

# Low-Cost Ways to Increase Enrollment and Retention

Dr. Kurt Nelson



**MARIAN UNIVERSITY**  
Indianapolis®  
**Fred S. Klipsch Educators College**

# Action Planning Guide

## Low-Cost Ways to Increase Enrollment and Retention

### ACTION PLANNING GUIDE



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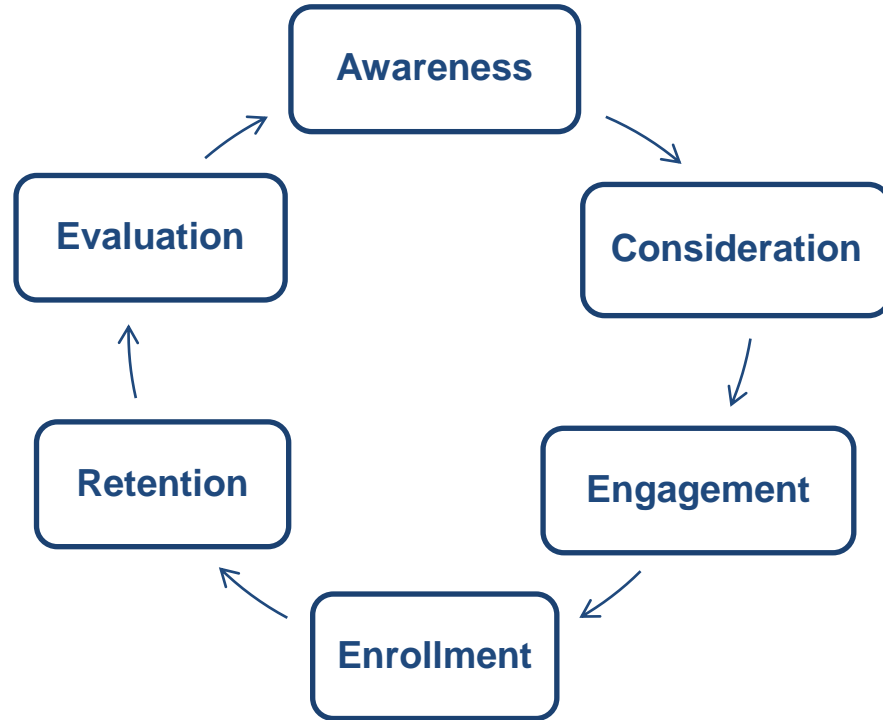
# Caution!

- Low Cost does not mean low investment (time, talent)!
- Don't try to do it all at once!
- Don't try to do it alone!

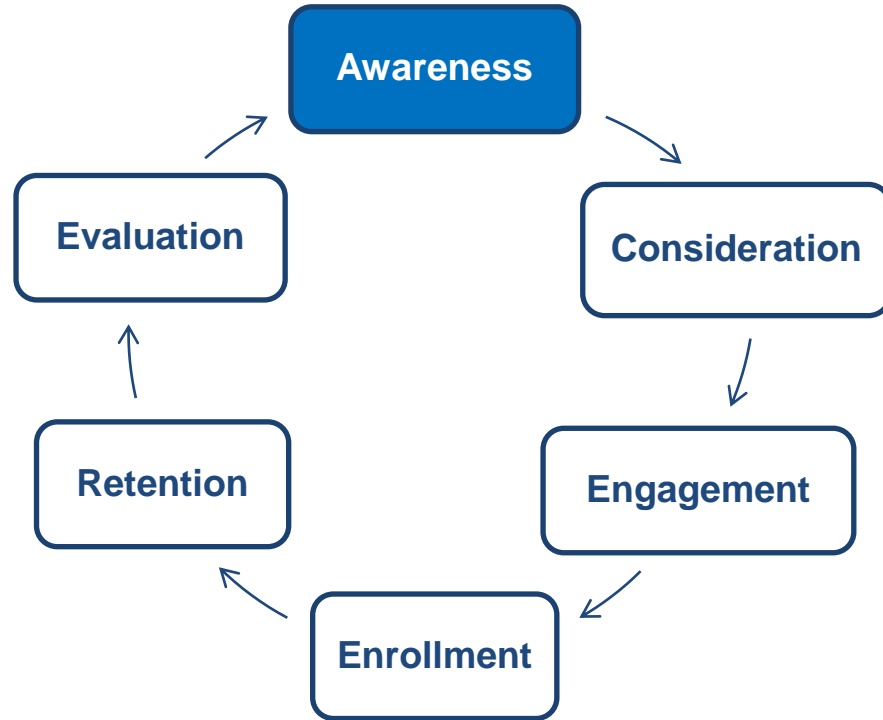
Who has the interest, passion, and skill to help your school?

