

Meeting Today's Parent Needs to Create Lasting Partnerships

Strategies to Reduce Risks of Unproductive Relationships and
Capitalize on Opportunities to Satisfy Parent Desires

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“The phrase I learned from a former head, who was my mentor, was: **‘If you don’t have a plan for the parents, they’ll have a plan for you.’**”



Matt Levinson, Head of School, The Pingry School

The Agenda

DAY ONE



Identify the **key characteristics of today's independent school parents** through an in-depth customer profile



Illustrate **misalignments between schools and parents**, and **introduce EAB's new approach**

DAY TWO



Rethink **which group of parents schools should invest time in** to make the most of their resources



Classify **two distinct urgency levers** for schools to act now



Teach **nine tactics** to better serve today's parents, based on their changing needs, expectations, and desires

Understand Today's Parents to Meet Their New Needs

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Two Reasons Schools Need a Deep Dive on Today's Parents

Changing Characteristics

Today's parents have new needs, expectations, desires than those of the past

Rising Tuition

Increasing school tuition means increasing parent expectations

How a Customer Profile can Help

- ▶ Gain insight into today's parents' core characteristics, values, expectations
- ▶ Identify potential misalignments between today's parents and your institution
- ▶ Recognize where parents' needs, desires are not being met
- ▶ **Use information to feel empowered to meet parent expectations, without compromising school values**

What We Heard from Heads about Today's Parents

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More Transactional

*"We are a school that has a generalist and comprehensive, balanced program. But within that we have parents that want to specialize their child, want them to have this very particular experience...Almost as if **the value is the transactional acceleration of their child's trajectory.**"*

Head of School, PK-12, Mid-Atlantic



More Anxious

*"I think there is an unarticulated anxiety [for parents] that even if their child ends up in the college that they would have anticipated or hoped they would be going to, **that is no longer a guarantee of a successful or happy life.**"*

Head of School, PK-12, Mid-Atlantic



Less Trusting

*"**You don't go to the doctor and tell them what prescription to give you.** When your doctor says, 'Well, you need this treatment,' you don't say, 'Actually doctor, I thought about it a lot and I think we need to take a different course of action.'"*

Head of School, 1-12, Southeast



Expectations Misaligned

*"**Parents believe our role is to protect their kids from the public system and from the real world.** And of course, we see our role as to prepare their kids for the real world. So, there's a huge difference there."*

Head of School, PK-12, Southeast

Heads' Experiences by the Numbers: Key Trends



81%

Of heads¹ agree that **transactional attitudes among parents have increased**

67%

Of heads¹ agree that **parent anxiety has increased**

63%

Of heads¹ agree that **parents are less trusting today than in the past**

74%

Of heads¹ agree that there is a growing number of **more vocal and/or time-consuming parents**

