



Start a Raving Fan Club

Letting Parent Ambassadors Ignite Your Enrollment

The Fan Club Strategy

The fourth strategy for increasing your school’s enrollment (see the *Growing Your Enrollment* guide) is the Raving Fan Club. As you may have noticed in the *Growing Your Enrollment* guide, your school’s raving fans are an important asset. And don’t worry – they’re not crazy. They’re just passionate about your school!

So let’s get started on the last strategy for growing your enrollment, the Raving Fan Club – plus a few bonus tips for good measure.

1. Develop an official Fan Club for your school

What is this?

A Raving Fan Club is a group of parents and community members who believe in the mission of your school and want to share it with others. These people will be your hands and feet, helping you carry out your mission to your community.

Why you should do this

You may be thinking, “I have a group of dedicated parents at my school already. Why should I go through the trouble of making them officially part of a fan club?” Great question. The reason is the club will attract more fans. There could be people who love your school but haven’t ever said anything to you about it. Having an official group you can call on for support is a strategic move.

Getting started

As you’re implementing the three strategies from the *Growing Your Enrollment* guide, don’t make the mistake of thinking that you have to go it alone; most schools are sitting on an incredibly powerful but often-overlooked resource: their parent community.

We interviewed over 100 school principals and senior administrators and noticed a trend in their responses: the parent community can be one of the top sources of enrollment referrals. Why is that?

Your students’ parents are already invested in your school and they want it to succeed. One of the easiest ways to give

them the opportunity to help spur growth is by creating a Raving Fan Club (“brand ambassadors,” in marketing lingo).

The idea is simple: bring enthusiastic parents together on a regular basis, let them share positive experiences, and cultivate a strong sense of school culture. Using this as a foundation, you can ask them to help you spread the word to the rest of the community through a series of activities that don’t require a huge time commitment.

Raving Fan Club activities

Here’s are some of the types things your Raving Fans can do:

- Hold fun, inspiring meetings periodically.
- Invite a new family to an open house event(s).
- Invite a current family to the open house if they think that would move them from Fan to Raving Fan.
- Share your open house event’s Facebook invite with friends.
- Share your Facebook Live tours with friends.
- Share your Twitter Periscope tours with friends.
- Share your open house event(s) flyer with friends.
- Write a positive review on Yelp.
- Write a positive review on Google.
- Write a positive review on PrivateSchoolReview.com.
- Write a positive review on GreatSchools.com.
- Write a positive review on Niche.com
- Like, follow, and write a positive review on Facebook.
- Display school decal on their cars.
- Wear school spirit apparel when they are out and about.

Raving Fan Club meeting agenda

Here is an example agenda based on feedback we’ve heard from schools who have successfully built Raving Fan Clubs:

- 6:30** Welcome parents as they arrive. Be sure to provide refreshments.
- 6:35** Share your vision for the school.
- 6:45** Invite current parents, students, administrators and/or board members to share how the school has impacted them. We recommend no more than 4-6 people.
- 7:00** Open the floor to questions. This gives people who might not feel comfortable getting up in front of a group the opportunity to share.
- 7:15** Offer examples of low-time-commitment ways parents can help promote the school.
- 7:30** Closing remarks.

7 Tips for Building a Raving Fan Club

1. Don’t hold too many meetings. This may seem counter-productive, but the parents who love your school the

most are probably already involved, so you don’t want to overload them with meetings.

2. Hold a meeting prior to your annual open house event(s). This not only gives parents the opportunity to promote your school but also gives them time to invite their friends and neighbors to attend your event(s).
3. Synchronize your Raving Fan Club with other marketing efforts to create a tidal wave of interest. Make it feel as if the whole city is excited about your school’s upcoming open house event(s) to get the crowds rolling in.
4. Avoid major time commitments. As we mentioned earlier, the parents most likely to participate are also the ones most likely to already be involved. Provide families with things they can do to promote the school that don’t require major time commitments.
5. Always remember: relationships must be mutually beneficial. Parents should want to be fans because of the value your school is providing.
6. Get your teachers involved. Have teachers give you a list of parents that they think are already raving fans. Administrators can’t always reach out to every parent.
7. Let fans make more fans. Foster a culture in which parents regularly introduce themselves to other parents or invite other families over for dinner or a play date.

