



CASE STUDY NO. 1

Growing a prosperous school district, one student at a time.



The Problem

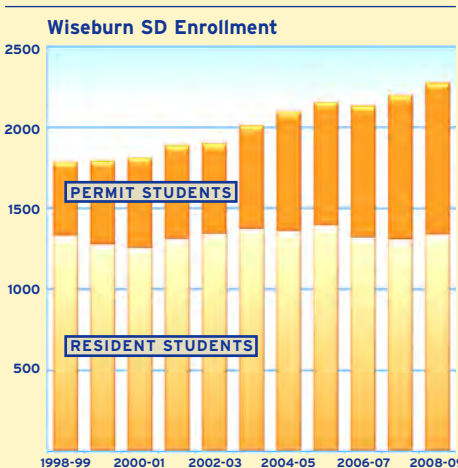
Don Brann’s district was losing students. Families were moving out and industry was moving in. Enrollment in Wiseburn had fallen 60 percent over the last 30 years. Half the district’s schools had closed. Could he save his district from further erosion? Could he actually grow it?

The Solution

Don marketed his schools. He visited workplaces, giving employees reasons to consider placing their children in his schools. He educated them about the law that gives those who work within a district’s boundaries the same rights as residents. He put clear reports about his schools in parents’ hands.

“Increasing enrollment is all about customer satisfaction and meeting people’s needs.”

—Don Brann,
Superintendent,
Wiseburn SD
1993-2008



The Results

Wiseburn SD now enrolls nearly half its students through Don’s efforts. These transfer students add over \$6 million a year to Wiseburn’s budget. The district is growing, and leadership is launching new programs.

➤ Find out how they did it

Boosting enrollment grows a thriving school district



ACCORDING TO SUPERINTENDENT Don Brann, the 1960s was a golden era for southern California's Wiseburn School District. "They had 3000 students, six schools, and a wealth of programs." But in 1993, when Brann arrived, enrollment had declined to 1000, three schools were closed, and the district was providing only the most basic services. He set about to change that.

Assessing the district's strengths, he saw an opportunity to recruit families—from outside the district—who put a high value on education. "We offered small schools, small classes, and a way for parents to connect," he says. "That's what many parents want." Brann points out. "You want to keep enrollment stable and growing."

Fifteen years later, Wiseburn now enrolls more than 1000 students on interdistrict attendance permits in addition to the 1200 who live within the district. With state funding at approximately \$6000 annually per pupil, the permit students add more than \$6 million a year to the district budget. "We use those funds to enhance our programs," says Brann.

Recruiting commuter families in car-conscious Los Angeles

The district's first enrollment boost came from parents who worked in the local aerospace, entertainment, and technology industries. "People commuted from all over southern California to their good jobs in our area," says Brann. "I approached these local companies with a two-part message: We have the small schools your employees want and, if they drive in with their children, they can use the carpool lanes." To support his message, Brann provided the companies' HR directors with "propaganda packets" listing the schools' test scores and program information. He spoke to employee groups, met individually with parents, and conducted tours of the district's schools.

The strategy worked and Wiseburn's enrollment grew at the rate of 50 to 100 students each year. With the annual per-pupil income from the state, its budget grew also. "There are expenses involved in teaching these kids, but there was profit left," says Brann. "I added afterschool childcare, started building in the arts and PE, lowered class size, and improved the physical plant. Once I met those first families' needs, parents started telling others and the line grew longer. If you meet people's needs, they'll come."

Providing local alternatives to private schools

With changing enrollment patterns in the surrounding area, Brann shifted his marketing focus. "As some of our neighboring districts showed signs of strain, more of their parents were choosing private schools or setting up charter schools," he says. "These people didn't know about Wiseburn, so I started talking about our district at pre-school meetings—places where parents were making education decisions. Unlike private schools, our schools are free. And unlike most charter schools, we have a long record of success." Parents of



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KENNETH JOHANSSON

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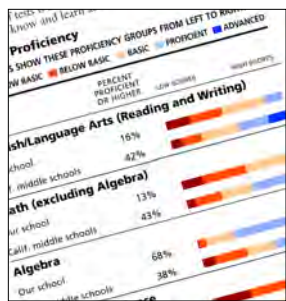
preschoolers are thinking about logistics, the curriculum, the curriculum, and safety, he says. “I give them the same propaganda packet I use with the local companies, and I invite them to take a tour.”

Evidently the new marketing approach is working as well as the original one. At the beginning of the 2008–09 school year, with declining enrollment all around it, the Wiseburn School District added 80 new students. “People have choices,” says Brann. “Increasing enrollment is all about customer satisfaction and meeting people’s needs.”

How School Wise Press Helped

The Wiseburn District “propaganda packet” includes a School Accountability Report Card (SARC) fact sheet for each of the district’s schools. Early on, Brann created these documents himself. Now he contracts with School Wise Press to prepare them. Here’s what he says:

What’s in your “propaganda packet”?



We provide an overview of the district, a description of the arts program, the district calendar, testimonials from parents, and a newspaper article about the impact of our recruiting program. The packet also includes a SARC fact sheet from School Wise Press for each of our schools.

Why do you use School Wise Press? I value having documents that look professional. Originally, I wrote the SARCs and our district’s architects designed them. They looked good. But as the legislative requirements increased, doing all the work to keep it legal took too much of my time. When I saw what School Wise Press could do, I shifted my business to them. I want to work with a firm that does SARCs for a living.

What’s the role of SARCs in marketing?

While other administrators may see the SARC as just another legislative requirement, I see its value as a money maker for us. Parents who are shopping for schools collect SARCs—to see whether to put their children in your school. So I want to do more than the minimum. I want to have reports and fact sheets that enhance my ability to market to more sophisticated parents. That’s what I get with School Wise Press.

When do you use the fact sheets compared to the whole report?



We offer small class size and high scores, a safe environment, good discipline, and highly qualified teachers. All parents want to know about these things—and the fact sheets show them very well. Some parents want more details and that’s when I give them the whole report. I try to match the marketing vehicle with the person’s need.

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