



**SCHOOL OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
STUDIES**

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Introduction

As the world has advanced at a rapid pace over the past century, much focus has been placed upon financial impact as the measure of success. The impact to the environment has often been an afterthought. But the last couple of decades, organizations have started measuring success more holistically, not just in terms of financial performance. This includes keeping track of human capital, natural capital and financial capital to understand the overall impact an organization has (Robert & Klimenko, 2019).

This trend has led to new opportunities and enabled functions like the one I have in my organization. How do we make businesses more sustainable and exhibit a triple bottom line that accounts for the people, the planet and the profit instead of just profits alone? This is an area of deep interest to me both personally and professionally.

As businesses are becoming more aware of the environmental challenges, corporate social responsibility has become a part of many organization's core strategy and will be a trend moving forward. Green jobs that are more focused on the environment and sustainability are growing (Smith, 2021). Growing a population of students with this new skill set will help meet the demand for these jobs and will be important to tackle the climate crisis.

I found out about the School of Environmental Studies (SES) recently. It is a magnet school in District 196 in Minnesota. The school wants to provide a unique experience to the students that immerses them in the environmental topics and issues. It can serve as a launchpad for students interested in this topic and provide them an opportunity to get started on their journey towards solving some of the most important problems of our times. However, the school has only had

mixed success in attracting students on a regular basis and this introduces multiple challenges to the school including its survival.

Over the course of the last few weeks I have engaged with the principal of the school and various other stakeholders to understand their challenges. In addition to my primary research, I have also leveraged secondary research to synthesize my findings. In this paper I will be sharing a detailed situational analysis, my findings from the research I have conducted, and a proposal for communication objectives and goals with a detailed plan to help the school attract students on a regular basis.

Situational Analysis

“Opened in 1995 as a unique partnership between District 196, the City of Apple Valley, and the State of Minnesota (Minnesota Zoo), SES aims to offer more effective learning by providing new authentic learning experiences” (Explore SES, n.d.). This magnet school for juniors and seniors immerses its students in the study of environmental topics and issues (Attending SES, n.d.). The district stretches across Rosemount, Apple Valley and Eagan Public Schools. There are 19 elementary schools, six middle schools and four high schools in the district not including SES (Schools, n.d.). The school offers a range of courses for students who are interested in learning about the environment not just through the classroom but through local, national and even international field trips (Attending SES, n.d.).

Problem Statement

District 196 serves over 150,000 residents and 29,000 students. SES has space for up to 200 juniors and seniors each. According to the school’s principal, Lauren Trainer, the school has many issues that contribute towards a lack of steady stream of applicants every year. Though

they have a total of 400 spots (200 for seniors and juniors each), they have years where they are overwhelmed by applicants and some where they are unable to drive interest. A steady stream of applicants is important because the number of enrolled students is what drives budget planning for the year. According to the school principal and the dean of students, a decrease in student enrollment translates into reducing faculty members to balance the budget. A loss of 24 students means one faculty member must go. The school prefers to have a waiting list every year. At this point, there is no waiting list for 200 spots for seniors to start in fall of 2022. Not having a steady stream of applicants expressing interest in attending the school is a big area of concern for the principal and the institute. In addition, not having enough applicants can result in a less diverse students which also impacts the overall value and experience.

Goal

Drive the number of student applications by 125% of current capacity and keep enrollment at 100% each year. This results in the school receiving at least 500 applications for juniors and seniors each year enabling a waiting list for each group.

Background Information

The school has 24 faculty members that offer a range of unconventional classes. This includes courses that help students understand how to decrease the carbon footprint of a facility, getting training to become a nursing assistant, learning how to perform forensics with modern techniques, animal care to name a few (Faculty Contact Information, n.d.). This confirms Niche's finding also and puts the school at 17:1 student to faculty ratio (Senior, 2022). Though the school also attracts students from outside the district, the majority of the students live within the boundaries of District 196. For this research I will be focusing within the district as the likelihood of students enrolling from neighboring districts is slim.

Competition

District 196 has 19 elementary schools, six middle schools and five high schools (Schools, n.d.). This includes five magnet elementary schools, one magnet middle school and two magnet high schools including the School of Environmental Studies (Magnet Schools, n.d.). Interestingly both magnet high schools are located in Apple Valley.

School Name	Overall Niche Grade	Academics	Diversity	Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio	Students	Website	Percent Proficient - Reading	Percent Proficient - Math	Graduation Rate	Average SAT	Average ACT	AP Enrollment
School of Environmental Studies Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196, MN • 11-12 • ★★★★★☆ 127	A	A-	B+	A	17:1	349	district196.org	—	47%	95%	1260	26	48%
Eagan Senior High School ✓ Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196, MN • 9-12 • ★★★★★☆ 513	A+	A+	B+	A	20:1	2,015	district196.org	77%	71%	94%	1410	29	34%
Rosemount Senior High School Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196, MN • 9-12 • ★★★★★☆ 310	A	A	B	A-	20:1	2,446	district196.org	71%	60%	93%	1380	27	32%
Apple Valley Senior High School Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196, MN • 9-12 • ★★★★★☆ 240	A	B+	A+	B	18:1	1,682	district196.org	61%	52%	90%	1250	26	23%

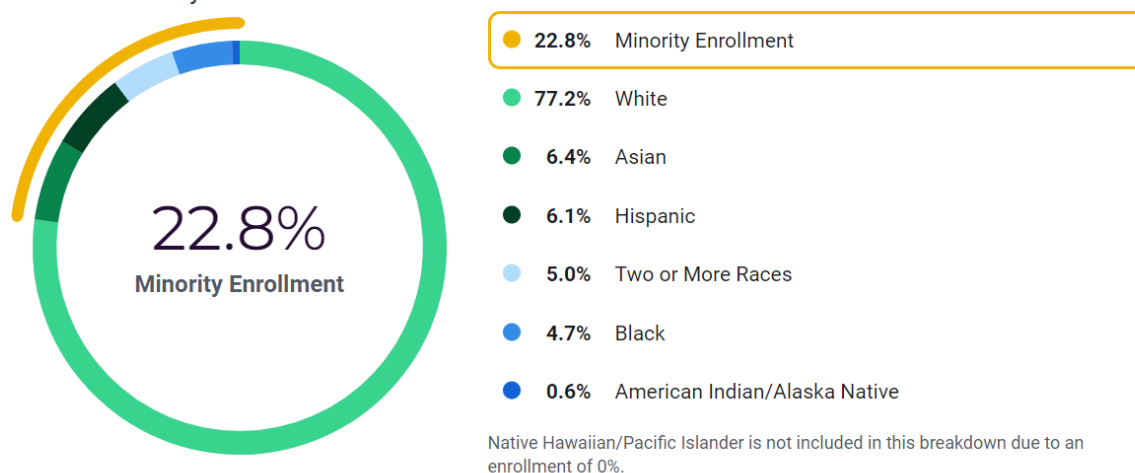
Both magnet high schools have the lowest student to teacher ratio as evident from the chart above. They also have the lowest enrollment among other high schools in the district. The average SAT and ACT scores of the magnet schools don't show well compared to others. The picture becomes more bleak when Eastview is added to the mix.