- Board members
- Teachers/Staff
- Parents
- Parishioners
- Alumni and community members

# Enrollment Management Cycle

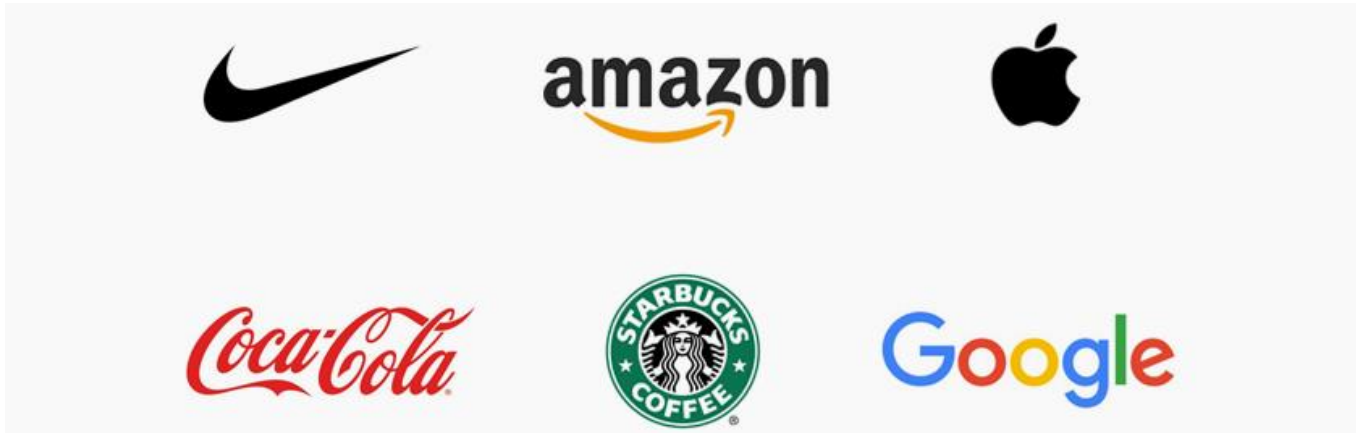


# Enrollment Management Cycle



# Brand

- Your school's brand is the total of all the mental associations that people have about you.



# Brand Management

- **Know** who you are
  - *What are the things that differentiate our school and make us unique?*
- **Share/promote/sell** who you are through the enrollment management cycle
- **Be** who you say you are
  - *Avoid brand disconnects*

# Awareness

- How do you compare to your competitors? Where does your school have value?
- What does your school offer that they don't/can't?
- What do they offer like you, but you can pivot to make it a category your school leads?