1) N=43 heads of partner schools

Today's Parents: Transactional, Anxious, Less Trusting

More
Transactional



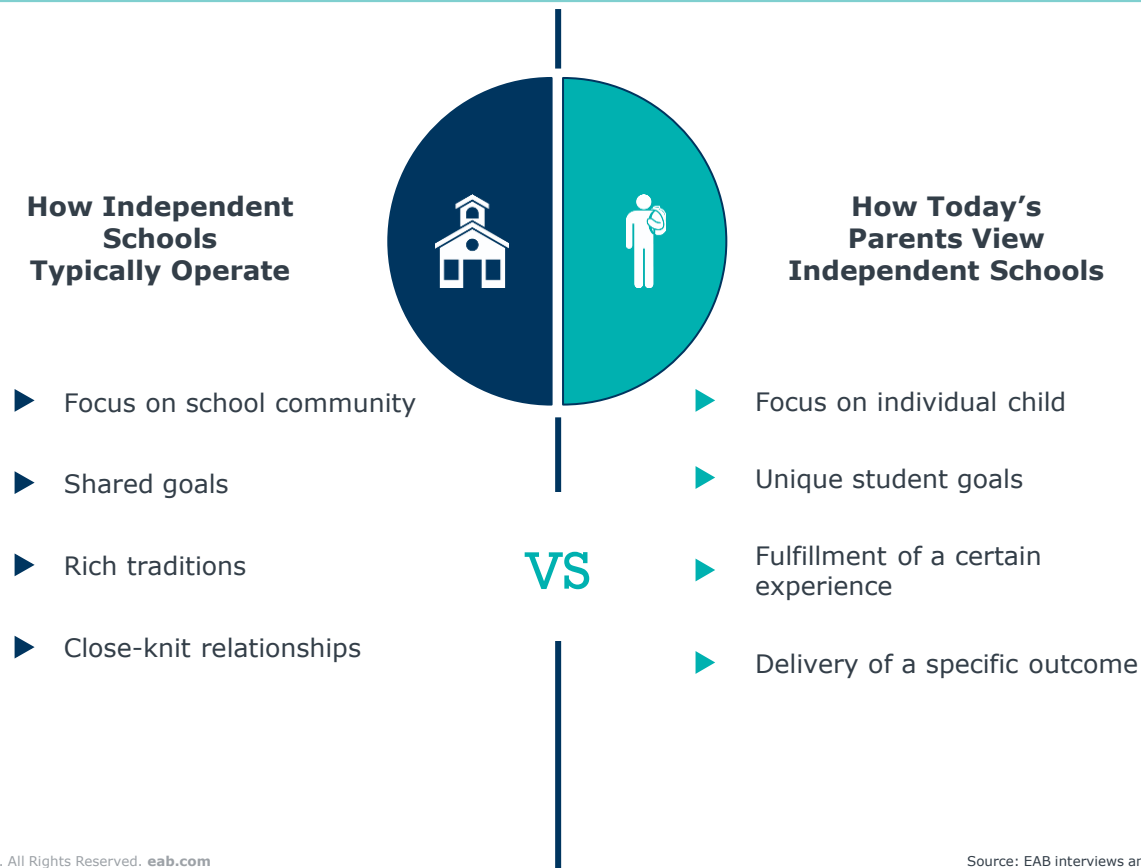
More
Anxious



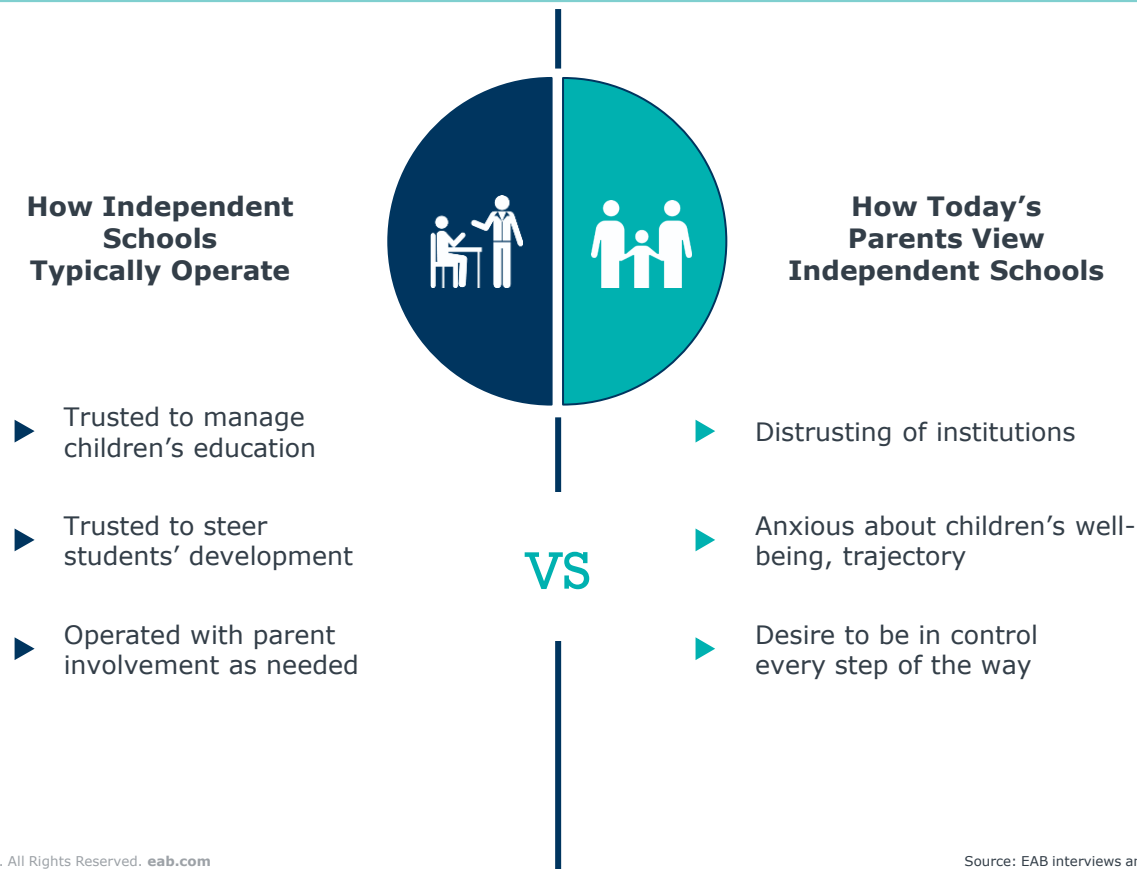
Less
Trusting



Transactional Parents Value Outcomes over Mission



Parents Seek Control Rather than Trust School Expertise



Three Major Costs of School-Parent Misalignment



How Changes in Parent Populations Have Manifested



Higher levels of anxiety and increased demands from **all parents**



