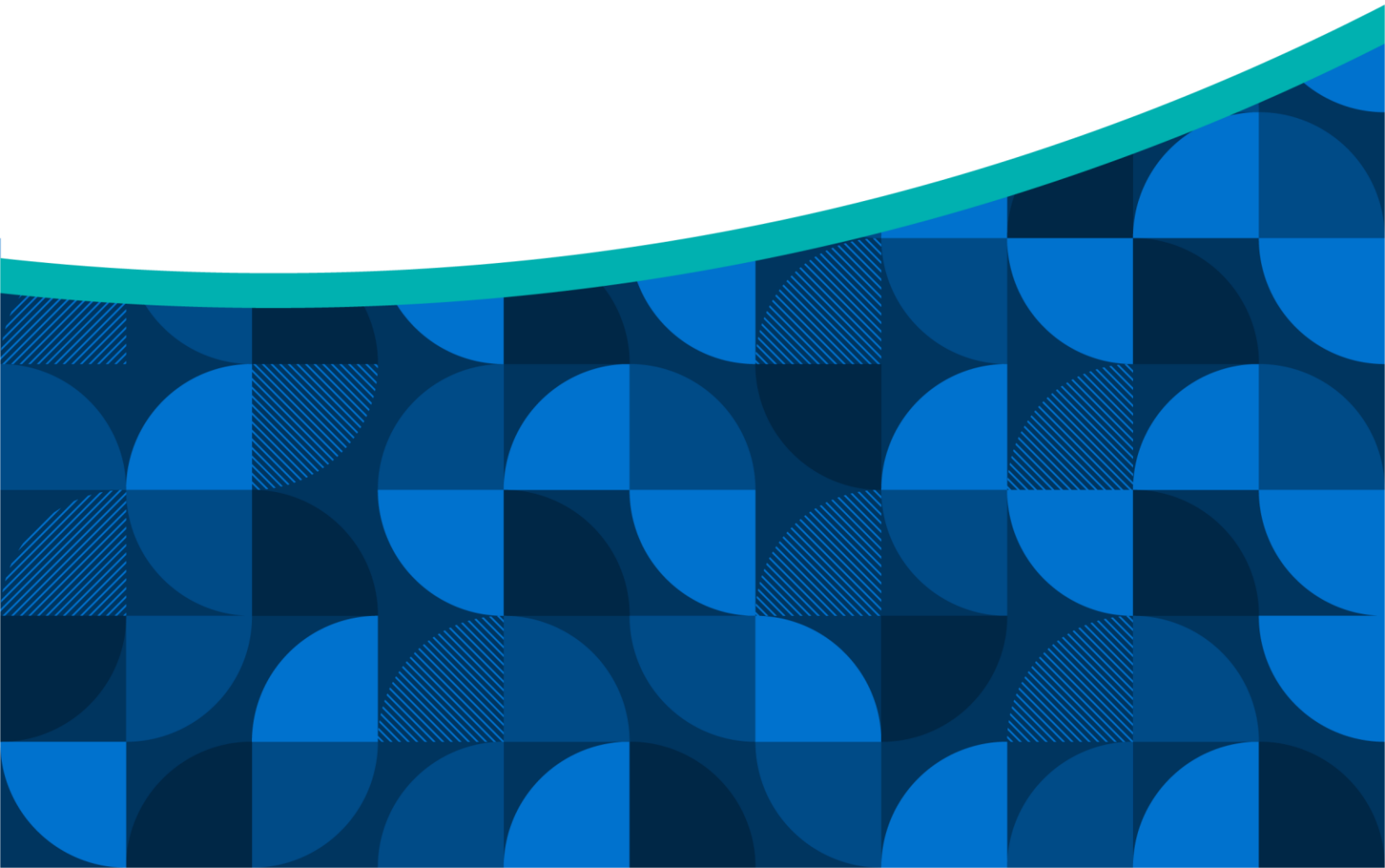




DYNAMIC VALUE PROPOSITION: PROVABILITY TOOLKIT

Marketing Your Differentiators

Use this toolkit to support messaging your value differentiators
in your market.



