

ACIS HEADS BUSINESS STRATEGY COHORT · APRIL 2026

Enrollment Engine

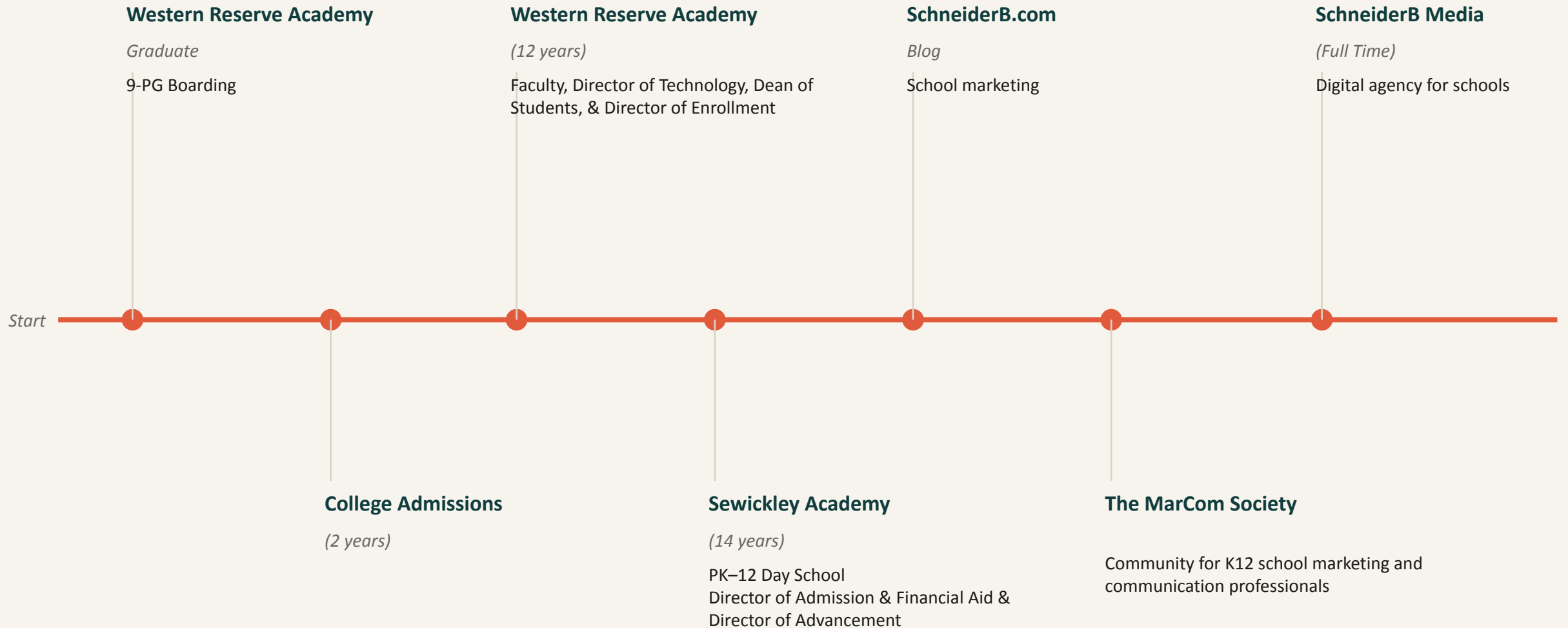
Marketing, Yield, and Retention

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Who is this guy?



“

Fall 2008.

Six of us sat around the conference room table, the tension in the air palpable, pressing down on us like an invisible weight.

Our interest indicators were trailing the stock market by about a month. The market had fallen off a cliff, and so had our inquiries, applications, and visits.

The head of school leaned forward and asked:

“What are we going to do?”

From the introduction to School Marketing the Right Way

The control of information has shifted.

THEN

Schools controlled the narrative

Families learned about you through brochures, open houses, and word of mouth.

You decided what they saw. You decided when they saw it. The inquiry form was the front door.

NOW

Families decide if you're worthy

They research you on Google, scroll your Instagram, read reviews, and talk to friends, all before they ever fill out a form.

By the time a family inquires, they've already half-decided. Your job is to confirm what they want to believe.