Small, but growing percentage of parents who are vocal, disgruntled, challenging to satisfy

Consequences for Schools



Consumes Time and Energy

Schools invest more time, energy to address vocal parents' concerns



Risk to School Reputation

Negative PR threatens school reputation, brand, as disgruntled parents leverage word of mouth, social media, press



Lost Opportunities

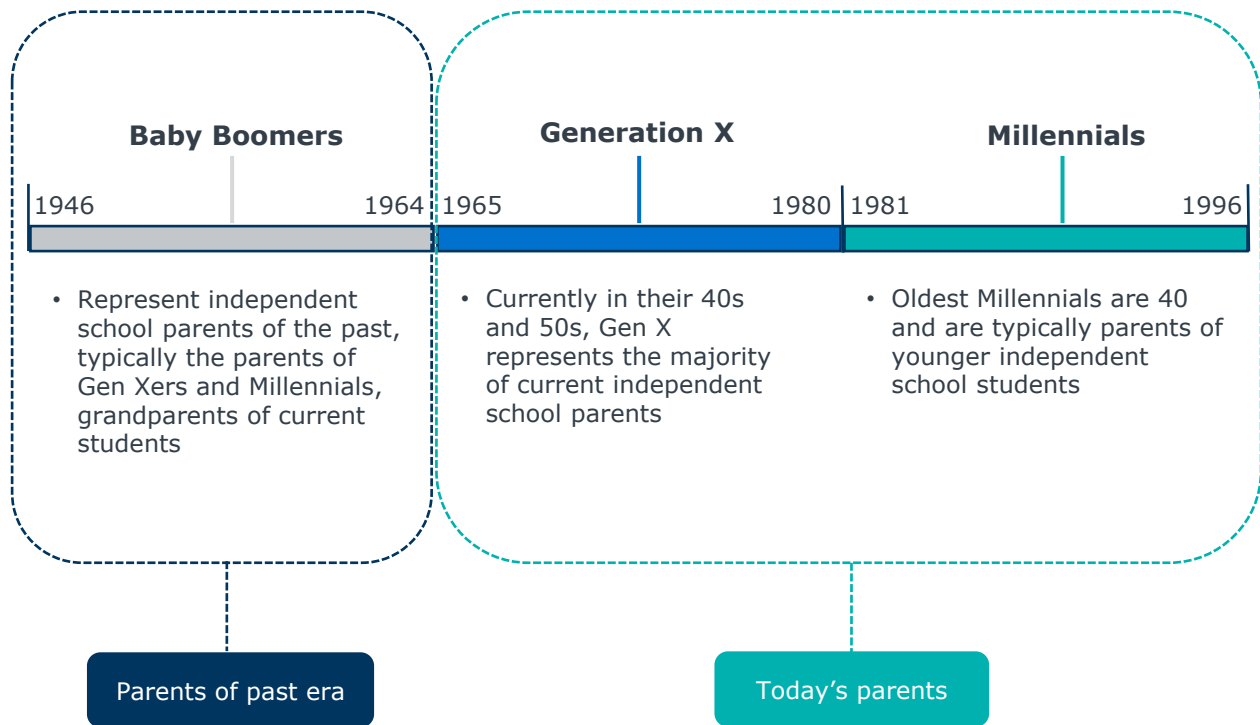
Schools miss chance to uniquely fulfill new desires of majority of parents to forge lasting partnerships

But Haven't Our Parents Always Been Like This?