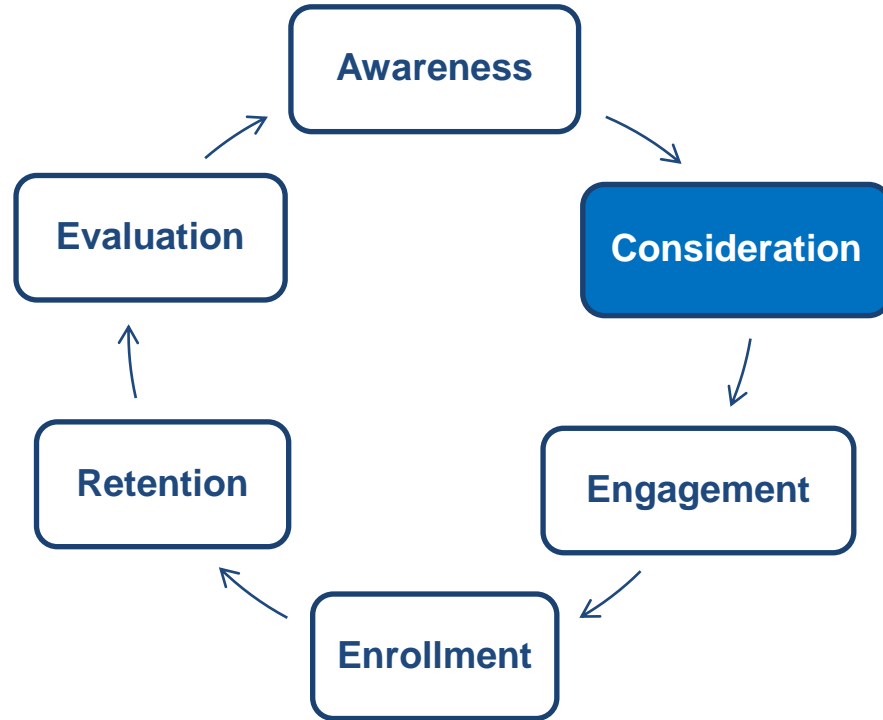
# Website

- A top-quality website is not an option in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Design for prospective parents, not current ones
- Is the website updated at least weekly?
- Must use responsive design for mobile devices.
- Conduct a website audit based on key findings from the 2016 NCEA/FADICA market research study.

# Website Audit (FADICA/NCEA Study 2018)

1. Students well prepared for success at the next level
2. Students prepared to live in global society (critical thinking, different points of view)
3. Strong curriculum
4. Diverse & welcoming learning environment
5. Affordability
6. Religious instruction balanced with virtue/character development

# Enrollment Management Cycle



# Partner (“Feeder”) Schools

- If both offer competing grades, create a customized brochure that omits information about any age levels that directly compete with other school’s program.
  - E.g. daycares & preschools: Customize brochure to start at 5-year-old Kindergarten
  - E.g. K-5 school: Customize to start with middle school

# Consider Your Image

- The NCEA/FADICA market research indicates that parents are savvy customers and take school decisions seriously.
- Make sure your marketing materials reflect the level of investment parents are asked to make.



# Messaging

- You are not selling a product
- You are selling a solution to parents' problem of where they are going to send their child to school.
- Focus on what the parent needs to hear to solve his/her problem, not on what you or your school want to tell them.

# “Win the heart and the mind will follow”

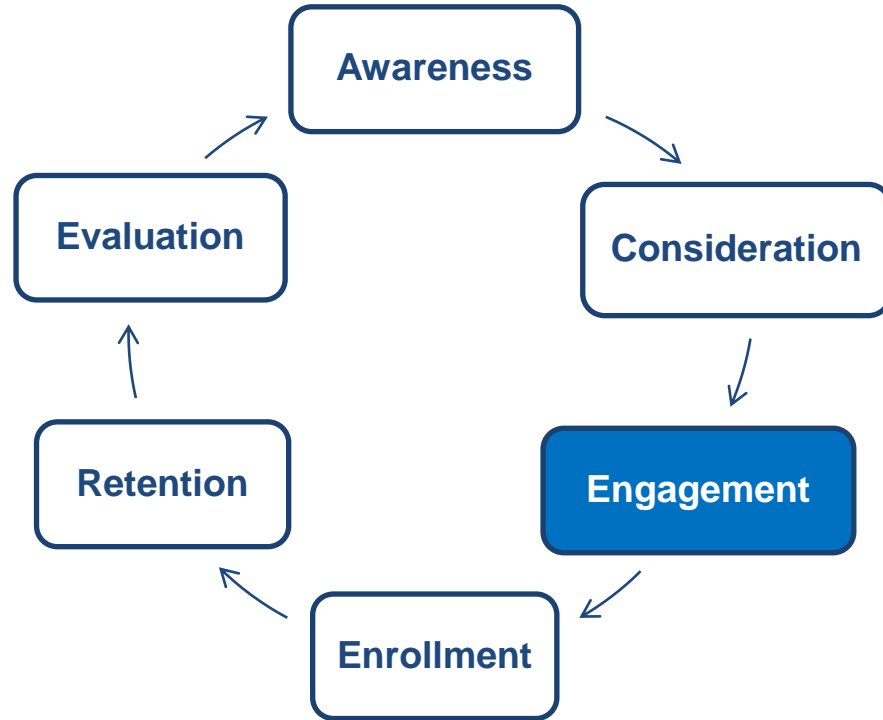
- Once a family has been hooked emotionally on the value of your school, they will be motivated to overcome many logical barriers (cost, distance), rather than using those barriers as excuses.
  - Use photos and stories of individual students and parents.
  - Avoid broad statements, vague benefits, and large group shots.
  - Make it personal!