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How to Use This Toolkit

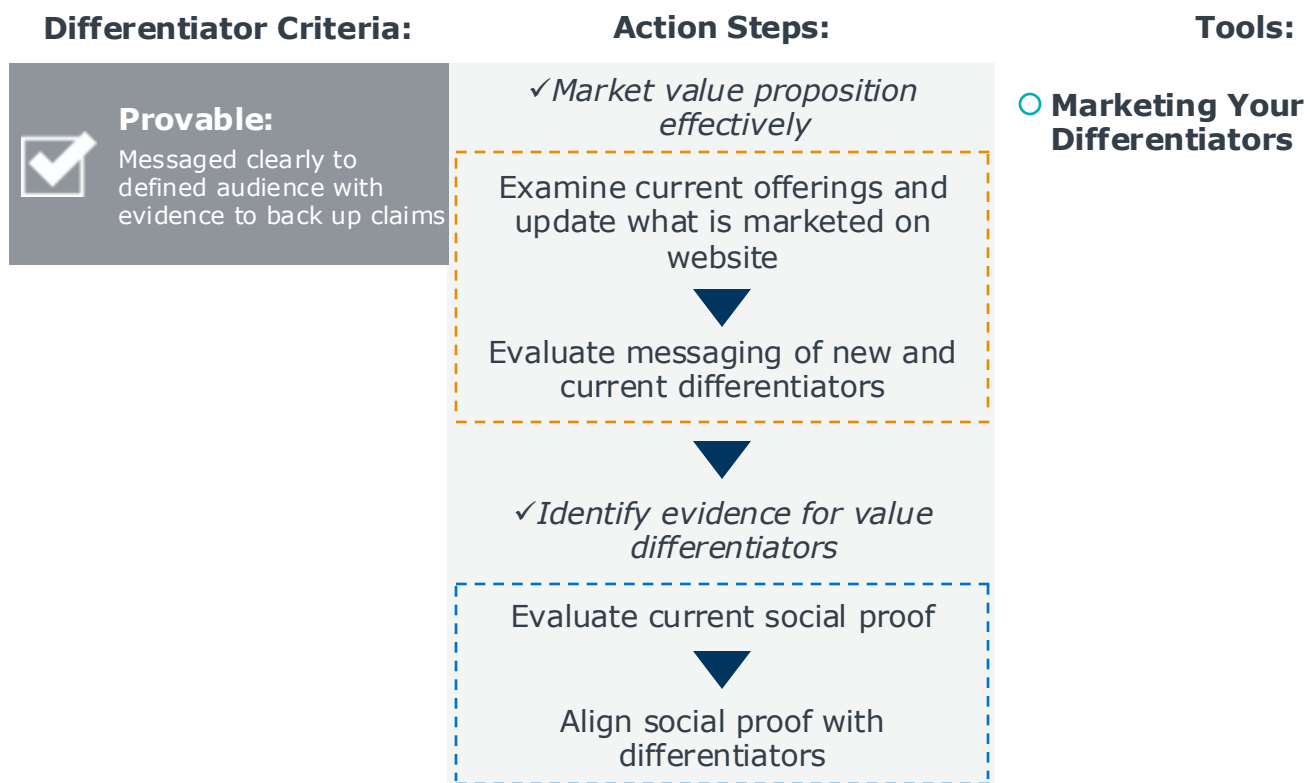
How an independent school markets and messages its differentiators can make the difference in whether a family decides to enroll their student. Yet many schools fall short with vague messaging and/or social proof misaligned to a school's key differentiations. To stand out, schools need clear, compelling messages backed by evidence—consistently showcased across all channels, especially the website homepage.

This provability toolkit will assist schools in completing step 3 of EAB's 3-step dynamic value proposition. This tool should be used after you assess the distinctiveness of your school offerings and plot them on the matrix. Refer to **p. 5** of [EAB's Value Proposition Management System Implementation Guide](#) for an overview of the 3-step process, and **p. 12** for an overview of step 3.

This toolkit begins with a marketing guide to help schools refine vague messaging around their differentiators. It also includes a checklist and source guide to help schools gather proof points for their offerings. Finally, a Mad Lib-style exercise helps schools combine insights from the full 3-step process to craft compelling differentiator vignettes.

See the graphic below for a step-by-step overview and track your progress using the action plan checklist on **p. 13** of the Implementation Guide.

The Value Proposition Management System: Step 3





EAB's Dynamic Value Proposition

Differentiator Marketing Guide

Use this section to help you better market your most relevant and distinct differentiators to ensure they are clear, appealing, and credible to your audience.

Improving Your Current Marketing Message

Schools often struggle to translate their relevant and distinct differentiators into a compelling and credible marketing message. Instead, use the marketing message framework of appeal, clarify, and prove to improve the way your school communicates your differentiators.

Two Common Messaging Mistakes

- ✗ Vague claims that are “table stakes” outcomes for any school with no concrete supporting evidence

↳ Example: “*Students are exceptionally prepared for high school*”

- ✗ Leading with a quantitative difference, meant more for beating out competition than building credibility

↳ Example: “*50+ student clubs*”