PART 1

Understanding Your *Enrollment Engine*

15 minutes

Inquiries are outcomes, not starting points.

INPUTS (what drives the numbers)

Activities you control

- Content that shows up in search
- Referral conversations with current parents
- Events that invite families in
- Ad spend aimed at the right zip codes
- Response speed when someone raises a hand



OUTCOMES (what gets reported)

Numbers on the dashboard

- Inquiries
- Applications
- Visits and event attendance
- Acceptances
- Enrolled students

Three interconnected components.



01

Marketing

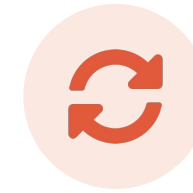
What generates awareness and compels families to raise their hand. Which channels actually produce families who enroll?



02

Yield

Once a family inquires, the sequence of experiences that moves them toward application and enrollment. Where do they drop off, and why?



03

Retention

What keeps current families committed year over year. Strong retention reduces pressure on new student recruitment.

Worksheet

<https://sbm.pub/acisworksheet>

Good visibility into the “what.”

Limited visibility into the “why.”



ASK YOURSELF A QUESTION

If your inquiry numbers dropped 20% next month, would your admission director be able to pinpoint the cause?

Or would you get a clear-eyed answer... or an educated guess?

Visibility self-assessment

THE PROMPT

Rate your own visibility on a 1-5 scale for each item. 1 means 'no idea.' 5 means 'I know exactly.' Circle anything you rated 2 or below. Those are your blind spots.

I could answer this question with confidence right now	Rating (1-5)
Which marketing channels generate the most inquiries	
Which sources produce families who actually enroll	
Why inquiries increased or decreased last year	
What activities my admission team prioritizes daily	
How much we spend to acquire one enrolled student	

How many blind spots?

POLL

How many items did you rate a 2 or below?

0

1 to 2

3 or more

We are not naming names. The pattern matters more than any single answer.



How many items did you rate a 2 or below?

PART 2

The Passive

Follow-Up Problem

15 minutes

Positioned like a luxury brand.

Communicating like they're not.



WHAT MOST SCHOOLS DO

One and done.

A family inquires.

The school sends one response.

Then silence.

Meanwhile, the family's grocery store follows up with more sophistication.



WHAT FAMILIES EXPECT

Systematic. Personal. Fast.

Every brand they interact with follows up, thoughtfully and often.

The gap between how families expect to be marketed to and how schools actually communicate is growing every year.

What proactive looks like.



Speed matters

Follow up immediately, not within 24 hours. The first response should go out in minutes.



Systematic sequences

Automated emails that nurture over time. Not one message, a choreographed series.



Multiple touchpoints

Phone calls, texts, personalized emails. Not just one-and-done from a single channel.



Multiple conversions

Inquiry magnets, scheduling widgets, webinars. Give families more than one way to raise their hand.

Map your current inquiry response

THE PROMPT

Think about a family who submits an inquiry form on your website today. To the best of your knowledge, write down what happens next. Be specific about who does what, when, and how.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- How quickly does the first response go out? Hours? Days?
- Who sends it? What does it say?
- What happens on Day 2? Day 3? Day 7?
- How many total touches occur before the family either responds or goes cold?
- What is automated versus manual?

If you found yourself writing 'I think' or 'I'm not sure,' put a star next to that line. Those are questions to bring back to your admission director.

How proactive is your follow-up?

POLL

How many touches does a family receive in the first 7 days after inquiring?

1

2 to 3

4 to 5

6 or more

I'm not sure

There is no shame in any answer. The point is to see where the room actually stands.



How many touches does a family receive in the first 7 days after inquiring?

PART 3

The Funnel *Conversation*

15 minutes

Every stage is a conversion point.

Awareness → Interest

Website visitor becomes an inquiry

Interest → Engagement

Inquiry schedules a visit or event

Engagement → Application

Visitor becomes an applicant

Application → Acceptance

Applicant is offered admission

Acceptance → Enrollment

Accepted family commits

Enrollment → Re-enrollment

Current family returns next year

What to ask your admission director.

Move beyond “how many” to “why” and “how.”

