity for schools to demonstrate how they prioritize parent needs. While many independent schools provide options for transportation, meals, and after-care, too few of them share details about these services that are quick and easy to find on their websites.



Exercise #2 asks you to consider whether your website shares a sufficient level of detail about such information and offerings.

	Yes	No	N/A
1 The landing page about campus location(s):			
• Can be found on our website in two clicks or less from the homepage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Describes grades served at each location	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 The page about transportation options:	Yes	No	N/A
• Can be found in two clicks or less	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Shares public transportation options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Details school bus or shuttle service information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Shares carpool options	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Talks about walking to campus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Provides transportation costs	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 Information about after-care programs:	Yes	No	N/A
• Can be found in two clicks or less from the homepage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Includes details such as hours of operation, cost, and age groups served	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4 List out other convenient services offered by your school (e.g. daily lunches, all-inclusive tuition) on the left. Then describe in the boxes on the right where these services are listed on your website and whether they are easy to locate.			
1. _____	<div></div>		
2. _____	<div></div>		
3. _____	<div></div>		

Providing Tuition Transparency

How do you communicate about your school's tuition and financial aid?

Providing information about tuition and financial aid is paramount for many prospective families. More than just sharing details about tuition cost and financial aid deadlines, your website should display information about the range of incomes of families that receive aid at your school to provide greater transparency into how financial aid is awarded at your school.



Complete Exercise #3 to ensure that you are communicating an appropriate level of detail about tuition on your school's website, while also considering how best to frame your message about financial aid to families.

1 On the *Admissions landing page*, the following information is listed or linked:

	Yes	No
• Open house dates and information	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Application timeline	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Required application components	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Admissions testing	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Information about financial aid	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Name, email, phone number of an admissions staff member	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2 On the *Affordability/Financial Aid landing page*, the following information is included:

	Yes	No
• Detailed information about what tuition includes (e.g. lunch, field trips, transportation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Link to tuition amounts per grade	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Financial aid availability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Range of financial aid awards given	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Annual household income ranges for award recipients	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• Financial aid application information and deadlines	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Providing Tuition Transparency(cont.)

How do you communicate about your school's tuition and financial aid? (cont.)

The Loomis Chaffee School's website displays a table with the range of aid awarded by family income level to illustrate how aid is distributed at the school. **After reviewing the Loomis Chaffee Family Contribution Frequency Table, discuss the questions below as a group.**



Loomis Chaffee Family Contribution Frequency Table, 2017-2018

Aid recipient income ranges

Ranges of total family contribution

Total families receiving aid at a given income level

2017-2018 FA Recipients	Family Contribution (FC) = How much a family is paying toward Loomis tuition. Each column indicates the number of families with an FC within the stated income range.							
Based on 2016 Reported Income	FC = \$0-\$5,000*	FC = \$5,001-\$10,000*	FC = \$10,001-\$15,000*	FC = \$15,001-\$20,000*	FC = \$20,001-\$30,000*	FC = \$30,001-\$40,000*	FC = \$40,001+*	% of FA recipients
Total Income: \$0-\$80,000	41	8	0	0	2	2	3	28.0%
Total Income: \$80,001-\$120,000	16	10	3	1	2	2	0	17.0%
Total Income: \$120,001-\$160,000	10	16	11	5	2	1	2	23.0%
Total Income: \$160,001-\$200,000	2	9	3	4	5	1	2	13.0%
Total Income: \$200,001-\$240,000	0	1	4	4	4	2	2	8.5%
Total Income: \$240,001+	0	0	0	6	6	6	3	10.5%

Web Page Highlights

- **Easy to Find:** Financial Aid Distribution Chart appears on school financial aid page
- **Provides Transparency:** Chart demonstrates range of aid recipients, even among high-income earners, creating greater visibility into school's approach to awarding financial aid
- **Readily Available:** Financial aid data typically collected by admissions team to share with Board

3

How could displaying this type of data expand your applicant pool? Are there specific aspects of this table that would appeal to prospective families you are trying to recruit?

4

Does your school provide data on your website like the table of family contributions by income level? If not, is this information that you could share online?

Providing Tuition Transparency(cont.)

How do you communicate about your school's tuition and financial aid? (cont.)

5

Do you have concerns about pushback that you may get in response to displaying such data? What concerns do you have?

6

Loomis Chaffee uses the term "family contribution" rather than "financial aid." What does the difference in this terminology portray to prospective families about the school's approach to tuition assistance? What terminology does your school use? What does it portray to prospects?



Questions? Contact us at EABresearch@eab.com to discuss your school's website and online messaging with a member of our team.



Washington DC | Richmond | Birmingham | Minneapolis

P 202-747-1000 | **F** 202-747-1010 | eab.com