School Name	Overall Niche Grade	Academics	Diversity	Teachers	Student-Teacher Ratio	Students	Website	Percent Proficient - Reading	Percent Proficient - Math	Graduation Rate	Average SAT	Average ACT	AP Enrollment
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Rosemount Senior High School Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196, MN • 9-12 • ★★★★★☆ 310	A	A	B	A-	20:1	2,446	district196.org	71%	60%	93%	1380	27	32%
Eastview Senior High School Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan Independent School District No. 196, MN • 9-12 • ★★★★★☆ 396	A+	A	A-	A	21:1	2,268	public.district196.org/evhs	82%	72%	95%	1330	28	30%

The school's proficiency scores for both math and reading don't do well in comparison. The AP enrollment for the school is higher than other high schools in the district. With 349 students, the school is only at 87% capacity of where it needs to be.

According to the U.S. News & World Report, the school scores 46 out of 100 giving them 9528th rank in the nation. The school also doesn't do well in terms of diversity but that appears to be an issue across all schools in the district due to the demographics.

Student Diversity



Gender Distribution



Key takeaway

Niche, U.S. News and Great Schools are some of the websites potential students and parents use to evaluate schools. Not showing well on these platforms will hurt the school negatively in terms of attracting new students every year.

Demographics

About 154,000 people reside in the district (ACS School District Profile, n.d.). The graphics below gives a good insight into the population within the school district. The lack of racial

Education Levels		National	Gender	
Master's degree or higher	15%	12%	Female	50%
Bachelor's degree	33%	20%	Male	50%
Some college or associate's degree	33%	29%	Age	
High school diploma or equivalent	16%	27%	<10 years	16%
Less than high school diploma	4%	12%	10-17 years	13%
Hide ^			18-24 years	6%
Racial Diversity			25-34 years	11%
White	85%		35-44 years	16%
Asian	5%		45-54 years	14%
African American	4%		55-64 years	13%
Hispanic	3%		65+ years	10%
Two or more races	3%		Hide ^	
Other race	0%			

diversity in the schools can be explained by the racial breakdown of the population in the area. At least 48% of the population has a bachelor's degree compared to the 20% national average. Different age groups also have a fair representation here with 18-24 making the smallest number. It's possible this age group is busy completing a college degree in a different part of the state or country.

The income in the region is also more than the national average. Sixty nine percent of the population makes more than \$104,743 median household income. The national average for the median household income is only \$62,843 according to Niche as illustrated in the figure. The median individual income is \$48,743 compared to the national average of \$31,133.

Key takeaway

The district has a predominantly white population with higher than average education and annual income. With an even spread of age groups, it is safe to assume that we have parents of potential future students, parents of

current or soon to be students, grandparents and families living within the district boundaries.

All age groups prefer to consume information differently. Facebook is not as popular among the younger generation as TikTok and Twitter is. When formulating a plan, the different age groups discussed above should be factored in so the best channel is used to connect with them.

Branding and Positioning

In the school year 2020-2021, the district's total expenses were about \$429 million. About four percent of the expenses were covered by the federal government, 28% came from the local government and the rest was supported by the state. About 70% was from instructional expenses and only about 14% was due to food services and other operational expenses including marketing (Search for public school districts, n.d.). The district like many others across the nation tries to allocate as much of the budget as possible towards instructional expenses.

While lack of targeted marketing from the district does not affect the zoned schools in the district, it does have a negative impact on the School of Environmental Studies. All zoned schools by default enjoy enrollment from students who live in the vicinity. Getting enrolled in a

Income

Median Household Income

\$104,743

National \$62,843

Household Income Brackets

<\$25k	7%
\$25-\$44k	9%
\$45-\$74k	15%
\$75-\$149k	39%
\$150k+	30%

Median Individual Income

\$48,734

National \$31,133

Individual Income Brackets

<\$15k	16%
\$15-\$34k	20%
\$35-\$64k	28%
\$65k+	36%

magnet school requires extra effort on the parent or students part. This explains the lower enrollment number for both magnet high schools in the district compared to the other high schools.

Moreover, the school also lacks programs to support athletes. It relies on the other schools in the district for student athletic needs. The students who wish to be in a marching band or want to play hockey or football would have to go to one of the other high schools in the district while attending the School of Environmental Studies. A successful sports team can serve as a marketing arm for any school. All other high schools in the district enjoy a competitive sports team.

Unlike the other high schools in the district, the School of Environmental Studies only serves 11th and 12th graders. This means students from middle school have to attend one of the other high schools before considering the School of Environmental Studies. Switching schools after 10th grade seems too disruptive to many students according to Trent Thompson, dean of students.

Key takeaway

While not having a big marketing budget is normal for zoned schools, a magnet school like the School of Environmental Studies that only serves 11th and 12th graders without a sports program will require special consideration from the district for attracting students to its school. Unlike other zoned schools, the School of Environmental Studies does not enjoy automatic enrollment of students due to zoning.

Findings

Interview Method

Interviews were conducted with key stakeholders both online and in-person between February and April 2022. This included the school Principal, Dean of Students, current students and a parent of a former student. All in person interviews were conducted at the school except the one with the parent which was conducted at a gym in Apple Valley. The interview scripts can be found in the appendix section of this report.

Summary of Key insights

- Niche, U.S. News and Great Schools are some of the websites potential students and parents use to evaluate schools. Not showing well on these platforms will hurt the school negatively in terms of attracting new students every year.
- Broad target audience that consumes information very differently. Messages for each group will have to be crafted diligently for the different channels they each prefer.
- Special consideration from the district is needed for marketing in absence of a sports program
- The school strives to help students get ready for the real world through an environmental lens.
- The school helps polish existing leadership skills students may have and enable them to build more.
- Student interest varies from year to year.
- Students learn about the school via word of mouth or through the principal directly going to the schools and talking to 10th graders.
- The classes are structured very differently. It can be a good thing but can also be confusing to someone who hasn't seen or heard of this before.
- Students may be coming to the school not just to learn about the environment but because they are either not feeling welcome or bullied at their home schools.
- Seniors can be used for connection and recruitment .
- The school prepares students for college and helps them earn credits that can count towards their future college education.
- The school doesn't have a sports program unlike the other high schools in the district.