"There has been **a rising tide of anxiety and consumerism** among parents. In the last twenty years, these parents have become more transactional, looking for a service or outcome to be fulfilled. **And we have also seen a lot of new reasons that people are anxious—they're less able to control their child's future.**"

Psychologist and School Consultant

Defining Parents of the Past and the Present



Soaring Tuition Heightens Expectations

Rising Tuition Outpaces Income Growth

57.5% Median day school tuition growth, 2007-2017

29.4% Median income growth of 95th percentile, 2007-2017

Median Tuition Among ISEF Member Schools 2021-2022¹

Day School: **\$33,098**

Boarding School: **\$62,450**

The Customer Is Right in the World of Premium Brands

“I met with a disgruntled set of parents the other day with six full-pay kids in the school. Not that I support it, but I can understand the transactional mentality that's evolved. It's like: 'I'm spending nearly \$200K every year at your school. And in the rest of my life when I spend that much money, I get what I want.' The customer is right in the world of premium brands.”

***Head of School,
PK-12, Mid-Atlantic***

1) Data from analysis of ISEF Member Tuition Rates for 2021-2022 school year. N=93.
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Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics; DQYDJ, "2016 Household Income Percentile Calculator for the United States," <https://dqydj.com/household-income-percentile-calculator-2016/>; U.S. Census Bureau; NAIS Trend Book 2017-18; EAB interviews and analysis.

Today's Parents Include "The Unluckiest Generation"



Economic Snapshots of Average Baby Boomer, Gen Xer and Millennial

20%

Income earned
over Millennials
at same age

4X

More wealth held
in 1989 at same
age as Millennials
in 2020¹

Baby Boomers

74%

Of Gen Xers have
less wealth than
parents

6X

More debt than
their parents

Gen Xers



Slowest economic
growth of any
generation²

13%

Percent **earnings**
lost from 2005
to 2017³

Millennials

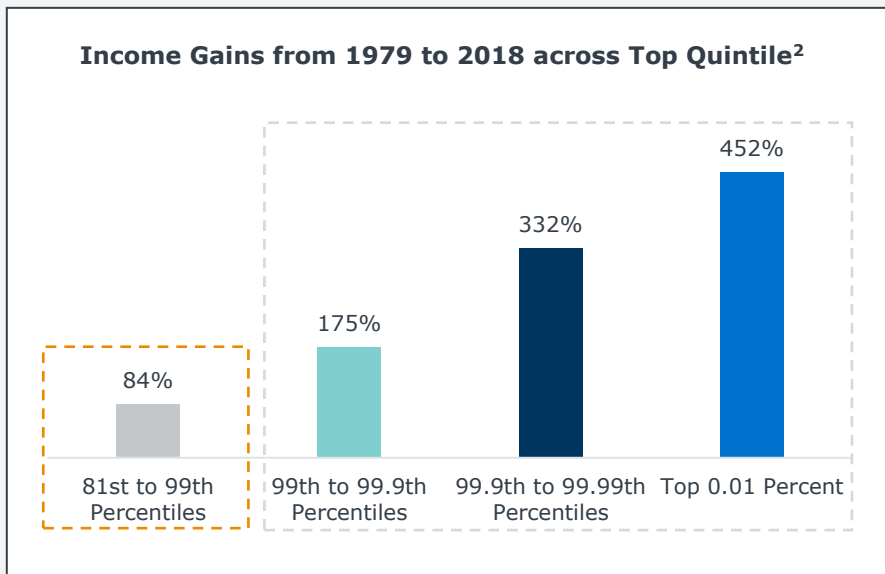
1) 21.3% vs. 4.6% of US wealth

2) Since joining the workforce

3) By average millennial

Even Today's High Earners Feeling the Pinch

**Income Growth¹ Distribution at the Top Uneven,
with Most Significant Growth Limited to Top 1%**



1) Average household income (before taxes and government benefits), adjusted for inflation)

2) Average income of 81st to 99th percentiles is \$172,400, while average of 99th to top 0.01% is \$2 million.

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Source: "[The Distribution of Household Income, 2018](#)," Congressional Budget Office, August 2021; EAB interviews and analysis.

Parents Wonder What Future Looks Like for Their Children

Real, Perceived Threats Create Anxiety for Today's Parents

Will my child be successful?



Acceptance rates at top colleges are dropping, raising pressure on high school students



The future of work won't be about college degrees, it will be about job skills

PUBLISHED: WED, OCT 21 2019-4:26 AM EDT | UPDATED: THU, NOV 6 2019-10:08 AM EDT



Odds of Americans earning more than their parents have plunged

Will my child be happy?



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Stress in America 2020 Survey Signals a Growing National Mental Health Crisis



Americans are the unhappiest they've been in 50 years, poll finds
Just 16% of U.S. adults say they're very happy.