Three Parts of Effective Messaging

Appeal

Embed the addressed customer job, pain, or gain into your message

Clarify

Tie a concrete offering to how your school addresses the customer need

Prove

Quantify and use social evidence to prove this offering achieves the claim

Improving Vague Marketing Messaging

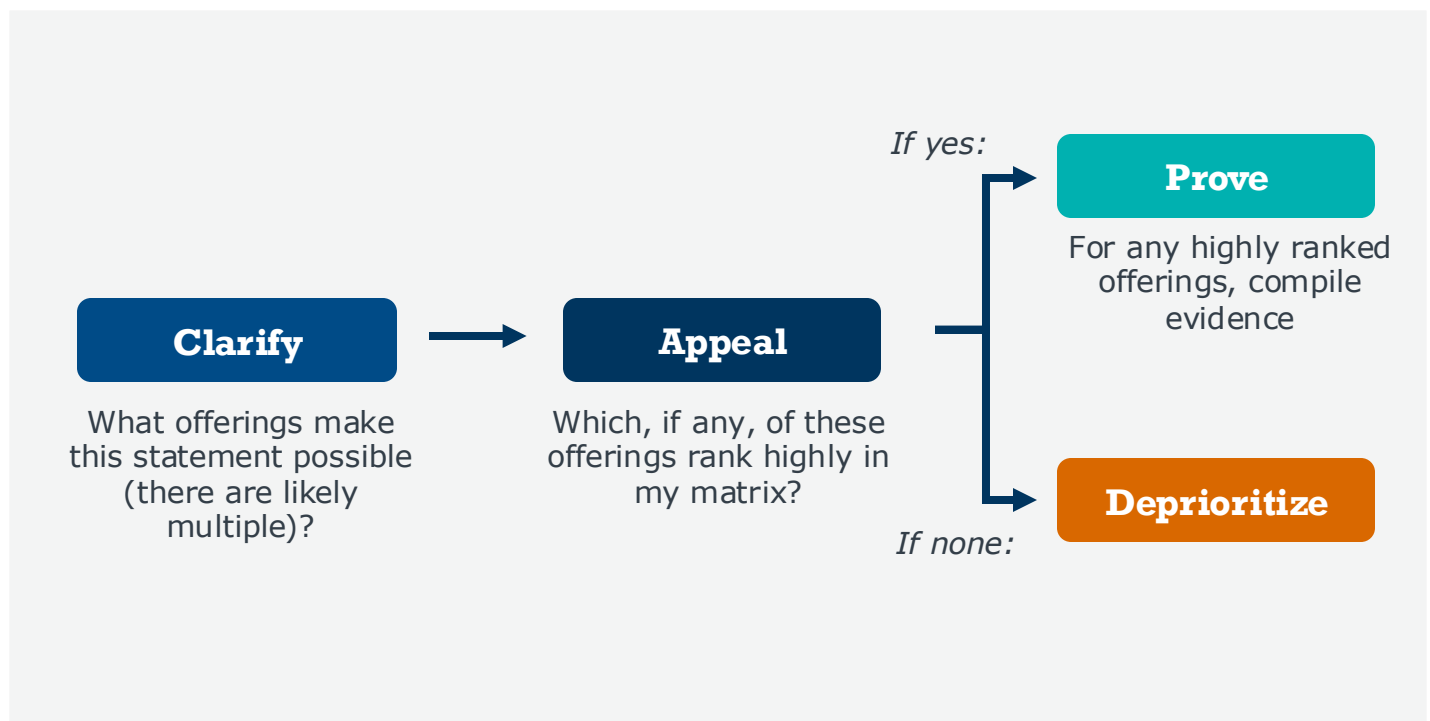
Schools often make vague but important claims that don't resonate with their prospective families. To more effectively message these outcomes, you must answer which offerings drive this outcome and back your claims with evidence. Use the below formula to help move from vague claims to concrete outcomes by better clarifying, appealing, and proving your claims to your audience.

✗ Vague claims that are "table stakes" outcomes for any school with no concrete supporting evidence

→ Example: "Students are exceptionally prepared for high school"



Process to Improve Vague Messaging



Improving Vague Marketing Messaging (example)

Use this example to see how to transform a vague or table stakes claim into a more compelling message by better clarifying, making appealing, and proving the claim.

Vague or Table Stakes Claim

Students are exceptionally prepared for high school

Clarify

What offerings make this statement possible? There are likely multiple.

Coding labs that build tech fluency

Curriculum embeds different cultural perspectives to broaden students' views

Required public speaking builds confidence

Harkness method encourages open class discussion

Free periods to teach students personal time management

Offer middle school study abroad to build language skills



Appeal

Which, if any, of these offerings rank highly in my matrix?

Coding labs

Middle school study abroad

Harkness method



Prove

For any highly ranked offerings, compile evidence.

70% of graduating students are fluent in at least one coding language

100% of study abroad students are conversationally proficient in their language of study

High school teachers report that our graduates participate more frequently than the avg student

Improving Vague Marketing Messaging (example)

Use this example to see how to transform a vague or table stakes claim into a more compelling message by better clarifying, making appealing, and proving the claim.

Put It All Together

At our school, your child won't just be prepared for high school—they'll be ready to lead. From coding fluency to confident communication, we equip students with the skills that matter most.

- *Tech-Savvy and Future-Ready: 70% of our graduates are fluent in at least one programming language—giving them a head start in an increasingly digital world.*
- *Global Citizens by Middle School: Through immersive study abroad programs, 100% of our middle school participants return conversationally fluent in a world language.*
- *Confident Communicators, Critical Thinkers: Thanks to the Harkness method—where students lead discussion, not just listen—our alumni arrive in high school ready to speak up, think deeply, and lead with clarity.*
- *Proven Impact: High school teachers consistently report that our graduates participate more actively and thoughtfully than their peers.*

We don't just teach students to succeed. We teach them to stand out.