- Diversity is a challenge and is well known by the staff.
- The school is not a comprehensive high school and has to rely on other high schools for some of the amenities/courses students may be interested in. It also doesn't issue a high school diploma unlike the other high schools.
- The school is unable to get more parents engaged and has concluded that at 11th grade, parents are usually not as involved in their child's education. This is an important miss.
- Leaving friends half way through high school is a real challenge.
- Former students share a bond with the school and love coming back.
- Leveraging alumni to engage parents might help get more parents interested in the school for their children.
- The students take pride in the work they accomplish through the project and want to talk about it with others.
- The school doesn't have relationships to get to a broader audience. It has stories to share but doesn't have access to a platform to reach a wide audience.
- The school is up against schools that are not willing to truly partner and help it grow. Instead they want the growth in population to be a reason for them to grow their own schools.
- The district is not proactively helping the school, it will react to what the school wants them to do. There is inter-competition within the schools in the district.
- Becoming a comprehensive school is a big undertaking and can potentially lead to the school becoming more like the other schools with no real differentiators.
- Social media is leveraged as an afterthought and not by experts in the space.
- Students like to travel in groups and are finding out about the school through word of mouth.
- Collaboration is encouraged and courses are designed around enabling collaboration between students through projects.
- Students are learning life realities through the projects they are working on.
- Environmental studies helps students think about adapting it as a long term career path.
- Some students may find the friendly staff and the smaller school setting the reason to be at the school.
- Lack of dance and sports programs keeps the possibility for students to return to the comprehensive schools open.
- Parents are generally happy with the support the school has provided young students in finding their true selves.
- Acquiring students without a particular interest in what the school has to offer can create a retention challenge.
- A formal alumni program that is adequately managed can serve as a funnel for future students.

Secondary Research

- “Schools facing increased need for applicants (zoned, unscreened, and those with low applications) increase per-pupil spending on non-instructional functions (ancillary services and building services, in particular), reducing instructional resources. Accountability does not work if principals do not have sufficient autonomy to differentiate their quality; otherwise, the district holds the schools accountable for random noise or things over which they have no control. Choice does not work unless consumers in the market have a differentiated set of options from which to choose; otherwise, it is not really school choice at all. This requires a sufficient scope of differentiated options, which may explain why districts adopt small school reforms along with choice-based reforms. Without principals having real autonomy over how resources are used, school choice may not be as effective as its supporters suggest.” (Rothbart, 2020). Giving magnet schools more autonomy is key because they don't benefit from automatic enrollment due to zoning. They have to be innovative to attract every application and hence more control over how resources are allocated becomes vital for their success.
- Singer explains, “Diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. Innovation is an idea, practice, or object that is perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption.” (Singer, 2016). “Diffusion of Innovation theory is one of the oldest social science theories. The theory explains how over time, an idea or product gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The end result of diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behavior, or product.” (LaMort, 2019). The school and most magnet schools for that matter are an innovation in the traditional school system. Looking at magnet schools as an innovation can perhaps lead to help diffuse the information and eventual adoption

using the diffusion of innovation theory. The School of Environmental Studies currently diffuses information through word of mouth, the yearly event the school principal leads and infrequent articles posted in a paper very few read. This needs to change.

- Technology adoption model is a model used to explain an individual's acceptance of technology solutions and determines their attitudes towards it. This can be applied to areas outside of technology also. The model “recognizes the role of perceived ease of use (PEOU) and perceived usefulness (PU) in understanding user acceptance in information systems” (Min et al., 2019, p 771). If people find an idea easy to use or understand and find it useful and valuable, it can lead to attitude change and adaptation.

The idea of magnet

schools and

especially in this

school's case where it

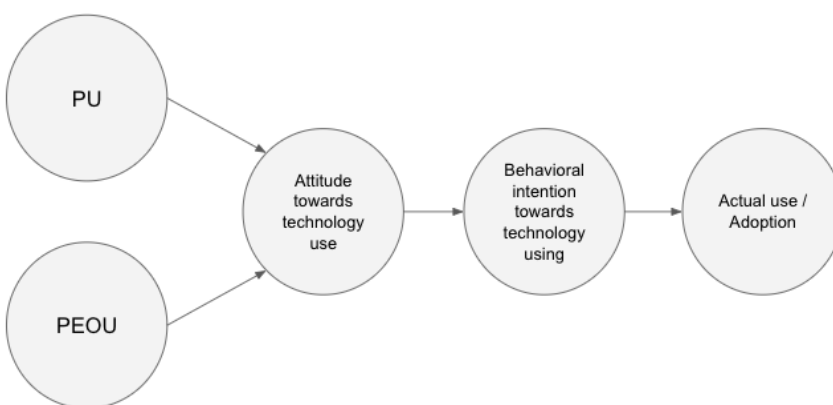
is even more different

than a regular high

school can be

confusing. This gets

in the way of adoption. The school should consider ways to make its perceived utility simple both for the parents and the students. Asking students to apply and attend the school is a big behavior change. Change in attitude is a prerequisite for this behavior change.



- Granovetter in the late 1960s challenged the assumption that we get our most useful or new information from people we have the strongest ties with. In his paper in 1973, he concluded that weak ties are strong and strong ties are actually weak in providing new information. While our strong ties or our close friends provide us information, they often narrow our horizon and can promote a group think behavior. This is where the strength

of our weak ties comes into play that bring diversity and new perspectives to the conversation, opening us up to new opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). The school relies heavily on word of mouth and in most instances students know someone who has attended the school. The connection for the student may or may not be a weak tie but a strategic combination of both strong and weak ties can lead to a better outcome for the school.

- The product life cycle helps organizations place their products or services in one of the categories in the figure

below that helps estimate the opportunity.