More and more Americans are dying by suicide. What are we missing?

Allie E. Destaguir USA TODAY
Published 11:20p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019 | Updated 2:47 p.m. ET Jan. 30, 2019

Will my child be safe?

The New York Times

U.S. Coronavirus Death Toll Surpasses 700,000 Despite Wide Availability of Vaccines

A timeline of mass shootings in the U.S.

At least 2,000 people killed or injured in mass shootings since 1999.

The New York Times

6 Aspects of American Life Threatened by Climate Change

“The uncertainty of the world is really what’s causing the anxiety. We used to know the path and how to get from A to Z...now we don’t even know if Z is where we’re going.”

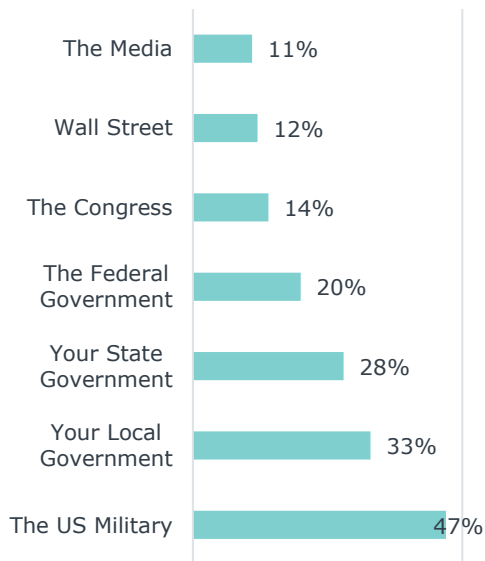
Marjo Talbott, Head of School, Maret School



Younger Americans Less Trusting of Institutions, People

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How Often Millennials Trust Institutions to Do the Right Thing¹



▶ Low Trusters

People who are more likely to see others as selfish, exploitative and untrustworthy, rather than helpful, fair and trustworthy²



46%

Of young adults (ages 18-29) identified as low trusters

19%

Of older adults (ages 65+) identified as low trusters

”

“Parents are less likely to extend trust in the way they used to. They want evidence—detailed information to support conclusions that in the past would have been automatically given, like school is safe and their child will be fine. Now, parents bring a different layer of scrutiny to a school.”

*Lorri Hamilton Durbin, Head of School,
Town School for Boys*

Source: Gramlich, John. [“Young Americans are Less Trusting of Other People and Key Institutions Than Their Elders”](#), Pew Research Center, August 6, 2019; Walker, Hunter. [Harvard Poll Shows Millennials Have ‘Historically Low’ Levels of Trust In Government](#), *Business Insider*, April 29, 2014; EAB interviews and analysis.

1) % who respond, “all or most of the time,” as reported in by Harvard University’s Institute of Politics 2015 poll.

2) According to Pew Research Center, 2018

Losing Generational Privilege: An Unspoken Fear

“I think there’s an element of fear because many families have historically been in positions of control or power. I think that there’s a **fear that their kids are going to lose their position of power.**”

Assistant Head of School,
PK-12, Mid-Atlantic

A Gradual, But Dramatic Shift Toward Intensive Parenting ²⁰

Intensive Parenting

- An approach to child-rearing that is “child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor intensive and financially expensive”
- Takes many forms, such as **helicopter**, **snowplow**, and **drone** parents



1996

- ▶ Term first coined by sociologist Sharon Hays
- ▶ Observed among white, affluent, educated mothers



Today

- ▶ Intensive parenting a US cultural phenomenon
- ▶ Accepted as “standard” way to parent across all income levels

Two Core Tenets of Intensive Parenting



Vulnerable Children

- Children seen as vulnerable to physical, emotional risks
- Plastic brains must be molded, shaped



"God-like" Parents

- Parents play outsized role in child development, future
- Time, money must be invested by parents into child-rearing

“The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting”

“**It starts in utero**, when mothers are told to avoid cold cuts and coffee, lest they harm the baby. Then: video baby monitors. **Homemade baby food. Sugar-free birthday cake. Toddler music classes.** Breast-feeding exclusively...The American Academy of Pediatrics...now recommends that babies sleep in parents’ rooms for a year. **Children’s television** — instead of giving parents the chance to cook dinner or have an adult conversation — is to be ‘co-viewed’ for maximum learning.”

Intensive Parents' Time Channeled into Children, Schooling

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Parents' Investment in Children's Growth, Individual Needs...



