Attracting and retaining students

Business case for marketing and communication program

Summary

Growth in the Peel District School Board has slowed in recent years and secondary schools in the coterminous board have increased efforts to attract students. The Peel board needs to respond with a coordinated, ongoing strategy to maintain reputation and public support, and to attract and retain students. Failure to attract and retain students could have long-term effects on the sustainability of individual schools, programs and reputation.

Project mission

The Communications and Community Relations Support Services will implement a multi-faceted, multi-year marketing and communication program designed to maintain reputation and public support for the Peel board, and to attract and retain students.

Objectives

To increase understanding of reasons for school choice.

In order to implement an effective program, it is necessary to understand what perceptions or situations we need to address. Primary and secondary research will be necessary to ensure strategies address the actual need.

Create broad-based awareness and understanding of the high-quality education and positive, safe environments at Peel board schools and the specific benefits for students and families.

In order to achieve this objective, we will target not only members of the public and existing families, but our own staff, particularly at the elementary level. It is necessary for Peel board staff to deliver positive messages when talking about our schools—they are the best choice for students. We need our staff to understand the options that exist and really *believe* our schools are the best options.

To reduce the number of students lost between grade 8 and grade 9 by 100 per cent within the next 5 years.

Between grade 8 and grade 9 in 2011, we lost more than 1,300 students. Using the research on school choice and by continually asking why, we will be better positioned to implement solutions necessary to retain students. This objective requires both central and individual school-based strategies.

Performance measures

To increase understanding of reasons for school choice.

- Count the number of research-based initiatives.

Create broad-based awareness and understanding of the high-quality education and positive, safe environments at Peel board schools and the specific benefits for students and families.

Tracking general awareness is challenging; however, the following evaluation tactics can be used:

- At the school level, ask how new families learned about the school/program.
- Count positive media impressions, interactions with families at public events, presentations to staff, hits on social media sites, positive blog mentions, etc.

To reduce the number of students lost between grade 8 and grade 9 by 100 per cent within the next 5 years.

- Track enrolment data.

Needs assessment

The rate of growth in the Peel board is declining—particularly in certain areas. The overall loss of students between grade 8 and 9 has increased over the last five years.

This is occurring because growth in many areas of the region has slowed. Also, the coterminous board has stepped-up recruitment efforts. Suspected causes for school choice include perception of safety/morality, uniforms, proximity, availability of transportation and program/extra-curricular options. Primary and secondary research will help to clarify reasons for school choice and why this issue of demission exists. This decline in growth has a greater affect on schools in the southern part of the region.

The problem is large—the 2011-12 per pupil funding rate for a secondary student is $9,959, excluding transportation and other grants. If the rate were to remain the same, the loss of one student at grade 9 is the loss of $39,836 over four years. The following chart shows loss over the last five years using the current funding rate. This chart does not take into account where the students went—whether it was to Catholic, private or out-of-the-area schools—it simply shows total loss.

Year	Total students withdrawn from grade 8 in June	Total students admitted to grade 9 in Sept.	Enrolment difference between grade 8 and 9	Cost of loss over grade 9 year (based on current per pupil funding of $9,959)	Cost of loss over four years of high school (based on current per pupil funding of $9,959)
2007	10,842	10,520	322	$3,206,798	$12,827,192.00
2008	10,943	10,389	554	$5,517,286	$22,069,144.00
2009	10,770	10,334	436	$4,342,124	$17,368,496.00
2010	10,949	9,988	961	$9,570,599	$38,282,396
2011	10,503	9,187	1316	$13,106,044	$52,424,176
				Total students lost between grade 8 and 9 over five years:	3589
				Five year total funding loss of students lost assuming they would have remained in our system for four years of secondary school:	$142,971,404.00

*enrolment stats taken from SIS data

Using our current per pupil funding rate of $9,959 per student and assuming the students we lost in grade 9 would have stayed with us for all four years of their high school career, the total cost of the loss of grade 9 students over the last five years is $142,971,404.00.

Based on just the students lost between grade 8 and 9 in 2011 alone, we lost $13,106,044 this year and will lose more than $52 million in the four years they would have been in our system.

Hypothetically, the total funding lost from students lost between grade 8 and 9 in 2011 is equivalent to:

($13,106,044.00/cost of item)	**Item**
More than 940	**mobile technology LAB** including: • 30 x NETbooks (small laptops) with a 1 year warranty • 1 x mobile cart with wireless access point • 1 x small printer
More than 3,691	**classroom technology sets** with ceiling mounted projector • 1 x standard classroom computer with monitor, keyboard and mouse • 1 x standard projector *ceiling mounted* • 1 x standard document camera

More than 2,600	classroom technology with **Epson Interactive solution** wall mounted including: • 1 x standard classroom computer with monitor, keyboard and mouse • 1 x Epson BrightLink interactive projector *wall mounted with whiteboard* • 1 x standard document camera
More than 270	First year, category 1 **secondary teacher salary** plus benefits for one year

Long-term impact

If this trend continues, we could see the following:

- ghettoizing of certain schools
- school closures
- reduction in staff
- less administrators at smaller schools
- reduction in program options at smaller schools

These factors will have a negative effect on the reputation of the Peel board, which will serve to perpetuate the problem.