ChatGPT prompt

"Take this information and write three parent-centered marketing messages. Leverage the stats provided."

- *"Empowering Young Minds Through Coding—70% of Our Graduates Are Programming Proficient."*
- *Study Abroad, Speak the World—100% Return Conversationally Fluent."*
- *Where Every Voice Matters—Master the Art of Discussion with the Harkness Method*

ChatGPT prompt

"Provide an SEO-optimized tagline for each point."

Our graduates enter high school ahead of the curve—70% are proficient in coding, 100% of middle school study abroad participants return fluent in a world language, and all are skilled in leading thoughtful discussion through the Harkness method. High school educators consistently report that our alumni participate more actively and confidently than their peers.

ChatGPT prompt

"Write a concise value proposition statement that proves the school prepares students for high school exceptionally well using the evidence."

Improving Vague Marketing Messaging (template)

Complete the template to transform a vague or table stakes claim into a more compelling message by better clarifying, making appealing, and proving the claim.

Vague or Table Stakes Claim

Clarify

What offerings make this statement possible? There are likely multiple.

Appeal

Which, if any, of these offerings rank highly in my matrix?

Prove

For any highly ranked offerings, compile evidence (see toolkit **p. 14**)

Put It All Together

Improving Competitively Quantitative Messages

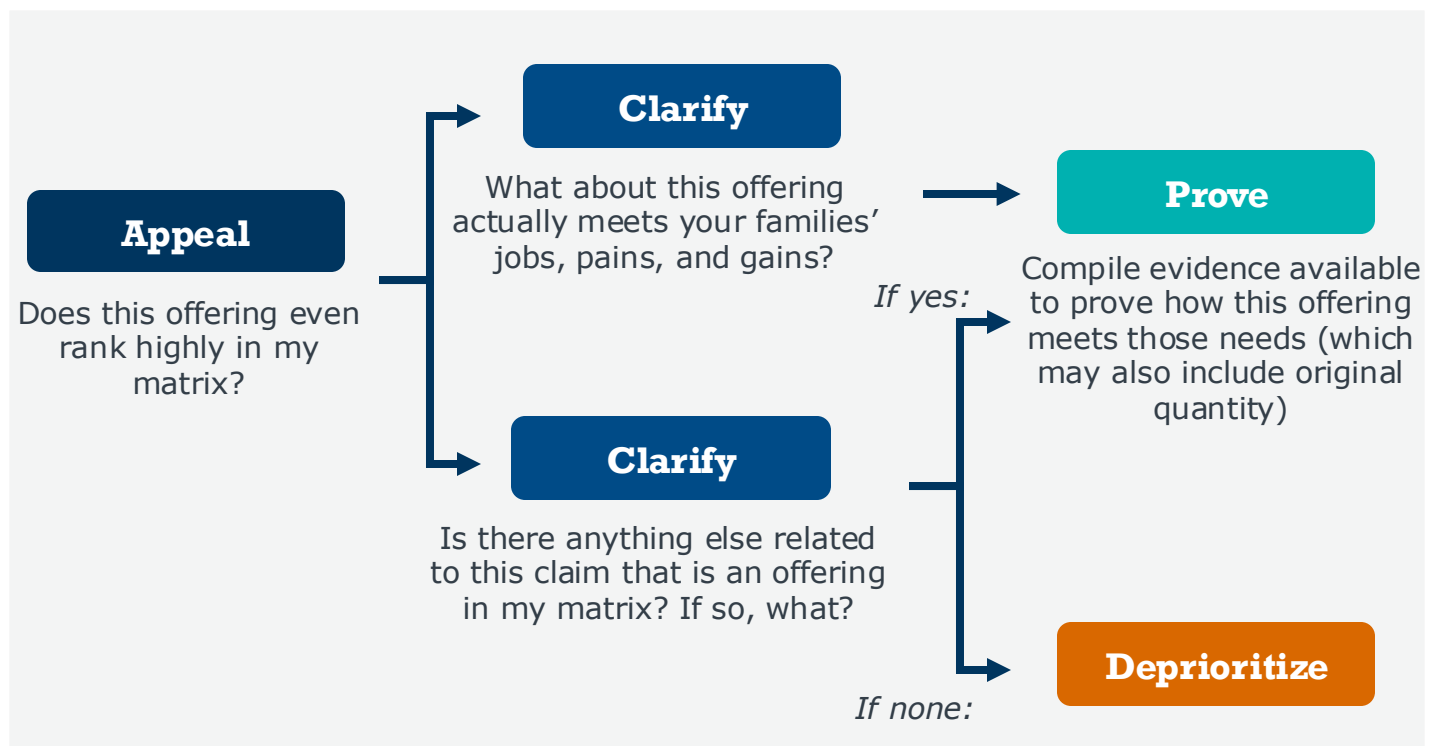
A key mistake schools make is leading with quantitative differences. Often these quantitative differences enter schools into an arms race, detracting from the importance of the offerings and the family gains they lead to. To more effectively message these offerings, use the below formula to highlight the family gains the offering meets and provide supporting evidence.