Email invitation template

Here’s a sample of what an invitation to join the Raving Fan Club might sound like:

Dear [School Name] Families:

We want to express our gratitude for your family! Involved, caring parents are foundational to our school’s excellence, and your support enables us to fulfill our mission of [fill in your school’s mission].

As a valued member of our school community, we want to invite you to become a [School Name] Raving Fan! What does that mean? Well, word of mouth is the number one way new families come to [School Name]. It could be from social media or a Yelp review but the common thread is families come to [School Name] because they hear from Raving Fans.

We invite you to join our Raving Fans gathering on [Date/Time] for just one hour. We want to help you feel confident, as a Raving Fan, in communicating:

- Our history
- Our mission
- Our academic program and enrichment offerings
- Opportunities for new families to check us out
- Our plans for the future

Please RSVP by [date] if you will be joining us. Child-care will be available, but you need to RSVP with the number of children and include their age/grade. We will send you some further information in preparation for the gathering. If you know of other parents who should be included in our Raving Fans gathering, let us know.

With Great Gratitude,
[Head of School Name]
[Head of School Job Title]

2. Let your Raving Fans promote your open house with Facebook

What is this?

In case you missed it, you will want to make Facebook Live tours to promote your open house. Ask your fan club parents to share them with friends. [Click here](#) for more info about how Facebook Live can help.

Current families can also share your open house Facebook event. [Click here](#) for info on Facebook events.

3. Advertise with spirit wear and accessories

What is this?

Here are two things your Raving Fans and other current families can do to advertise your school year around:

- Invest in some new car decals.
- Invest in adult-sized spirit wear shirts.

Why you should do this

- Car decals are a cost-efficient way to advertise your school year round. Think about the number of people who would see eye-catching stickers on parents' cars over the next 12 months. Look at your parking lot – if you don't see that many (or any) decals you are missing an opportunity.
- Increase awareness and name recognition with branded T-shirts, polos, sweatshirts and hats for kids and adults.

Getting started

Here are common reasons why parents don't have your car decal on their car:

- They don't know where to get them. You can fix this by placing car decals in a bucket at the front desk. You can also send them home in goody bags on the first day of school or parent orientation or grandparents day.
- The design isn't attractive. Find a professional designer. On a budget? Try websites like Upwork and 99Designs or even recruit a college art student.
- They are too large. If your decal is the size of a small planet you may want to opt for a smaller size.

Bonus Tips

We know we've given you a lot of strategies to consider. If you have put at least some of them into practice, first of all – congratulations! Well done!

Here are a few additional tips for capitalizing on even more opportunities. These are some important things we see the most successful schools doing time and time again – *after* adopting effective marketing strategies like the other ones in this guide.

1. Nurture your relationships with feeder schools

What is this?

A feeder school is one that sends its graduates to your school. So, if you are a K-8 school, then preschools are your feeder schools. You need to nurture your relationship with the directors of those feeder schools. You want them to know a lot about what you have to offer. If possible, attend feeder schools' events, plays or social gatherings so that you can have face time with parents who may be considering your school.

By the way, if you are multi-divisional school, such as a 7-12, don't let your upper division (the high school), take your lower division (the middle school), for granted. In that scenario, the high school would treat the middle school as a feeder school and actively recruit its students. Don't just assume that students will be moving to your upper division school.

Why you should do this

So teachers and administrators at your feeder schools will mention you to parents when they're asked, "Where should we send our kid next?"

Getting started

If you have never spoken to the feeder schools, then give them a call. If you have, ask them if you can exhibit or have some other kind of presence at key events such as plays or graduations.

Expert tip

Offer to pay for an advertisement for their school that co-promotes your school. For example, if you are a high school, then the ad could have the K-8 school name and below it say, "prepared me for success," and show a photo of a student from your high school wearing your school's uniform.

2. Make sure your profile on review sites is up to date

What is this?