# Target Marketing/Segmentation

- Parents are not a monolithic group. Each has its own needs and require different communication strategies
- For each group on the right, consider:
  - Where are they most likely to hear about your school?
  - What are their biggest priorities or needs?
  - What are their biggest concerns about school?
- Parish & Non-Catholic families
- Parents of preschoolers
- Parents of possible transfer students
- Parent in medical or STEM fields
- Families that are new to town
- African-American & Hispanic families
- Low Income Families
- Military families



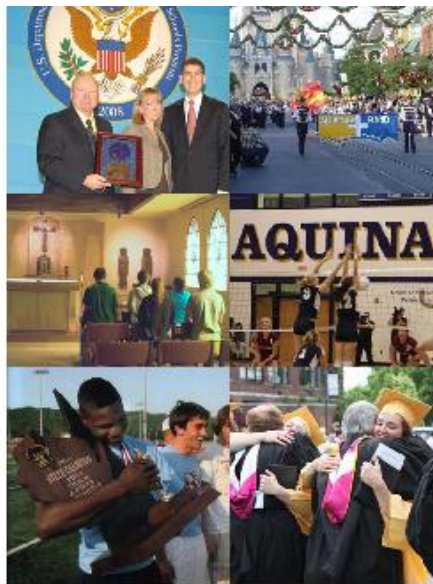
# Enrollment Management Cycle



# Moves Management

- Track and record inquiries
- Building an ongoing relationship with parents. Not just enrollment *next* year, but for 4 (HS) or even 9 (ES) years!
- Don't try to leap from inquiry to enrollment. Think in baby steps.
  - Invite family to come for an open house, take a tour, schedule a shadow day, etc.
  - As they take each step, thank them for their interest and invite them to the next step.

# Leverage Other Activities



The students and staff of Aquinas High School invite you to their Fall Open House on **Sunday, November 13, 2011**  
Open House: **12:00-2:00 p.m.**  
Free Matinee Performance: **2:00 p.m.**

- Meet Teachers and Administrators
- Tour the School
- Explore Our:
  - ✓ Top-Quality Academics
  - ✓ Award-Winning Fine Arts
  - ✓ Championship Athletics
  - ✓ Engaging Activities
  - ✓ Active Faith Life
- Get Information About:
  - ✓ Enrollment
  - ✓ Transportation
  - ✓ Scholarships

For more information, contact our admissions office at 784-8585

Bring this letter with you to receive **complimentary admission** for you and your family to Aquinas High School's 2:00 p.m. matinee performance of *The Music Man*!

Stay and enjoy the dramatic, musical, and artistic talents of Aquinas students!



{Student Name – for tracking purposes}

# Put out the Welcome Mat

- Shadow Day confirmation letter with details
- Personalized parking place
- Staff or student ambassador waiting for family

# Create Tour Protocol

- Principal visit with family FIRST, make a connection by listening to the parents' and students' needs, wants, strengths and interests
- Plan out an established tour route and talking points.
- Close visit by inviting the parents to take the next step in the engagement process.
- Or principal should close by “asking for the sale.”