Develop children's talent through at-home, extracurricular activities

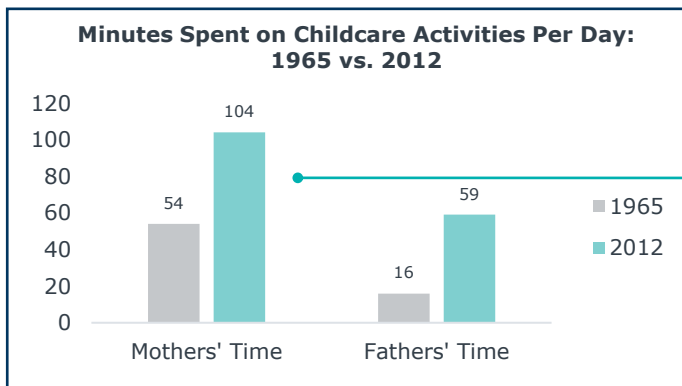


Respond to misbehavior with discussions, allowing for negotiation, explanation



Press institutions to recognize children's unique thoughts, feelings, needs

...Requires More Time Than Ever on Parenting, Including Greater Focus on School



Translates into more time involved in what is happening at school

Source: Faircloth, Charlotte. "Intensive Parenting and the Expansion of Parenting," *Parenting Culture Studies*, 2014, pp. 25-50; "Today's parents spend more time with their kids than moms and dads did 50 years ago," *UCI News*, September 28, 2016; Miller, Claire Cain. "The Relentlessness of Modern Parenting," *The New York Times*, December 25, 2018.

Customer Profile in Summary: Today's Parent Characteristics ²⁴

More
Transactional



More
Anxious



Less
Trusting



Normative Practice: Intensive Parenting

The Challenge: Schools Can't Change the Product or Customer

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Schools

Administrators limited in ability to fundamentally change product

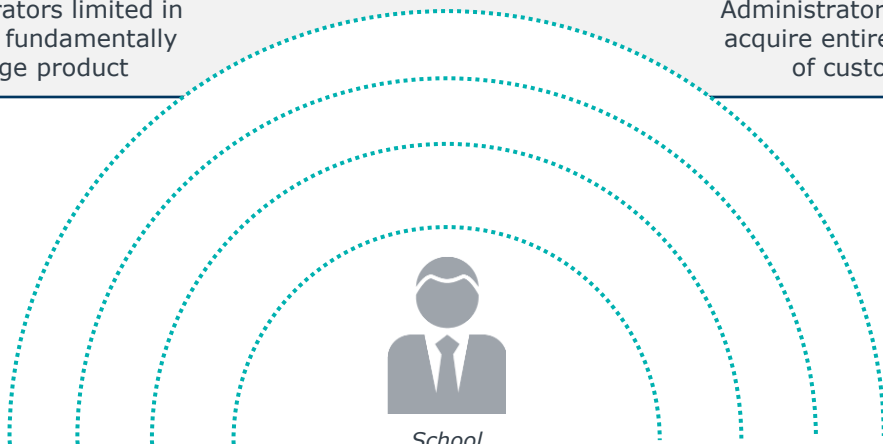


Parents

Administrators unable to acquire entirely new set of customers



*School
Administrators*



Instead, Focus on Better Managing Existing Tensions

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Schools

Administrators limited in ability to fundamentally change product

*A New Approach:
Focus on solutions to **recognize,
better manage the existing
tensions***



Parents

Administrators unable to acquire entirely new set of customers



*School
Administrators*

Change the Approach to Where, How Resources Invested ²⁷



Who You're Focusing On

Invest efforts in majority of parent community,
instead of vocal minority



How You're Serving Them

Approach parent education, events based on
expectations, desires of today's parents, instead of
ad-hoc programming

Vocal Minority Demands Attention, But Cannot Be Satisfied

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5%



Make up a small percentage of population, but **dominate the conversation**



Demands often difficult to meet, even **impossible at times**



Heads, administrators invest great effort managing these parents, with **disappointing results**