Whenever your school is listed on sites like Yelp, GreatSchools.com, PrivateSchoolReview.com, and Niche.com, then make sure the profile of your school is up to date. For example, make sure that your contact info is valid but also make sure things such as your enrollment, sports offered and other awards given are accurate.

Why you should do this

To avoid a scenario in which a family is interested in your school but is unable to contact you because your online profile had outdated contact info. Plus, it only takes a few minutes to update it.

Expert tips

- When someone visits a review site and clicks on the link to your website, direct them to a landing page, which is simply a specific page on your website, such as [YourSchoolWebsite].com/yelp. That way, you can track the number of visitors to that page.

On that page, put a very clear call-to-action (CTA) because you know they are interested. And they came from a review site, so you know that reviews matter to them – include two or three raving reviews. Think of them as testimonials to how great your school is.

Also, consider including a special offer to entice them to

book the demo, such as, "book a demo today and we'll send you a free eBook on tips for..."

- Another way to track where people heard about you is to use an email alias. For example, if admissions@myschool.com is your email, use admissions.y@myschool.com, where the "y" stands for yelp. This way you *know* that's how they found you. [Click here](#) for step-by-step instructions on setting up an alias in Gmail. When you reply, you can reply as admissions@myschool.com.
- Another reason to use email alias: avoid spam. Spammers routinely scour websites for email addresses, so don't publish the email of your principal or anyone else on staff. Instead, use an alias.
- Lastly, we recommend getting the most out of the review sites. Most people don't realize that they can do a lot more on their review site profiles than just list contact info. Did you know you can display your own photos, respond to reviews and track visitors?
 - [Click here](#) to learn how to get the most out of Yelp.
 - Google allows you to have a very nice looking profile that appears to the right of search results. [Click here](#) to learn more.

3. Be purposeful about getting online reviews

What is this?

Be intentional about getting fresh reviews every year from places like the review sites mentioned above.

Why you should do this

You could be losing prospects without even realizing it. Prospective families may dismiss your school based on online reviews without ever visiting in person.

Getting started

1. Commit to getting at least 10 new positive reviews each year.
2. Decide on which review sites you will be listed. We recommend the following:
 - Facebook
 - Google
 - Yelp
 - PrivateSchoolReview.com
 - GreatSchools.org

Focus on these popular sites and improve your public image on each of them. Also, keep in mind that these sites' reviews show up in your Google profile.

3. Divide your families into four groups: For example, K-2, 3-4, 5-6, and 7-8. Ask each group to review your school during a separate quarter of the year. The reason you want to break them up is so that you can get reviews throughout the year instead of all at once. When you ask for a review, send them an email and include a link to your online profile so that it's easy for a parent to leave you a review.

Expert tips

- If you are concerned about getting negative online reviews, focus on asking parents who you know love your school. Once again, the Raving Fan Club to the rescue! (Are you starting to see why you need a Raving Fan Club and not just satisfied parents?)
- Respond to every review, both negative and positive and be sure to include facts and figures if needed.

Warnings

- [Constructively address concerns](#) when you see them. [A study done by Yelp](#) shows that the right response to a critical review can improve a customer's impression of the overall experience. Generally speaking, a poor review with a well-thought-out response is better than no reviews at all – of course it's best to have them mixed with plenty of good ones.

Expert tip

Does your school require permit parking for pick-up and drop-off? Why not combine your permit and car decal marketing efforts into one.

Branded shirts

Survey your parents to see how many would want a branded T-shirt. They are a great way to show support and you can test the waters by limiting it to just the Raving Fan Club or parent/teacher organization at first. Keep in mind you will get much better pricing if you order in bulk. For example, [4imprint.com](#) offers custom printed T-shirts for around \$7 each in low quantities; the price drops to less than \$5 if you order 12 dozen.

4. Ace the personal tour

What is this?

Your hard work has paid off and now interested parents are ready to come in for a one-on-one tour of your school. Here

are a few things you can do to make the best impression. Some of the same "Open House Strategies" apply here (see the *Growing Your Enrollment* guide).