“Businesses are constantly seeking ways

to grow cash flows by

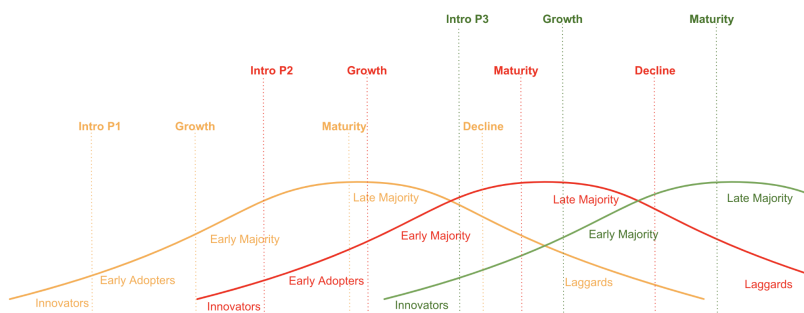
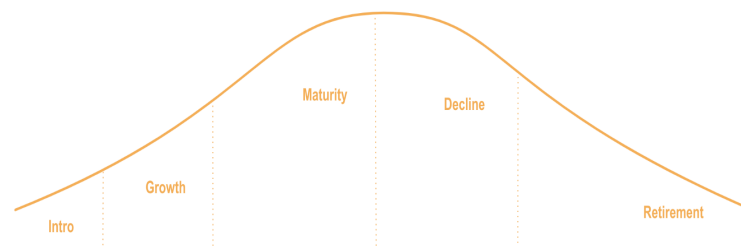
maximizing revenue stream from the sale of products and services. In mature businesses (rather than start-ups using venture investment) it is the cash flow that allows a company to invest in new product development and business development, in an effort to acquire additional

market share and become a leader in its industry” (Sääksvuori,

2008, pp. 191). The

growth and maturity

phase is where most revenue is generated before the product hits a decline and an eventual retirement. The key for continued success is to invest early before the product or service hits the maturity stage. Meaning, don’t expect infinite growth from the investments done in the past. Invest now in a new product or service well before the



maturity curve to keep leading the market. This creates the effect of continued growth, however it depends on continued investment and not relying solely on past success as a means to funnel new opportunities. The school will have to look into adapting a similar model where they should view every graduating class's project as their innovative product. They should then look to use that product to help attract the newer students for recruitment. The newer students will become seniors and repeat the process for continued success.

- “A new way to describe the preferred brand architecture approach in academia would be as a multidimensional branded municipality instead of a branded house. In a multidimensional branded municipality, various components may carry out different facets of an overall broad mission, but those components all still share central characteristics and brand values as part of the same ‘city’. In contrast to the uniformity and linearity of the branded house, then, a multidimensional branded municipality would position the master brand as the primary driver but still acknowledge the multidimensional nature of colleges and universities.” (Zinkan, 2018). The district in this case is acting like a branded house without the school getting a spotlight on its own. In addition to messaging, the branding strategy for the magnet schools should be revisited at the district level.

SWOT Analysis

Strength	Opportunity
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only known school in the world to have achieved LEED 4.1 certification led by students • Current and former students have positive view of their experience at the school • Is known to have a very inclusive culture • The school has very distinct courses that 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the population rise in the district, the school has access to more students • Current event issues related to environment can be used as an awareness and recruitment tool • Expected growth in the green jobs over the next decade can be used as a catalyst

<p>provide a unique experience to students (J-term, outdoor classes etc). Student led grant approval for solar was recently completed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AP enrollment is higher than other schools in the district • Most faculty has worked in the field for many years and brings multiple years of real life experience to the classroom 	<p>to help recruitment efforts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The district has both middle and elementary magnet schools. Parents who choose magnet schools for their children may be a good target • Students love to get involved in real life challenges and have a track record of completing complex projects. Exploring a marketing course can introduce new opportunities for students and the school • The school is in a unique setting in the MN zoo. Leveraging its location and unique building to host more tours can be a way to increase interest
Weakness	Threat
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relies on word of mouth and marketing resource shared by other schools in the district • Does not enjoy automatic enrollment unlike the other high schools in the district • Is not a comprehensive high school (only offers 11th and 12th grades) • Does not have a school sports program • Marketing is limited to what the district can offer and can't be positioned as being better than other schools in the district. (Can't truly compete in a very competitive situation) • Second magnet school in the city • Proficiency scores for Math, reading, SAT and ACT are lower than other schools in the district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competes with comprehensive schools that have a good academic showing in public ranking systems • Other schools in the district have a desire to get bigger and don't seem to have true intent to share the growing population of students in the district • Students from other schools have shared that enrolling at the School of Environmental Studies is not encouraged by their home schools • Becoming a full high school (9-12 grade) will dilute what makes the school different • Not running at full capacity means reducing faculty which has a cascading effect in a small school

Communication Objectives

The School of Environmental Studies faces a real strategic communications problem. While recruitment and enrollment are top of mind for all schools, this school faces the challenge of taking students away from well established schools in the district without having the ability to autonomously market for themselves in a competitive manner. It is lost in the shadows of some very successful schools in the area and students and parents don't have a good understanding of who it is and what it does. By asking students to apply and enroll, the school is asking for a behavior change by students. This requires an attitude change by the students, the parents, the

other schools and the district. This behavior change will take place once the attitude towards the School of Environmental Studies has changed. Strategic communication is at the heart of the problem the school is trying to solve.

Optimize

My **first communication objective** is to optimize the conversion rate of the students. After having spoken with a few people a few times I have an understanding about the school. However, if the 10th graders are learning about this in a 45 minute conversation then the conversion rates will not improve. The school should be meeting prospective students well before the 10th grade and more frequently. It should become a school middle schoolers aspire to be in one day. Ninth and 10th graders should be engaged for reinforcement of that message to keep the School of Environmental Studies on their minds.

Involve

My **second communication objective** is to improve parent and community involvement. Though the school believes parents of 10th graders are not as involved anymore, parents' involvement in college selection is a common theme. Parents who care about the colleges their children attend will care about the high school options their children have access to. Capturing the parents' attention will be a key factor in increasing student interest. Creating more opportunities to increase school tours with parents involved should be explored. Parents of all future students should be targeted, not just 10th graders. Additionally, parents who chose magnet schools for their children in elementary and middle school should be approached proactively. Hosting community events for raising awareness for environmental topics should be explored. This can serve as yet another recruitment tool.

Partner

My **third communication objective** is to increase knowledge about the work the students are doing among their current peers, future and former students, their parents, family and friends along with the broader community. This may require working closely with the district and other schools and potentially even securing a marketing budget with some degree of autonomy. Additionally there are 16 Fortune 500 companies in Minnesota and all companies of that size are looking to make investments in green initiatives. Partnering with these companies more deeply can open up new opportunities. The school is doing great work in a silo and the only paper that is talking about it is the "Sun Current." Being a unique school at the national level, the School of Environmental Studies should be looking to communicate nationally to seek the results it wants locally, and then leveraging that coverage to increase its credibility and appeal.