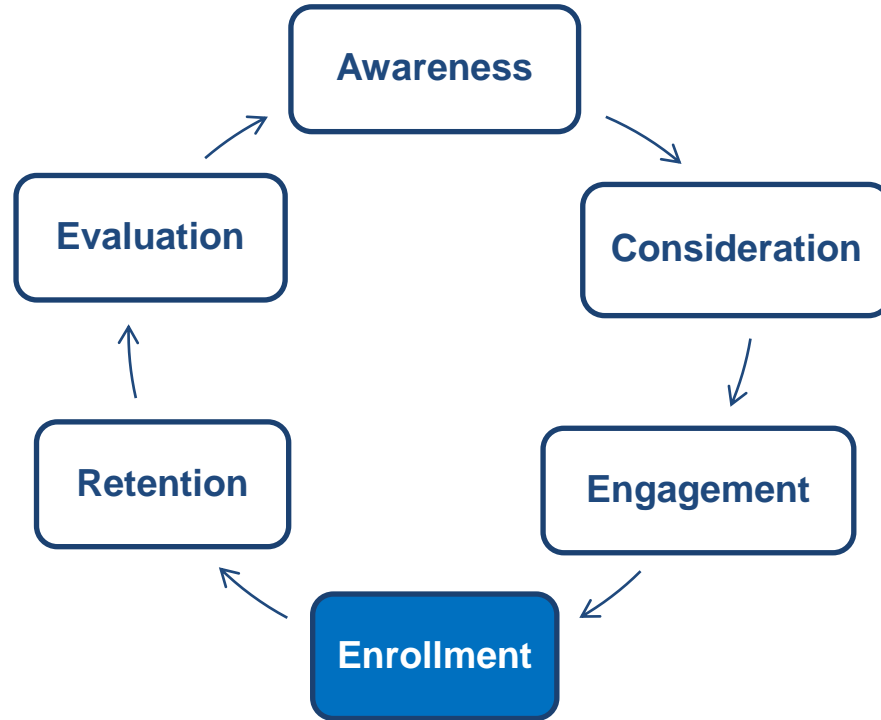
# Let your Teachers Shine

- Classroom visit is the opportunity for a family to fall in love with the teacher!
- The principal or office staff alert teachers in advance about visitors
- The principal and family enter and observe learning
- Teacher approach the family and is introduced by the principal. Principal can give the teacher cues from information learned about the family.
- Teacher engages family and student by asking questions, talking about special projects or events, talking about the student's interests, and exploring connections.
- Principal fade into the background to supervise class

# Showcase Your School Virtually

- Record a virtual tour during a school day
- Record a “Day in the Life,” through your student’s eyes
- Have a teacher record a mini virtual lesson with students
- Host virtual coffee (BYO) events with department chairs or teachers
- Host virtual coffees with counselors to talk about transitions, academic expectations, faith development, and social development
- Record brief parent and/or young alumni testimonials
- Host a live parent panel virtually

# Enrollment Management Cycle





# Take the Parent's Perspective

- Consider your entire enrollment process from start to finish from a parent's point of view
  - Are families building relationships with your staff or simply passing through a multi-layered bureaucracy?
  - How clear is the process? Do they know whom to contact about different phases?
  - Are your forms by child (one for each) or by family to streamline paperwork for parents?

# Dismantle Our Own Barriers

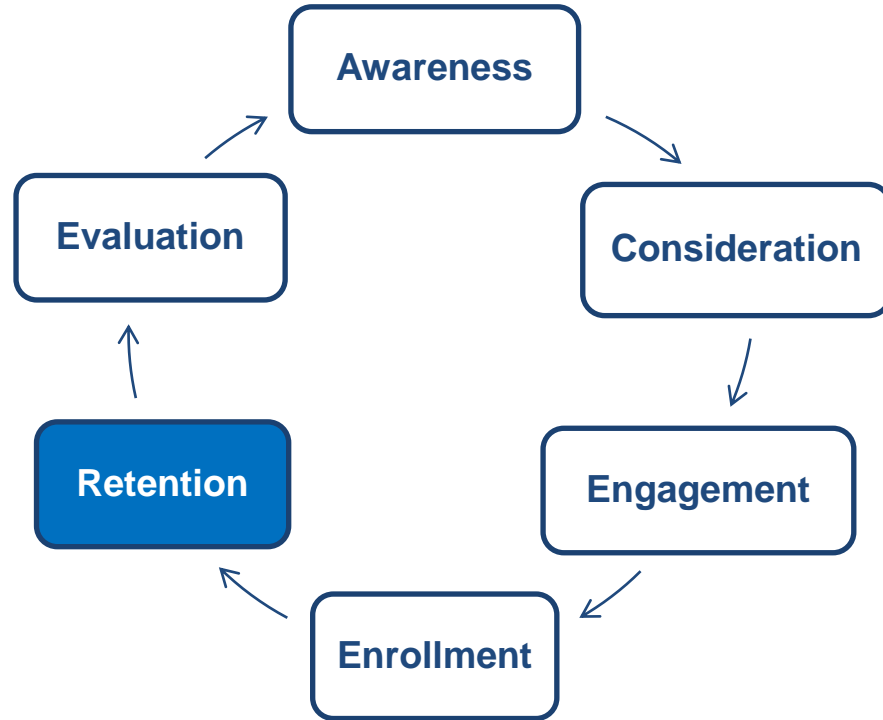
- The Partnership Schools in New York and Cleveland report that they lost 87% of families if they are not fully enrolled within a week of initial outreach.
- What things are needed at enrollment and which are needed before classes begin?