1 What is driving our inquiries?

2 What happens after someone inquires?

3 Where are we losing families in the funnel?

4 What do we know about families who don't move forward?

5 What is our re-enrollment rate, and what drives it?

Worksheet

<https://sbm.pub/5questions>

Estimate your funnel

THE PROMPT

Fill in your best guess for each conversion rate. Mark your confidence as High, Medium, or Low. Then identify where you suspect the biggest drop-off is happening.

Stage	Your Estimate	Confidence (H/M/L)
Inquiry → Scheduled Visit	____ %	
Scheduled Visit → Completed Visit	____ %	
Completed Visit → Application	____ %	
Application → Acceptance	____ %	
Acceptance → Enrollment	____ %	

Final step: write one question you want to ask your admission director about this funnel.

Where is your biggest drop-off?

POLL

Where do you suspect your biggest drop-off is happening?

Inquiry to Visit

Visit to Application

Application to Acceptance

Acceptance to Enrollment

Not sure

This is the gap worth investigating first. The schools that move the needle start where the leak is biggest.



Where is your biggest drop-off?

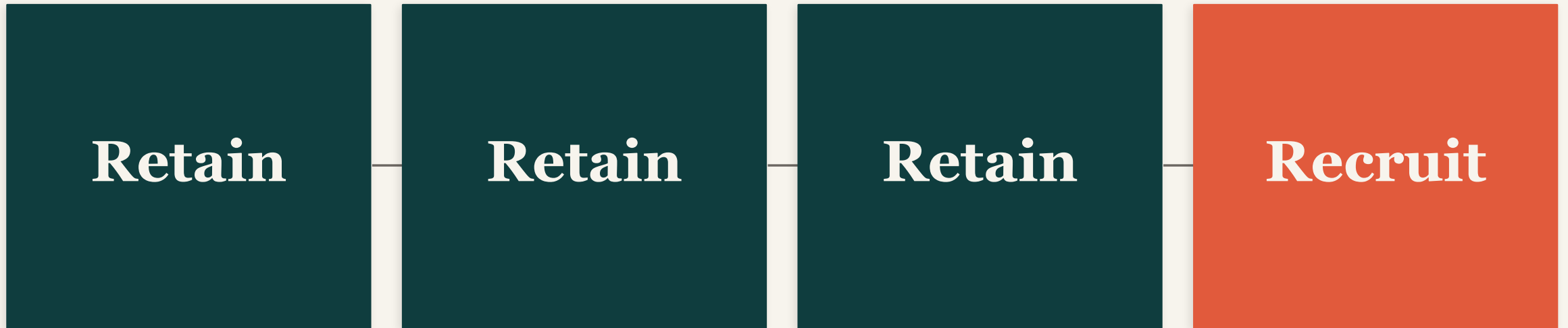
PART 4

Retention

The Silent Engine

5 minutes

The cheapest student to enroll is
the one you already have.



Most communication with current families should reinforce their decision. Everyone at the school, from faculty to coaches to the front desk, has a role in the enrollment engine.

The current family audit

THE PROMPT

Think about a current family at your school. From September to now, what systematic communication have they received that wasn't logistical? Not schedules, forms, or payments. Real communication. Write down what you know.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Has every family received at least one personal, positive communication about their child from a teacher or administrator?
- Do families hear from the school proactively, or only when there is a problem or a request?
- What communication reinforces their decision to stay?

If your list is short or you're unsure, that's a signal. Retention is often the least systematized part of the enrollment engine.

Your one conversation.



BEFORE THE NEXT SESSION

Schedule a 30-minute conversation with your admission director.

Use the five questions. Come prepared to share one insight.

The enrollment engine isn't the admission office's job alone. Heads set the tone for whether the school operates with a marketing mindset or continues to rely on reputation and hope.

Commit to one question

THE PROMPT

Based on what you reflected on today, write down the one question you will ask your admission director this week. Be specific.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- Walk me through...
- What do we know about...
- How do we decide...
- What happens when...

If you'd like, share your question in chat. Not required. The goal isn't to have the answers. It's to know which questions to ask.

KEY TAKEAWAY

The schools that thrive

are the ones that treat enrollment as

systematic, data-informed, and proactive.

YOUR TAKEAWAY RESOURCE

The Five Questions to Ask Your Admission Director

Reference card available after the session.