✗ Leading with a quantitative difference, meant more for beating out competition than building credibility

→ Example: "50+ student clubs"



Process to Improve Competitively Quantitative Messaging



Improving Competitively Quant. Messaging (example)

Use this example to uncover the highly ranked offerings behind your current quantitative messaging by confirming and clarifying what about (if anything) the message appeals to your audience and leveraging evidence to prove its value.

Quantitative “Difference” Claim

50+ Middle School Student Clubs

Appeal

Does this offering even rank highly in my matrix?

If yes:

Clarify

What about this offering actually meets your families’ jobs, pains, and gains?

*Yes—we have a suite of
programming that develops
leadership skills, and student
clubs are a piece of that*

If no:

Clarify

Is there anything else related to this claim that is an offering in my matrix? If so, what?

N/A

Prove

For any highly ranked offerings, compile evidence.

In a survey, 2 years after graduation, 100% of previous middle school club leaders went on to hold a leadership role in high school

Improving Competitively Quant. Messaging (example)

Use this example to uncover the highly ranked offerings behind your current quantitative messaging by confirming and clarifying what about (if anything) the message appeals to your audience and leveraging evidence to prove its value.

Put It All Together

At our school, we believe leadership isn't something students stumble into—it's something they're intentionally prepared for. That's why we offer a thoughtfully designed suite of programs that nurture confidence, initiative, and collaboration from the earliest grades. One standout example is our robust student club network, where students begin practicing real leadership in middle school. And the results speak for themselves: in a recent survey, 100% of our former middle school club leaders went on to hold leadership roles in high school.

ChatGPT prompt

"Take this information and make a parent-centered value proposition in paragraph form. Leverage the stats provided."

Short & Punchy

100% of our former middle school club leaders are leading in high school. Our programs don't just build clubs—they build leaders.

Inspirational

What happens when you invest in young leaders? 100% of our middle school club leaders step into leadership again in high school.

ChatGPT prompt

"Can you synthesize this information in a few different ways so it can be used for clever social media posts?"

Our student clubs are more than just fun—they're part of a larger leadership program. Two years after graduating, 100% of our middle school club leaders held leadership roles in high school. And with over 50 clubs available, there are ample opportunities to lead.

ChatGPT prompt

"Can you turn the information into a quick quote that our school tour guide can use?"

Improving Competitively Quant. Messaging (template)

Complete the template to uncover if there are highly ranked offerings behind your current quantitative messaging by confirming and clarifying what about (if anything) the message appeals to your audience and leveraging evidence to prove its value.

Quantitative “Difference” Claim

50+ Middle School Student Clubs

Appeal

Does this offering even rank highly in my matrix?

If yes:

Clarify

What about this offering actually meets your families’ jobs, pains, and gains?

If no:

Clarify

Is there anything else related to this claim that is an offering in my matrix? If so, what?

Prove

For any highly ranked offerings, compile evidence.

Put It All Together



EAB's Dynamic Value Proposition

Evidence Collection to Prove Differentiators

Use this section to understand the different quantitative and qualitative sources available to collect evidence to improve the provability of your differentiators and to assess the quality of your existing evidence.

Evidence to Prove Differentiators: Social Proof

Social proof is one of the most powerful tools schools can use to strengthen the credibility and provability of their differentiators. Use the guidance below to better understand how social proof builds trust with families and explore examples commonly used by independent schools. Then, use **pp. 18–20** to assess the quality of your current social proof.

▶ The Proof Is in the People to Build Trust



Social proof | *noun*

A psychological and social phenomenon wherein people copy the actions of others in choosing how to behave in a given situation.

75%

Of consumers “always” or “regularly” read online reviews

58%

Of consumers will pay more for a product or service with good reviews

70%

Of people will trust a recommendation from a stranger, boosted to 92% if they consider them a peer

“Whether the question is what to do with an empty popcorn box in a movie theater, how fast to drive on a certain stretch of highway, or how to eat the chicken at a dinner party, the actions of those around us will be important in defining the answer.”

Robert Cialdini,

Author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*

▶ Common Social Proof Independent Schools Use

- ▶ Case Studies
- ▶ Testimonials
- ▶ Reviews, Ratings, and Awards
- ▶ School Brand Ambassadors
- ▶ User-Generated Content
- ▶ Data and Statistics from Community
- ▶ Customer Logos – feature colleges and workplaces of your alumni, for example

Embed Social Proof In Every Click



Homepage



Social media



Admissions, donate now, etc.