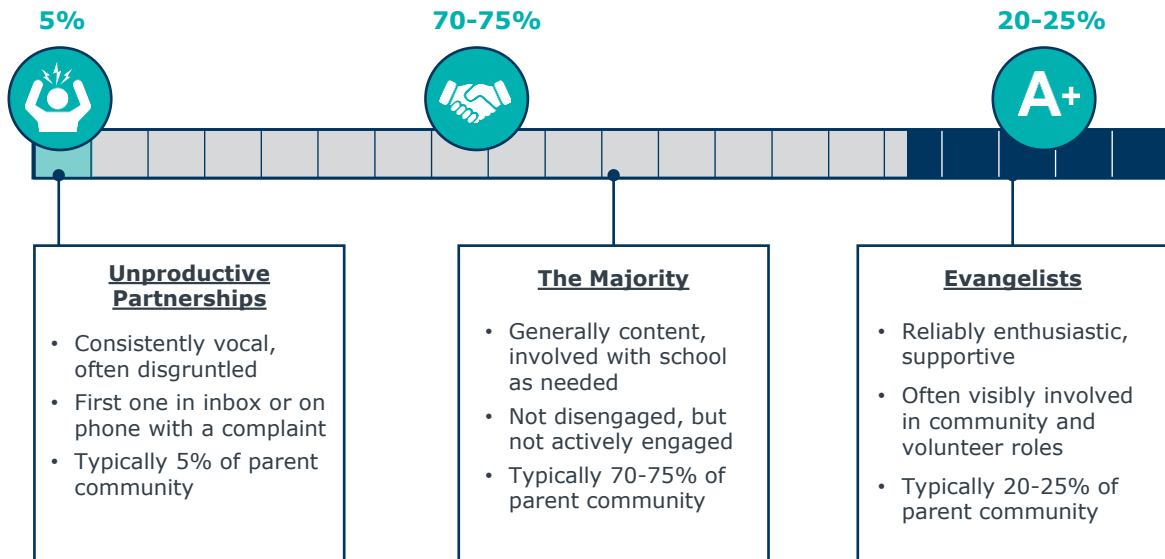
“**The parents we call 5 percenters are different...They cannot be soothed or reasoned with, no matter how hard the school tries...**They provoke and sustain an abrasive, aggrieved, unhappy, mistrustful relationship with the school, sometimes for years. In some cases, their criticism is relentless. In others, it's episodic: it emerges, seems to be resolved, but then reemerges – and keeps repeating this pattern.”

Robert Evans and Michael Thompson

Hopes and Fears: Working with Today's Independent School Parents

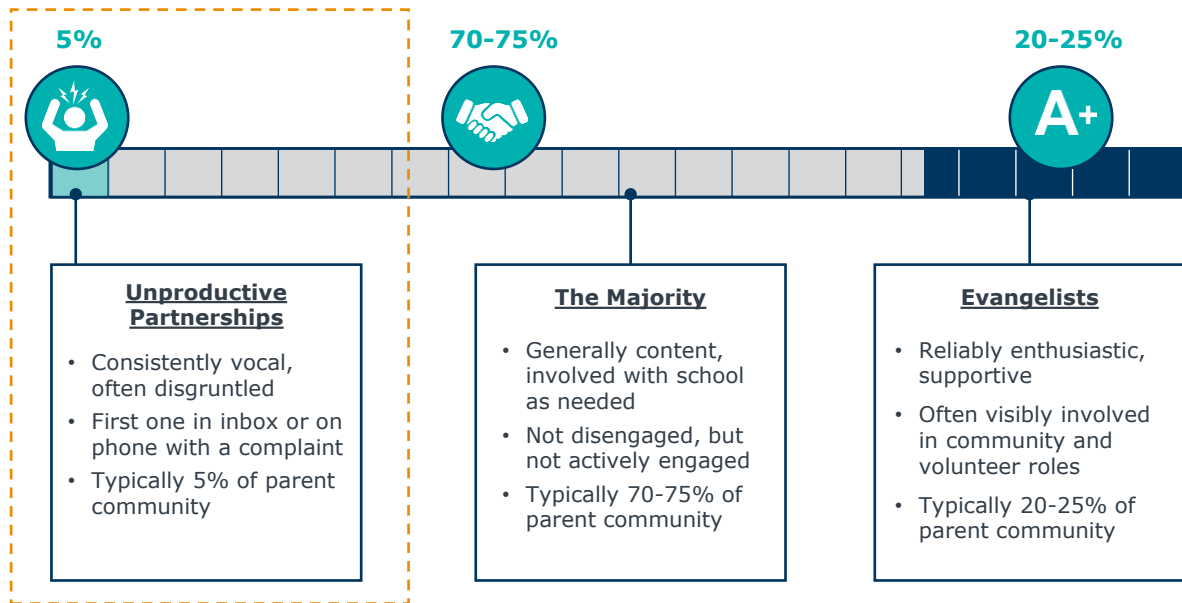
Examine Where Your Resources Are Allocated