Sources: [http://www.partnershipnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PS\\_Enrollment\\_final\\_2-1.pdf](http://www.partnershipnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/PS_Enrollment_final_2-1.pdf)  
<https://www.partnershipnyc.org/clear-the-path/>

# Acknowledge & Keep in Touch

- Spring to August is too long for “radio silence”
- Let parent know when to expect next communication
- Consider monthly new parent communication  
(‘evergreen’ and/or specific)

# Enrollment Management Cycle



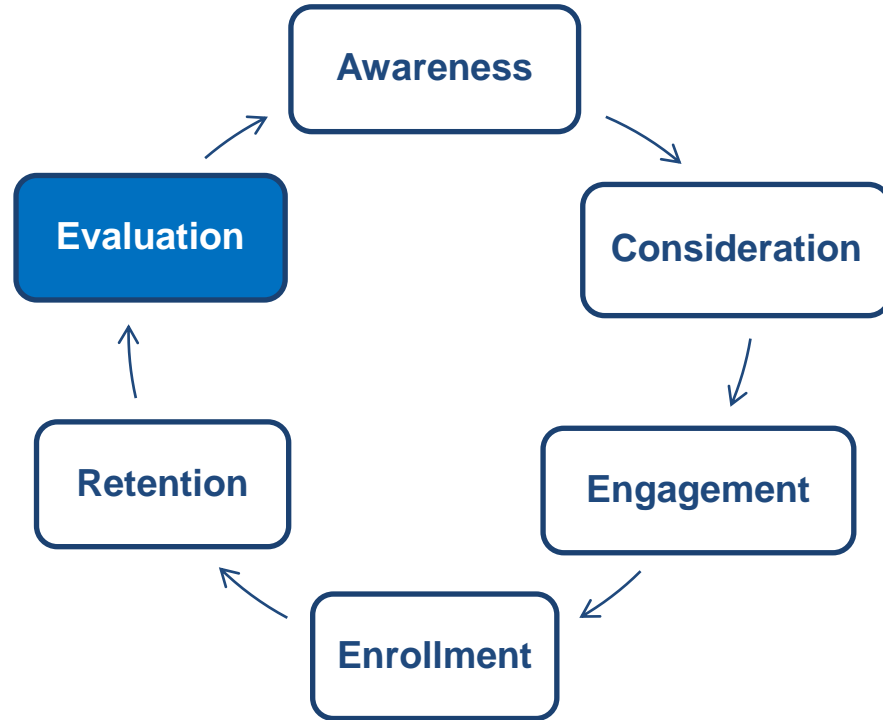
# New Parent Orientation

- Schedule before your general Back-to-School night or School Supply Nights so that new families can already feel comfortable with your building, staff, and other parents.
  - **Principal** talk about nuts & bolts items (e.g. how parents drop off in the morning, procedures for afternoon pickup, aftercare procedures, who to contact if your child is sick or has an appointment).
  - **Home & School leaders** talk about how to purchase lunches, where can you get school uniforms, spirit dress, used uniform resale, special events, volunteer opportunities, fundraisers.
  - **Pastor** address parents' role, goal to help every child grow closer to God, expectations for non-Catholic students, how to contact him if they ever have a question about faith practices in the school.

# Show You Value Parents

- Use mail merge to pre-populate re-enrollment forms. Demonstrates families are known & valued, saves time.
- Kick off re-enrollment by providing a State of the School Address or letter
  - Thank parents for their trust
  - Recap school's accomplishments
  - Discuss goals for coming year
  - Review finances and tuition

# Enrollment Management Cycle



# Track Conversion Rates

- How many families who inquired came to an open house or scheduled a tour?
- How many families that came to Open Houses enrolled?
- How many families that came for a campus tour or shadow day enrolled?
- Which step(s) of the enrollment cycle need more attention?



# Yearly Enrollment Comparisons are NOT the Same Thing as Retention

A 2% enrollment decline does NOT mean you had 98% retention

- **Pay attention to the Front Door**
  - Do you know where your K students come from?
  - Do you know where your Transfer students come from?
  - What grades do you gain the most transfer students?
- **Mind the Exits**
  - What grades do you lose students?
  - Do they leave the area or select other schools?
  - What schools do students go to when they withdraw from your school?
  - What is attracting them away from your school?

# Debrief and Keep Notes

- Debrief activities and events immediately
  - What worked well?
  - What do you want to change for next year?
  - What unexpected programs came up?
  - Don't repeat the same mistakes next year.

# Thank you!

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