Program offerings pages

Incorporate variety of diverse examples to address different market segments

Source: Gupta, S., What Is Social Proof? [How to Harness Its Power for Marketing Success](#), Gartner, 2023; Taheer, F., [Social Proof Statistics](#), OptinMonster, 2024; [Hubspot](#), November 2024; [Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report](#), 2019; Castleman, C., [Customer Value Proposition: How to Create One That Works in 6 Steps](#), Salesforce, 2024; Suski, J., [What Is Social Proof?](#); EAB interviews and analysis.

Source List for Proof Collection

Use the list of potential sources below to help you identify different ways to collect social proof that aligns better with your most relevant and distinct differentiators.

► Quantitative Sources (Data-Driven Evidence)

- ❑ Parent, Student, and Alumni Surveys
 - Annual satisfaction surveys
 - Post-graduation follow-up surveys
 - Net Promoter Score (NPS)
- ❑ College Counseling Data
 - Matriculation lists and trends
 - College acceptance rates by tier/type
 - Scholarship or merit aid awarded
 - Alumni success in college (e.g., retention, honors)
- ❑ Standardized Test Scores and Academic Benchmarks
 - SAT/ACT, AP, IB, MAP, or internal assessments
 - Growth over time rather than raw scores
- ❑ Admissions Yield and Retention Rates
 - Yield from accepted offers
 - Year-to-year student retention
 - Transfer-out rates (and reasons why)
- ❑ Program Participation Rates and Feedback Surveys
 - Percentage of students involved in specific programs
 - Feedback surveys collected after completion of specific programs
- ❑ Post-Graduation Outcomes (Beyond College)
 - Career paths of alumni
 - Alumni in leadership, entrepreneurship, or service roles
 - Alumni giving or engagement as a proxy for satisfaction
 - Alumni participation in events, mentorship, or giving

► Qualitative Sources (Narrative or Experiential Evidence)

- ❑ Student, Alumni, Faculty Testimonials
 - Organic feedback gathered through interviews, social media, review sites (e.g., Google), or open response surveys
 - Stories of student growth, classroom innovation, or program impact
- ❑ Athletic, Artistic, and Co-Curricular Achievements
 - Awards, competition results, performance reviews
 - Student leadership roles in clubs or initiatives
- ❑ Service Learning and Community Impact
 - Evidence of partnerships, hours served, or student-initiated service project
 - Community feedback or recognition
- ❑ Media Coverage or Awards
 - Local or national press stories
 - Recognition for staff, students, or programs
- ❑ Parent Feedback (Formal and Informal)
 - Notes from conferences or events
 - Email feedback or online reviews

Aligning Social Proof with Differentiators Checklist

Use the questions below to assess the quality of your existing social proof and where there may be areas to improve or add social proof to better align with your most relevant and distinct differentiators.

1. Alignment with Differentiators:

- Do our testimonials, reviews, or case studies clearly and consistently reflect the differentiators elevated as the most relevant and distinct (refer to your matrix)? ☐
- Are we unintentionally highlighting general strengths (e.g., “great faculty”) that every competitor could also claim? ☐

► Reflection Question

Which of your social proof examples do this well? Which are less aligned and are there ways to adapt them to make them more aligned to your true differentiators?

2. Authenticity and Specificity:

- Are the voices in our social proof specific and personal — or are they generic and interchangeable? ☐
- Do different segments of our audience (e.g., lower school vs. upper school parents, local vs. relocating families) see themselves represented? ☐
- Can we tie each story to a tangible outcome or real experience that supports our school’s value proposition? ☐

► Reflection Question

Where can we find more tangible evidence of the claims we make within our value proposition and key differentiators (see p. **16**)?

Aligning Social Proof with Differentiators Checklist (cont.)

3. Differentiation vs Competition

- Do our stories position us as different in meaningful ways, or just trying to be “better” at the same things? ☐
- Would a family reading the story understand why this student thrived here — and why that might not have happened elsewhere? ☐

► *Reflection Question*

How can we reposition claims that are too vague or based solely in a quantitative, ‘better than’ difference (see **p. 7** and **p. 11**)?

4. Credibility and Format

- Are we using a diverse range of voices (students, alumni, parents, faculty)? ☐
- Is there a balance of short-form (quotes) and long-form (case studies, videos) content to appeal to different preferences? ☐
- Are our ambassadors and spokespeople representative of the diversity and personality of the school community? ☐

► *Reflection Question*

What types of stories or voices are we missing that would better support our school’s value proposition?



EAB's Dynamic Value Proposition

Differentiator Mad Lib

Use this section to complete mad libs that are designed to help you articulate your value differentiators.

Value Differentiator Mad Lib Exercise

Use the following pages to begin to message your school's value differentiators clearly and concisely to your market. Using the below guidance, complete the exercise on **pp. 21-22** and repeat this exercise for each highly ranked differentiator (from your matrix). This will provide you a series of vignettes, which you can then use to tailor to any context. After completing a mad lib for each differentiator, complete the reflection questions on **p. 22**.