Differentiate

My fourth communication objective is to differentiate from the competition. This may be supported by tactics like:

- The third party ranking system does not represent the school fairly. At this point, U.S. News, Niche and others don't paint a great picture for the school. Look for achieving points of parity and establishing points of differentiation
- Unique student projects like LEED and solar should be used to differentiate
- A sense of community that involves alumni can be another area to explore

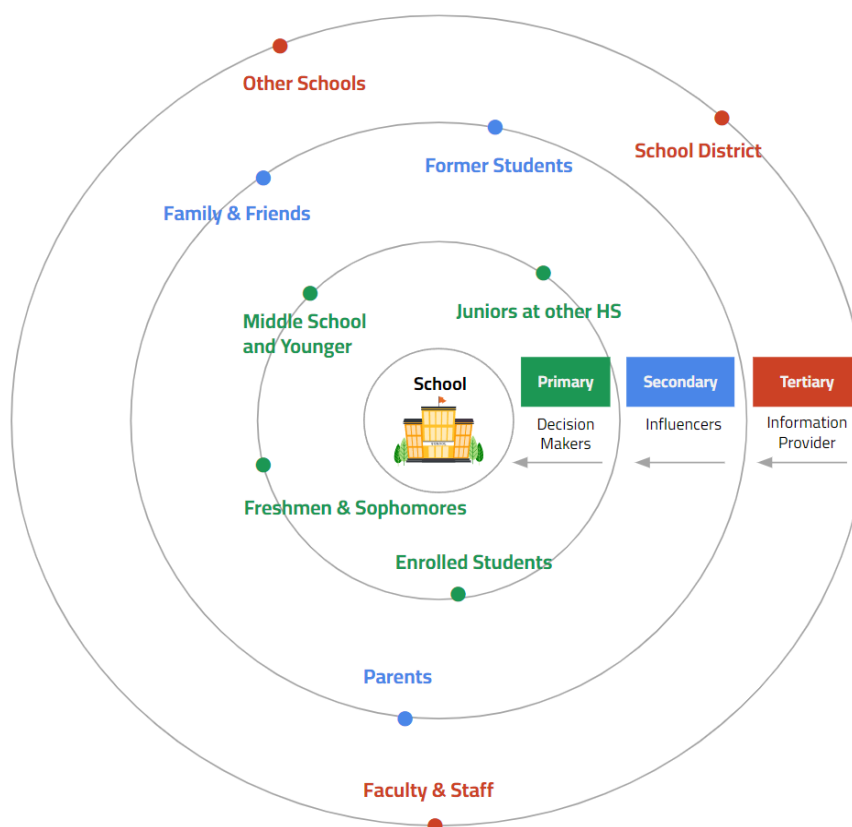
Planning

Having a clear understanding of the communications objectives we want to achieve, I will now focus on identifying the target audience, creating personas and building the brand narrative and personality that will resonate for the school to achieve its goal. I will also include the Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver analysis in this section.

Target Audience

The target audience for the school is a broad group. It ranges from former, future and current students, their parents, faculty and staff, other schools in the vicinity, the school district, local community, businesses to name a few. For this paper I will focus on a subset of

this group who will be the primary audience. However, it's important to understand that the target audience is bigger than what will be covered in this report. I am placing the target audience in three different groups based on the role they may play in helping the school achieve its goal.



Primary (decision makers)

This is the group who ultimately make the decision of attending the school or not. This group has subgroups that are discussed below.

Enrolled Students

- Current juniors or seniors enrolled at the School of Environmental Studies
- This group will eventually transition to become influencers
- Keeping this group satisfied is important for continued enrollment and advocacy
- The school is doing good with this group as all former students I have talked to directly or indirectly spoke highly of the school

Juniors at Other High Schools

- This group of students have already decided to stay other high schools, however they can still apply for their senior year
- The probability for this group to switch in their senior year is low due to stronger bond and ties with existing school
- Students in this group who may develop an interest in environmental topics and may want to pursue this in college can still potentially make the switch

Future Students

This group of students can potentially take advantage of both junior and senior years at the School of Environmental Studies. There are two subgroups within this group.

Freshmen and Sophomores

- This is the group that will convert at the earliest.

- Ninth and tenth grade students may want to attend the School of Environmental Studies, but have to wait until 11th grade
- It's important to keep these students engaged through their freshman and sophomore years
- These students may develop a bond with the schools they are currently attending and may find it difficult to switch when it is time. Keeping regular cadence with this group therefore becomes more important

Middle School and Younger

- This group should be viewed as a long term investment. The conversion will take longer
- Getting students engaged early will allow the school to grow a population of students who may view the School of Environmental Studies as the school they aspire to be in
- The school's affiliation with the Minnesota Zoo is another way to engage younger students and get them introduced to the school early and more frequently
- Bringing this group to the school for field trips will be another way to engage with the students
- During field trips, students can be checked in. The information logged can be used to keep in touch with the students and or their parents over the next few years

Secondary (influencers)

This is a group of influencers who can help the primary group make a decision.

Former Students

- Most former students of the school have a positive view of their experience
- Creating a formally managed alumni group will help harness the positive energy of this group that can be used for fueling recruitment

- This group can also be leveraged to create mentoring opportunities for currently enrolled students
- Older alumni can potentially be aligned with influencing parents. The age gap between them and students may be too big, but might be just right to engage the parents

Parents

- Depending on the age of the student, this group's involvement may vary
- Parents may help their children see the long term benefits of going to the School of Environmental Studies. This group is the student support and influence at home
- For freshmen and sophomores, parents can provide a lot of support when students are breaking the bond with their existing high schools
- Parents will play a bigger role for students that are younger
- Parents who chose magnet schools for their children may be particularly interested in learning about the school.

Friends and family

- Word of mouth is the most popular way how students find the school today, keeping this intact will be important going forward
- Siblings, family, neighbors and members of the community are just some of the examples of people whose opinion may influence students
- Friends may play a bigger role in influencing students. A motivated student who is wishing to attend the school might convince his/her friends to apply also
- Friends applying together may help address the breaking of bond feeling with the existing high school and at the same time serve as the support needed for the students to get started

Tertiary (information providers)

This group does not make the decision, or influence the students. However, the information they provide may help the decision makers and the influencers.

