

Situation Appraisal

Fairview German Language School is a K-6 elementary program that begins German language education in Kindergarten. Part of the Cincinnati Public School's Magnet program, Fairview has a respected reputation, good quality administration and teachers, and an exceptionally involved parent group.

As with any school, natural attrition occurs through the relocation of student's families. Because of the German language component, it was rare for students to transfer into the program after 2nd grade. This factor put additional pressure to enroll a large enough Kindergarten class so that after attrition, there is still a substantial amount of students to fill the class by the 6th grade.

In spite of all the strengths of the program, enrollment in the Kindergarten classes showed a steady decline. What had formerly been an enrollment of 4 full classrooms of Kindergarteners had dwindled to become a struggle to fill three classrooms. This was a trend that could have a critical impact on the program in 7 years if it continued.

Demographics

As a magnet school, Fairview can draw from any quadrant of the Cincinnati Public School district. Enrollment was sporadic throughout the district with a high penetration in several densely populated neighborhoods.

The **ethnic profile** of Fairview students reflected a unique combination of 40% Caucasian, 40% African-American and 20% international cultures. Due to Fairview's location near the University of Cincinnati (UC), its enrollment benefited from the UC's draw of international students and their families.

The **financial profile** of Fairview families covers the range of low income to middle income. Over 40% of Fairview's students are eligible for the "School Lunch Program" for low income families.

The **educational achievement profile** of Fairview reflected a consistent excellent rating. Most students continue their education at Walnut Hills, another school of excellence.

Key Resources - Fairview's Marketing Advantage

- ◆ Very effective tours were being conducted by the parent group. These tours garnered a consistent **80% conversion rate** to enrollment.
- ◆ A small group of parents had started shooting a recruitment video
- ◆ The formal parent organization (GEBAS) was **very supportive** of marketing efforts and had some financial resources
- ◆ In general, Fairview has converted new students and their families to becoming **very loyal** to their school.

FAST FACTS

School: Fairview German
Grade Level: K through 6th
Location: Cincinnati, OH
Affiliation: Cincinnati Public School System

Problem: Enrollment dropped in a two year period to critically low levels. No lead generation marketing system in place. Limited budget.

"Fairview is unique in that we are consistently rated as a "School of Excellence" and, at the same time, have over 40% of our students qualifying for the "School Lunch Program" for low income families."

Karen Mulligan
Principal
Fairview German

Marketing Strategy

As a public school with very limited marketing funds, a low cost strategy needed to be developed in order to reach the goal of achieving a higher kindergarten enrollment. The strategy developed was based on two key objectives:

1. Increase the number of participants in the tour
2. Engage and motivate the sales force of parents (which didn't know that they were the sales force)

Due to limited resources, a highly effective and low cost marketing strategy/tactics needed to be developed.

Marketing Implementation

Video Production: Guiding the Viewer Toward Your Objective

With a recruiting video already in production, the objective of increasing participation in the tour became an underlying message. While this video included all of the basics that most elementary school recruiting videos contain (statements about the quality education, teachers, curriculum and facilities), the overall message delivered a high value in taking the tour of the school. This was done intentionally. Testimonials from parents referenced a positive tour experience. There was a strong invitation to take the tour of the school given directly from the principal and followed by and invitation from a group of kindergarten students to come and visit their class. The video concluded with a graphic stating "To set up your tour, please call XXX-XXXX today." Production of the video was completed in a timely manner before the beginning of the next year's enrollment period.

Video Distribution: Engaging the Unknown Sales Force

Once the video was produced, Fairview's parent group (GEBAS) was approached with a distribution plan where they were asked to pay for the duplication of the recruiting video so that every Fairview family could have a copy to view. This was immediately approved and funded by the parent group. A plan was devised to distribute the video via the homeroom teachers. Specific instructions for what the teachers should say were written and distributed. Three vital statements were written for the teachers to deliver to the students as the video was being handed out. "Be sure to watch this video tonight. You are probably in it." "Be sure to show this video to your parents and your grand parents." And finally "You have to bring this video back tomorrow." These three statements **added urgency and priority** to viewing the video. Parents were encouraged to share the video with other pre-school families. It was made clear to the parents that once the video was given out, their job was done. No need for them to follow up or get the video back.

The Unknown Sales Force
Most parents of school age children don't realize that they have significant influence on parents of pre-schoolers. They don't know that they are the best sales force for their school.

Results

The result of the whole school and their families viewing the video was one of increased enthusiasm and pride about their school. This increased level of enthusiasm made it very easy for the parent's to share the video with other pre-school families. The fact that they didn't have to get the video back, ensured that more videos were distributed to prospects. Teachers also became more actively involved in the recruitment of students. The tours became more effective as the video became part of the tour process.

The next enrollment year, five kindergarten classes were filled with a waiting list. Enrollment increased from 60 in 2001 to 125 in 2002 - a 105% increase.

Take Away Points

- ◆ Build on your "Golden Nuggets" - effective tours, supportive parent group, loyal students and families, excellent program
- ◆ Great results don't always require a big budget – This enrollment campaign was done for the cost of duplicating one video 500 times.