Institutional Differentiator Mad Lib

For [**target customer segment**], who [**customer need or problem**], our [**institutional offering**] provides [**key benefit or solution**]. Unlike [**school competitors**], this offering is [**unique difference or advantage**]. Our offering's value is demonstrated through [**support or proof**].

Use 'WIIFM' motto to keep customer-centric



"What's in it for me?" (or them, your customer) is a helpful question to ask when brainstorming language to use to market your differentiators

Do not plan to use mad libs verbatim



Instead, treat these as a reference point to translate and personalize into marketing messages for various contexts and market segments

Consider GenAI to translate vignettes



Tools like ChatGPT excel at turning lengthy descriptions into concise, compelling messages for different audiences and contexts

Source: Mariam, Ali, "[What does WIIFM Mean](#)," AllNewBusiness, February 2025; "Customer Value Proposition: How to Create One that Works in 6 Steps," [Salesforce](#), May 2025. EAB interviews and analysis.

Value Differentiator Mad Lib Exercise (cont.)

Mad Lib Questions

Target customer segment: _____

- Who is this differentiator intended for?

Customer need or problem: _____

- Questions: What is problem is the family facing? What need is the family trying to satisfy?
- Use a customer “job” established from market-tested Principal Customer Profile

Institutional offering: _____

- What is the best institutional offering to address this need or problem?
- Use one of the institutional offerings identified as a differentiator

Key benefit or solution: _____

- How does the offering meet this need or address this problem?
- Name one of the family gains or pains identified in your market-tested Principal Customer Profile

School competitors: _____

- Use the competitors listed in the Competitor Data Collection Toolkit

Unique difference or advantage: _____

- Use a difference noted in the Competitor Analysis Toolkit

Support or proof: _____

- What hard data do you have about this differentiator?
- What positive things have others shared about this differentiator?

Value Differentiator Mad Lib Exercise (cont.)

Complete Mad Libs for as many differentiators you have identified as both relevant and distinct, based on your matrix.

Differentiator #1

For _____ who _____ our _____ provides
_____. Unlike _____ this offering is _____. Our
offering's value is demonstrated through _____.

Differentiator #2

For _____ who _____ our _____ provides
_____. Unlike _____ this offering is _____. Our
offering's value is demonstrated through _____.

Differentiator #3

For _____ who _____ our _____ provides
_____. Unlike _____ this offering is _____. Our
offering's value is demonstrated through _____.

Reflection Questions

1. How difficult did you find the mad lib exercise? Were any blanks in particular difficult for you to complete?
2. If you were to share this completed mad lib with your senior leadership team, do you think they would agree with what you have written? Are there any components that may cause them to pause or that they would question?
3. If you were to share this completed mad lib with a prospective family, which parts might they find confusing or unclear? What questions might they have?
4. How would you leverage this mad lib for your website? How would you change it for a social media post? How would the messaging differ when used during a guided school tour?
5. What prompts might you give ChatGPT or a marketing expert to adapt this mad lib for various marketing contexts?



EAB's Dynamic Value Proposition

Web and Mobile Homepage & Admissions Page Audit

Review this section for an overview of the EAB provided homepage and admissions page audit for which your school can sign up.

Use Homepage to Highlight Differentiators

With consumers' digital-first habits and limited attention, your homepage is a critical place to highlight your value proposition and differentiators. Use the guidance below to understand why, and how independent schools might be missing the mark. Then, learn about EAB's homepage and admissions audit on the next page.

► Today's Consumer Experience: Information and Distraction Overload

500M

Tweets posted to X/Twitter each day, amounting to 180B every year

>4k

Number of brands (logos, advertisements, etc.) the average person sees daily

150

Number of times each day the average person checks their smartphone



Digital Is Where Attention Is

"People rarely call us to learn about the school anymore. And if they do, it's after hours of research. That research heavily involves our website. It's the first thing they see. It's often how they make their decision on whether to enroll their students or not."