School Faculty and Staff

- This group controls the experience of existing students and future students when they are in the process of evaluating
- Providing a genuine connection with the parents and students is important and will help shape the school's brand personality
- How this group disseminates the information will be a key factor in the overall success of the school
- Without this group's conviction, success will be hard. This makes internal communication really important for external communication to be effective

Other schools

- Other high schools will not be interested in losing students, so there will be some competitive behavior
- Identifying allies in the other high schools will be important for keeping the freshmen and sophomores engaged
- Partnering with all elementary and middle schools will allow for engaging with the students earlier in their school years and driving interest over years
- Partnering with other magnet schools will allow for these schools to create a magnet path for students
- Students already going to magnet elementary and middle schools may be interested in pursuing a magnet high school option also

School District

- The school district manages the budget and the marketing function
- This group can play a significant role in disseminating the information across the district
- The district can also provision requirements that enables better collaboration between the School of Environmental Studies and other high schools
- As the magnet school doesn't get automatic allocation of students unlike other high schools in the district, argument can be made for a marketing budget exception in order to increase the number of applicants

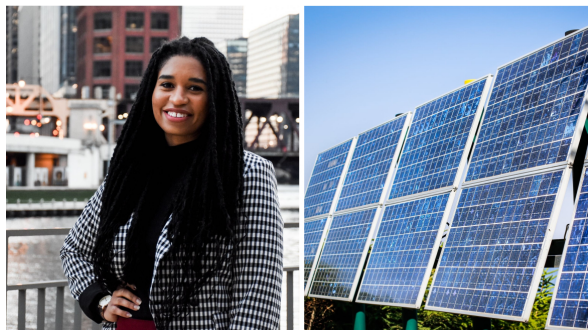
Persona

The following personas have been developed that targets the primary audience. More personas should be developed in the future to address the secondary and tertiary audience identified above.

Solar Susan

Solar Susan:

- Is a high school senior at the School of Environmental Studies
- Is very outspoken and exhibits leadership qualities among her peers
- Is leading the effort for getting solar funding approval for the school
- Is interested in dance and takes classes at the Eagan high school for dance because the school of environmental doesn't offer dance classes



Solar Susan worries about:

- Not knowing what life will be like beyond 12th grade

- Not feeling included in college like she has been at the School of Environmental Studies
- Missing her friends when high school is over
- Not being ready for the crowded universities
- Not being sure how she will pay for college

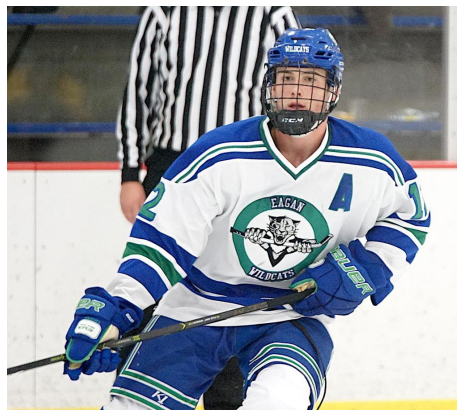
Solar Susan wants to:

- Attend the University of Minnesota next year
- Find a career that helps her channel her passion about preserving the environment
- Make environmental topics consumable by everyone
- Travel the world
- Be taken seriously by adults outside of her school around climate topics

Junior Mark

Junior Mark:

- Is is junior attending Eagan high school
- Interest has increased in the School of Environmental Studies
- Learned about the School of Environmental Studies from his neighbor Jim
- Still has one year left before college and is curious if it's too late to switch
- Is interested in environmental topics



Junior Mark worries about:

- Leaving friends behind if he switched schools
- Being a new kid in the new school
- Not being able to play hockey if he switched

Junior Mark wants to:

- Experience some of the exciting field trips Jim talked about

- Potentially study about climate change in college but isn't sure
- Get a hockey scholarship for college

Sophomore Julie

Sophomore Julie:

- Attends Rosemount high school
- Friend, Victoria is thinking about applying to the School of Environmental Studies
- Favorite topics are animals and travel
- Is very popular among her peers



Sophomore Julie worries about:

- Losing friends at Rosemount if she switched with Victoria
- Not being close to Victoria anymore if she didn't follow her to the new school
- Not being as popular in the new setting and having to start over

Sophomore wants to:

- Fly to New Zealand and see koala bears
- Be outdoors when she can
- Work at the zoo someday

Excited Joe

Excited Joe:

- Got to learn about the School of Environmental Studies through a field trip all the seventh and eighth graders took
- Loved the vibe of the school during the tour and all the great things the high schoolers were doing



- Liked the juniors and seniors took care of animals in one of the classes

Excited Joe worries about:

- Not getting accepted at the school when its his time to apply
- The animals not being there when he is able to finally attend the school
- Other high schoolers not being as nice as the ones at the School of Environmental Studies

Excited Joe wants to:

- Find a way to attend the School of Environmental Studies as soon as he can
- Go on a tour again and wants to bring his parents with him
- Ask the principal if can attend the school once he is done with middle school
- Be a zoo keeper when he gets older

Brand Personality

Based on my interviews with the school principal and some students and parents, the school's current brand means different things to different people. However, inclusivity was the common denominator in all my conversations. Using inclusivity and building on that for a stronger brand personality will be my recommendation. The school's brand personality will need to be excellence, futuristic, authentic and caring in addition to inclusiveness. These are the themes that should emerge in the minds of anyone when the School of Environmental Studies comes up.

Brand Narrative

The School of Environmental Studies is enabling students to get an early start in the environmental and climate studies journey. These are some of the biggest challenges of our

times and we will continue to see an upward trend in green jobs in the coming years. The school has an opportunity to spark interest in students at an early age who can then potentially become climate professionals. This presents an opportunity to not only educate students on climate challenges but set them up for potentially prosperous and rewarding careers in the future.

Discover, imagine and build a better tomorrow, today

This is the only planet we have and we share it with many other species. At the School of Environmental Studies, we learn about our fragile planet and our ecosystem. These expertise will help you get a head start in your journey for creating a sustainable future for everyone.

Key Messaging

The key messaging will be focused on three areas supporting the four communications objectives. The three themes are:

- Who are we
- What have we been up to
- Why should you care

Optimize

Engage with students early and stay engaged until it's time for them to be in 11th grade.

- Do school tours for students from elementary and middle schools at least once a quarter so they are introduced to the school early
- Capture student and parent contact information from the school tours and keep them engaged for the coming years
- Invite the students and families to future events hosted by the school
- Create high quality Youtube content regularly curated for all primary audiences
- Engage with primary and secondary audiences through social media regularly

- Engage current students to co-produce supervised content for both earned and owned media - this is for the students by the students

Involve

Get involved in community events and create a connection with the parents.

- Host and participate in community events focused on the environment. For example, run campaigns to drive awareness for earth day and other events the school hosts via both earned and owned media
- Target parents of students in elementary and middle magnet schools and present a magnet path for their children
- Craft a message for parents that is appealing to them. For example, quarterly newsletter that encapsulates major school events, unique student projects and accomplishments that points them to the new school blog run by the students (supervised)
- Have representation in at least one external event per quarter that is focused on the environment to grow awareness and community involvement

Partner

Partner with other schools and major local businesses for collaboration and co-marketing opportunities.