If we are able to attract and retain more students, especially at the secondary level, we would benefit from more funding, which could increase resources for schools and students, increase program choice, provide more support staff, etc. These factors will help to enhance the overall reputation of Peel board schools. The efforts to retain and recruit need to be ongoing to ensure long-term benefits are sustained.

Project work plan

Task	By whom	When
Internal research study, including: • exit interview questions designed to be used at grade 8/ 9 at the school level • comprehensive study of three secondary schools • review of secondary research related to school choice • Omnibus phone survey in Peel Region of residents with children between 12 and 18 years	Research and Communications departments Ipsos Reid	May to October 2012
Creation of communication and marketing plan, which could include the following tactics, plus others developed following research:		
Development school marketing kit, including: • Template communication plan with suggested strategies/tactics • Template print materials, template banners for program promotion (including pre-tendered supplier)	Communications	Launch in September 2012 at Starting Point
Promotional videos for all secondary schools, posted on YouTube, school sites, etc.	Communications & media support team	Ongoing from May 2012 to completion
Training for staff on programs, school options • Hold staff meetings at secondary schools and provide opportunity for schools to showcase programs to feeder school staff • Work in superintendencies to build understanding of local school options and benefits	Superintendents of education, secondary and elementary school principals	Ongoing
Ready, Set, High School! parent guide and welcome materials • Parent guide to be included in grade 8 report cards "Everything you need to know about high school" • Template welcome/registration letters and support materials to help with transition to high school	Communications	Templates launched to schools after March break, handbook provided in June
Promotion of registration and secondary info. nights through: • advertisements in local papers and the Peel section of Toronto Star • advertisements in malls, buses • posting on peelschools.org, shared through Facebook/Twitter • roadside signage—can only appear once as per municipal/regional limit • electronic Peel board sign	Communications and PPVPA	Dates collected by June 2012 Advertisements/web in fall 2012 Signs in fall 2012

Promotion of specialized programs: • website information updated every year • suggested format/content for info about the school's program on school website (section creation done by school) • promotion through social media sites • camera-ready articles for school newsletters and websites • colour flyer for distribution to all grade 5 and 8 students • production of promotional video for programs (should be for specific program, not each school – one for arts, one for IBT, etc.)	Communications These tactics tie into the Making My Way work	Design summer 2012 (must have info night dates from schools) Distribution fall 2012 Videos can be ongoing and will require same programs to follow same criteria, etc.

General outreach through:
• involvement in community events—booth at events like Bread and Honey Festival, etc.
• workshops in the community
  ○ also in various languages
• media pitches to mainstream and ethnic media
  ○ how to prepare for high school
  ○ course selection
  ○ how parents can support their high school teen
  ○ everything you need to know about high school
	Communications and other dept. staff	Ongoing

Creation of welcome materials to provide to builders for purchase packages/brochure racks • how to register information • background information on schools in the neighbourhood	Communications, planning	Ongoing
Creation of downloadable information for realtors in Peel Region	Communications	Ongoing

Budget

Project	Est. cost	Notes/ Source of funds
Internal research study with three schools	Costs depend on scope of research	One-time
Omnibus/custom survey	$20,000	Estimate approx., one-time
Ready, Set High School handbook	$10,000	2012 funded by PIC
Advertisements - Half-page vertical, colour run once in all local English papers and T. Star Peel section	$13,000	Cost is based on ad running once – may want to run twice
Roadside signage $225 per sign x 37 secondary schools	$8,325	
Colour flyer for specialty programs – 22,000 colour flyers for all grade 5 and 8 students	$1,500	
Booth rental at community events	$2,000	Cost per booth depends on event
Print materials, giveaways for booths	$10,000	
Overtime/lieu time for staff at booths	varies	
Workshops	$10,000	Based on 10 per year, approximately $1000 per workshop depending on location/participants, etc.
Registration materials for developers	$2,000	
Misc	$2,000	
Total cost for 2012-13		$78,825 tax not included
Cost for 2012-13 (minus the 10,000 from PIC)		$68,825 tax not included

*total cost may change as program evolves based on results of research

Additional advertising options

advertise in high traffic areas in the mall 3 large posters Bramalea City Centre, Shopper's World, Square One, Dixie Mall & Westwood Mall	$14,125	$7000 for design and printing of posters $7,125 for 4 week , $14,250 for 8 weeks
advertise in mall food courts digital ads in food court 12 week promotion (Square One and Erin Mills)	$6,900	
advertise on back of transit buses (10 in Brampton and Mississauga), 4 weeks	$15,500	Design and printing included
advertise inside transit buses (100 in Brampton and Mississauga) 4 weeks on various routes	$4,835	Printing, production included
advertise on sides of transit buses with (10 in Brampton and Mississauga) 4 weeks, various routes	$14,400	Printing, production included
Grand total including additional advertising		$124,585 tax not included

Staff support

No additional staff person is requested at this time, but there should be an understanding of the ability of the lead communication officer to support other initiatives projects, in addition to this program.