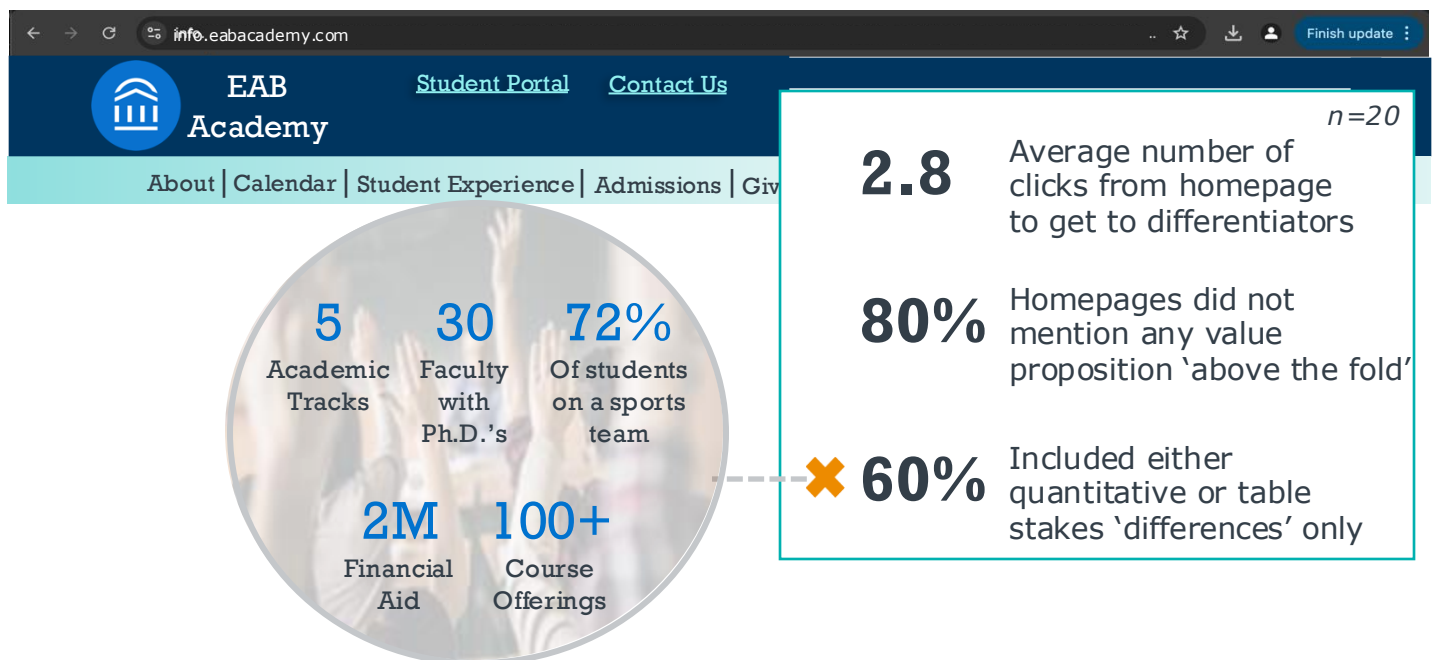
Head of School

But That Attention Is Limited

8s

Average length of a human's attention span

► EAB's Independent School Homepage Review Indicate Missed Opportunity



Source: Red Crow Marketing, "How Many Ads Do You See in One Day?"; Dunn, N., "Top 26 Twitter (x) Statistics", Charle, 2025; Hamborg et al., "Bias-Aware News Analysis Using Matrix-Based News Aggregation", 2018; Steinhilber, C., "Phones and Focus: How to Win the Uphill Battle of Workplace Distraction", Forbes, 2023; Dunn, N., "Top 23 TikTok Statistics", Charle, 2025; Lu, K. & Matsa, K.E., "More Than Half of Smartphone Users Get News Alerts, but Few Get Them Often", Pew Research Center, 2016; McSpadden, Kevin, "You Now Have a Shorter Attention Span Than a Goldfish", Time Magazine, May 2015; EAB interviews and analysis.

Overview: Homepage and Admissions Audit

Review the information below for insight into what is included in an audit as well as steps on how to sign up for one.

Audit Methodology

In response to our partner independent schools' growing interest and need to optimize their online presence, EAB research has developed the Web and Mobile Homepage and Admissions Page Audit to evaluate independent school partners' websites on desktop and mobile in the following areas:

- **Homepage Audit:** This section evaluates how well a school markets its value proposition and differentiators on the homepage of its school website.
- **Admissions Page Audit:**
 - **Usability:** This section evaluates the visual appeal and design of the admissions website. Families simultaneously browse a half dozen (or more) websites at any given time. Prospective families will invest considerable time and independent energy in an education search if they are reasonably confident that they can easily find the information they seek.
 - **Content:** This section evaluates the findability and completeness of the information provided on the independent school's admissions page. For families who are just beginning their education search or families looking for specific information, it is important that they can easily locate certain pieces of content. For a family looking more critically at an institution, they will be more concerned about the completeness of the content provided. This section also evaluates a school's calls-to-action, a key component of an effective admissions page. Calls-to-action can address general concerns (e.g., request for information) or specific concerns (e.g., avenues to ask personal questions), and may be linked tools that enable families to commit to a program (e.g., application or enrollment option).
 - **Testimonials:** This section evaluates the presence and quality of testimonials, another important content type which should be featured prominently on school admissions pages. Absent a friend or colleague who has attended an independent school, prospective families rely on testimonials for approval from "a person like them." Families perceive testimonials as similar to trusted "word-of-mouth" recommendations.
 - **Mobile Optimization:** Finally, audits consider how the independent school's admissions page translates to mobile formats.



To sign up, reach out to your dedicated advisor to let them know you're interested in participating in a web/mobile homepage and admissions page audit.

Source: Mariam, Ali, "[What does WITEM Mean](#)," AllNewBusiness, February 2025; "Customer Value Proposition: How to Create One that Works in 6 Steps," [Salesforce](#), May 2025. EAB interviews and analysis.



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