- Partner with the zoo to explore co-branding opportunities on items like membership cards for yearly zoo members
- Sell school merchandise at the souvenir stores at the Minnesota zoo
- Partner with magnet elementary and middle schools to create a magnet path for students as they get older

- Partner with all elementary and middle schools in the district and hold school tours to drive student interest early
- Partner with fortune 500 companies like Ecolab and Target who are based in Minnesota and have impressive environmental goals. Involve these companies in mentorship capacity for student led projects like LEED and solar funding. This allows for co-marketing opportunities and mentions by these companies in their earned and owned media channels resulting in broader reach

Differentiate

Share the unique work the students are doing with a broad audience and create a stronger alumni network.

- Add a communication focused class that captures student led environmental projects and crafts messages that resonates with the primary and secondary audiences
- Supervised student led content creation for owned and earned media that peaks interest of primary and secondary audiences
- Start a blog where the content is hosted to help with SEO ranking
- Use the blog to showcase the metrics the school should be measured by in addition to ratings offered by third parties and work with these third parties to include those metrics in the ranking system
- Launch an alumni section in the blog where former student stories are shared with their current accomplishments
- Invite alumni to school events and provide connection points with current students and parents for further impact and create a sense of community

Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) Analysis

I performed the following analysis of the school based on Hovland's SMCR framework of persuasion.

Sender

The sender or the source of the information will be critical as it will establish the brand personality or the nature of the communicator. As we are looking to have a brand personality that captures traits like excellence, futuristic, authentic, caring and inclusive, leading with students being the source of the message will help that cause. Currently the source is the district and the school staff proxied by the district. A lot of what the school has to offer gets lost with the dry communication and does not capture the true essence of what the school does. Turning to students for being the source of the message will create more authenticity that will help establish the school's brand personality that will resonate with younger students and their parents. This can also be a point of differentiation.

Message

As the school is managed by the district, rules and regulations set by the district will have to be honored. This includes that messages will not paint a bad picture of competing schools. Therefore, all student led external and internal facing communication will have to be supervised and approved before the information is shared. The messages will follow three themes:

- Who are we - Things the school has accomplished over the years and what are the environmental challenges we face
- What have we been up to - Showcasing the work being done by the school, current students and alumni

- Why should you care - The environmental impact of the work that has been done, in progress and future plans

Following these themes will allow the message to focus on what the school has to offer without highlighting any deficiencies in the competition.

Channel

The school's channels span across a range of media richness for its internal and external communications. Its richest media channel is the campus itself where potential students and their parents get an opportunity to have face-to-face communication with current students and faculty in action during school tours. The owned media is the standard school site that follows the layout of the competing schools in the district. Adding a blog will help the school differentiate and allow the audience to relive the experience of the school tour. It can also serve as a channel that helps funnel more interest and increases the number of school tours. As the school is looking to captivate more interest, social media should be activated programmatically. Facebook for parents and grandparents, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter should be leveraged to engage with the primary audience. Between these channels all primary and secondary audiences should be covered. The school should also look for earned media that could come from partnerships with local businesses. Examples of such posts can include stories like "Ecolab and the School of Environmental Studies co-host water preservation seminar". Stories like these may positively impact the company's CSR while enabling the school to stand out. A monthly newsletter can be distributed internally and externally that captures the top stories for the primary and secondary audiences. No paid media will be leveraged to limit non-instructional expenses and to keep the school's brand personality intact.

Receiver

The receivers of the message are the primary and secondary audiences listed above. The emotional state of the audience is important to understand in order to make the message resonate. Understanding which specific persona is being targeted will be important in order to craft the message successfully. For example, Sophomore Julie and Excited Joe care and worry about different things. Understanding the marker moments in each of the personas journey will be important for the message to land.

Personas for secondary and tertiary audiences are not created in this report. This should be completed in order to connect with them. Receiver is the element of pathos in the SMCR model and understanding what each target persona is thinking, doing and feeling during the different phases of their journey will be critical.

Implementation

This section will outline an implementation plan along with tactics for meeting the four objectives outlined above. An estimated budget for each objective will be presented at the bottom of each table which will be a total of cost associated to implement the tactics to support the communication objective. This is not an exhaustive list but a starting point.

Objective 1 - Optimize the conversion rate of the students			
Tactic	Budget	Staffing	Timing
Add school tours for elementary and middle schoolers	\$1000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student led tours may be supervised at times - Bus to transport students, visiting school pays the cost for the extra bus runs. The school will have a fund that can be used to share costs in some cases. 	Once every school year per school. More tours can be accommodated if requested
Invite 9th and 10th graders from District 196 and surrounding districts to special school events	\$0	Existing school admin staff to work with surrounding schools to invite students	One month before the event. An example would be the "Earth Day" event the school hosts yearly
"Magnet day"- 8th graders from other magnet schools spend a day at the School of Environmental Studies - Check in students and capture their contact details for future connections	\$0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing resources used to plan "Earth Day" and other events - Group of seniors who will be working with the 8th graders 	Once a quarter
Information sessions	\$0	- Student led tours	Monthly

available for the public to sign up and attend		may be supervised at times	
Student led supervised social media content for engaging younger students	~\$3000 (for additional equipment and software)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing music and videography faculty member - Communications faculty member - Students 	Student led campaigns will dictate the frequency. The campaigns will be created in the communications class
Total Budget - ~ \$4,000			

Objective 2 - Improve parent and community involvement			
Tactic	Budget	Staffing	Timing
Email outreach to parents of students who have toured the school	\$0	Existing school admin staff - capture information during tour and use that for continued connection and outreach	Invite parents within a week of the student tour date.
Email outreach to parents of all students currently attending magnet schools in the district	\$0	Existing school admin staff - collaborate with other magnet schools	Quarterly
Organize community events to increase environmental awareness led by students	\$10,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Existing resources used to plan "Earth Day" and other events - Student volunteers - Eco-friendly businesses who may be willing to sponsor 	Four events a year spaced out evenly and hosted within the District 196 vicinity
Newsletter to all parents updating them on the recent activities and driving traffic back to student led blog	\$0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Communications faculty member - Students in the communications class - Other student and faculty members who want to include their 	Quarterly