Today's Independent School Parent Community



Examine Where Your Resources Are Allocated

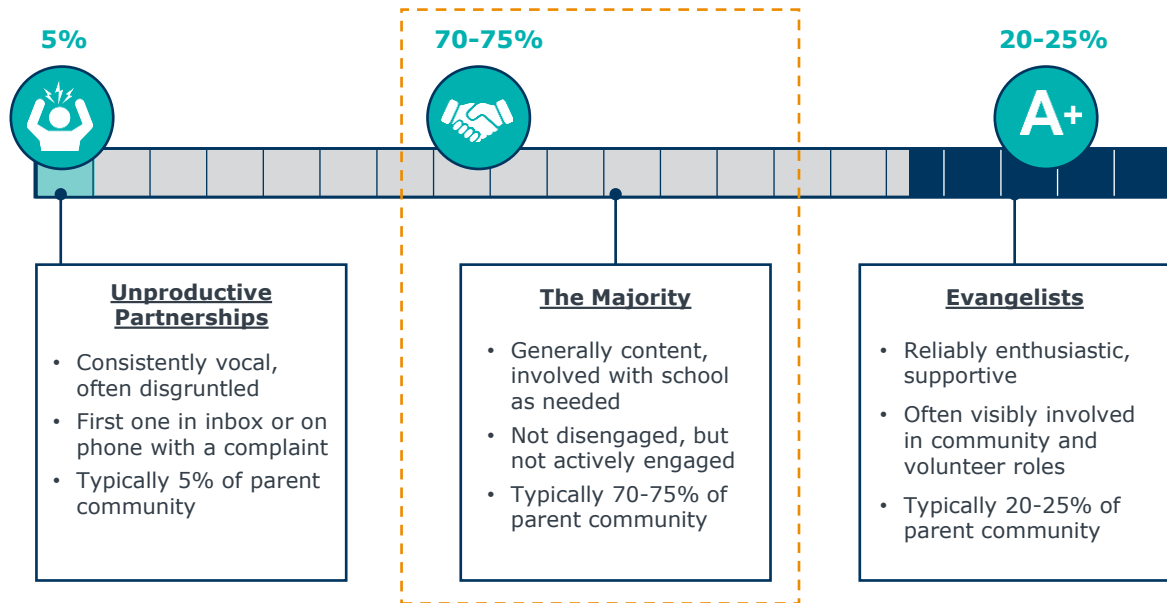
Today's Independent School Parent Community



Examine Where Your Resources Are Allocated

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Today's Independent School Parent Community





Use Intentional Approach to Satisfy Majority's Needs, Desires

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CURRENT APPROACH


Offer ad-hoc parent programming,
on as-need basis 


Provide same events
annually without revisiting 

Base programming on assumed areas
of interest, concern 

NEW APPROACH

 Create comprehensive, intentional
approach to satisfy parent needs

 Integrate today's parents' desires,
concerns when designing offerings

 Collect data from all parents on
concerns, topics of interest



New approach requires dynamic planning based on needs, wants of
Gen X and Millennial parents

Why You Need to Change Your Approach to Parents

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Urgency Levers for Independent Schools



Avoid Potential Risk of Unproductive Partnerships

- Proactively address parent anxiety, concerns to build trust in institution
- Reduce risk of growing segment of unproductive partners



Capitalize on Opportunity to Build Lasting Partnerships

- Meet today's parents' expectations, desires to create lasting partnerships
- Grow segment of brand evangelists
- Increase effectiveness of enrollment, advancement efforts

Meet Today's Parent Needs to Create Lasting Partnerships

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Key Attributes of Today's Parents

- Less Trusting
- More Anxious
- Practice Intensive Parenting
- More Transactional

Reduce Risk and Capitalize on Opportunities

1

Use Parent Education to Build Trust



1. Comprehensive Parent Education Curriculum
2. Ongoing Virtual Education Series

2

Assess Parent Concerns Through Surveying



3. Proactive Parent Feedback Survey

3

Fulfill Intensive Parents' Desire for Student Perspective



4. Student-centered Fishbowl Discussion
5. Perspective-sharing Senior Workshop

4

Connect Parents Through Dedicated Communities



6. Relationship-building Parent Dinner
7. Parent Edutainment Offerings
8. Mindfulness Parent Support Group
9. Engagement Preference Survey