Make sure they come.

- Text message reminder. We talked to one private school parent who simply forgot to attend a tour because she didn't put it on her calendar. She ended up choosing another school. Wow, the cost to send a "day of" text message seems like a small price to pay for 9 years' worth of tuition – plus the referrals she would have provided.
- Send an email confirmation
- Send a Google calendar confirmation or invite

Make a good first impression.

- Reserve a parking spot for visitors.
- Make it very easy to find the front office. Some schools have practically hidden theirs. Instead, make it super obvious with signage and even a directory with a map if necessary.
- Make sure they get a warm greeting from whoever is at the front desk.

Understand why they are interested in your school.

- Ask what kind of educational experience they want for their child and why
- Ask what they are concerned about and what they hope for.
- Make sure it's a conversation. They should be speaking at least 50% of the time, if not more.

Help them remember you and your school.

- Provide a folder with information about your school and the programs they are interested in.
- Give them a branded gift such as a pen, fidget spinner, water bottle, coffee cup or wristbands – something that keeps your name visible in their home or office.

5. A welcoming walk-in policy

What is this?

This is the policy the school has for prospective parents who show up unannounced at your school. It's your game plan for giving them the impression upon their first meeting with the receptionist that this is a loving and organized school.

Why you should do this

First impressions are important. The parent needs to feel welcome and important to make sure they permanently associate your school with positive feelings.

If they do feel welcome, they'll recommend you and word-of-mouth marketing is invaluable.

Getting started

Decide as a team what your policy will be for walk-ins. Below are two solutions:

- Drop everything and provide a tour. The tour can be provided by the admissions director, principal or vice principal.
- Have the admissions director, principal, VP or receptionist answer their questions as best as possible and schedule a personal tour for a later time.

Expert tip

It's best to script this. It may sound silly, but writing down word-for-word what you will say ensures that it will be said correctly and consistently.

6. Great email follow-up sequence

What is this?

A follow-up sequence is a pre-planned series of emails and calls that are made after someone has completed a personal tour or open house. Each communication in the sequence is either right from a template or at least follows some template guidelines.

Why you should do this

- Consistency is the key to incremental improvement. This allows you to adjust your scripts as needed and measure results.
- It ensures that you call the right amount (neither too often nor too seldom).
- Planning what you will say ahead of time ensures that you phrase things the best way possible.

Getting started

1. Start by writing down what you are currently doing. Make a new document that includes a draft of what you currently email out and what you say on the phone. You will probably realize that you have different scripts in practice now.
2. Next, share the document with everyone on your team who follows up with prospective families to make sure that your team is internally consistent with its messaging.
3. Experiment with modifying the scripts in order to improve results.

Expert tips

- When you are working on your phone script, practice your tone and delivery – inject passion and enthusiasm into your voice. Smile as if they were in front of you.
- Practice, practice, practice. And then practice some more.
- Your email signature should include a link to enroll and/or book a personal tour so it's easy to do.

7. Press 1 for Admissions

What is this?

When a prospective family is on your site and then calls you, make it easy for them to book the tour. If you have an auto-receptionist, it should say, "press 1 for admissions." The idea here to create an "admissions hotline."

Why you should do this

This makes it easy for prospective parents to get to the right person. Just as your website should have a clear CTA to book a tour, your phone system should also make it easy for a prospective parent to take the next step when they make that first call.

Getting started

Contact your phone system provider or IT person for assistance setting this up.

Expert tip

Automatically route incoming calls to ring other extensions if your admissions coordinator doesn't pick up. You don't want a prospective family's first impression to be that you let them go to voicemail.

Putting it all together

Between the *Growing Your Enrollment* guide and this one, we've given you a wealth of strategies to put into practice – and it might seem overwhelming. Just take it one step at a time. And remember, we're here for you.

We can also help with more than just improving enrollment – Gradelink was created to make all school administrative tasks more efficient, from attendance and standards, to report cards and parent communication.

So don't be a stranger. Drop us a line and let us know how your recruitment efforts are doing. And let us know if there's anything we can do to help!

Get started today.

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