		story in the newsletter	
Total Budget - \$10,000			

Objective 3 - Increase knowledge about the work the students are doing among their current peers, future and former students, their parents, family and friends along with the broader community			
Tactic	Budget	Staffing	Timing
Partner with the Zoo for co-branding opportunities	~\$1000	- Communications faculty member - Principal, other staff and the district	Revisit yearly. Zoo memberships cards can be used to highlight student accomplishments from the previous years
Sell branded school merchandise at the souvenir store at the Zoo and engage in storytelling through these products (T-shirts, hats etc.)	~\$2500	- Principal, school staff, and the district - Communications faculty member - Student volunteers	Initial budget of \$2500 to be used to create merchandise. Earnings from sales can be used to replenish more supplies. Budget to be monitored monthly during the first year and then move to an yearly budget.
Partner with local businesses including Fortune 500 companies based in MN for co-marketing opportunities surround student led projects	\$0	- Communications faculty member - Green Buildings faculty member - District and school staff - Student volunteers	Align business sponsorship every year with student led projects around green building initiatives. This will allow for multiple and at least one co-marketing opportunity every year.
Media relations outreach to media outlets including local TV networks to showcase student led	\$0	- Communications faculty member - Green Buildings faculty member - District and school	At least once a year

work		staff - Student volunteers	
Total Budget - ~ \$3500			

Objective 4 - Differentiate from the competition			
Tactic	Budget	Staffing	Timing
Offer an additional course to students that kickstarts student led marketing initiatives	~\$95,000 + any additional overhead for the course	Hire a new communications faculty member with a marketing background. The person will be serving a dual role (communications faculty + communications director)	Starting next school year and ongoing
Start a student run supervised blog that documents distinguished school projects	\$500 (yearly cost to run a blog on the existing district infrastructure)	- Communications faculty member - Students in the communications class	New articles to be posted on a weekly basis capturing recent activities and following a schedule maintained by a content calendar supervised by the communications faculty member
Formal Alumni section in the blog that recognizes past students for their previous, current and upcoming work	\$0	- Communications faculty member - Students in the communications class	Monthly
Alumni day for former students to come together and invite current and future prospect students including their parents - sense of community	\$2000	- Existing resources used to plan "Earth Day" and other events - Student volunteers - Eco-friendly businesses who may be willing to sponsor	Yearly
Total Budget - ~ \$97,500			

Cost Breakdown

The initial look at the cost breakdown shows 85% of the cost is from objective four. However it's important to understand that the objective four includes the salary of the communications faculty member and director. The

inclusion of this role will

enable the tactics in the

other communications

objectives also. Removing

the salary for the role from

objective four shows a

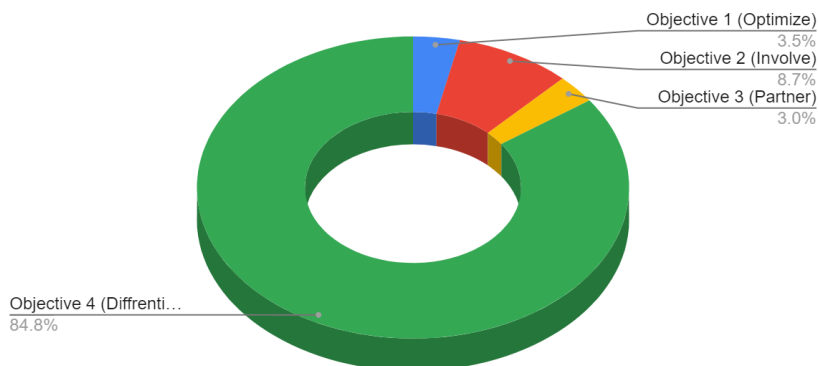
better representation of

how the rest of the cost is

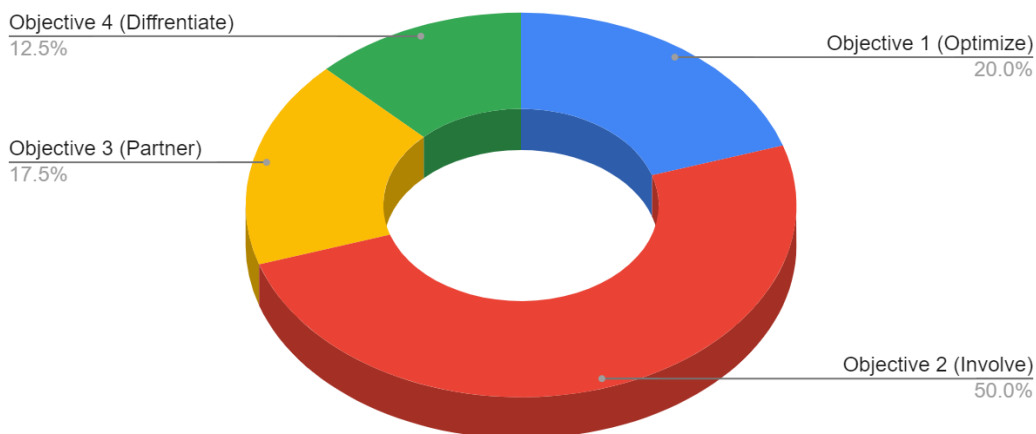
spread across the four objectives. The communications person's salary is removed from the

chart below to visualize the remainder of the cost.

Cost Breakdown



Cost Breakdown (without salary)



Evaluation

The goal for all four objectives is to increase the number of applicants by 125% of total capacity and ultimately bring enrollment to 100% every year. This means all activities should lead to an increased number of applicants. While students may not be applying throughout the year, other ways to measure could be used to track success of the tactics outlined above. Below I will share the proposed plan to evaluate the tactics proposed in the previous section.

Objective 1 - Optimize the conversion rate of the students (conversion = turn students to applicants)		
Tactic	Measurement	Frequency
Add school tours for elementary and middle schoolers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of students who apply and were first introduced to the school through this tour. - Number of subsequent visits 	Long term - ongoing
Invite 9th and 10th graders from District 196 and surrounding districts to special school events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track the attendance rate - Track conversion rate of students who attend these events 	Measure ongoing
"Magnet day"- 8th graders from other magnet schools spend a day at the School of Environmental Studies - Check in students and capture their contact details for future connections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track the attendance rate - Track conversion rate 	Measure ongoing
Information sessions available for the public to signup and attend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track the signup rate - Track the attendance rate - Track conversion rate 	Measure Monthly
Student led supervised social media content for engaging younger students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - YouTube views, likes and comments - Engagement on social media like TikTok and other platforms geared towards a younger audience - Number of applicants and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Measure ongoing - Weekly analysis to identify content that is driving engagement and highest conversion

	school tours that originated from social media - this information can be captured via application forms or when scheduling school tours	
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Objective 2 - Improve parent and community involvement

Tactic	Measurement	Frequency
Email outreach to parents of students who have toured the school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Email open rate - Target over 25% - Track number parents who respond and do a school tour 	Measure monthly
Email outreach to parents of all students currently attending magnet schools in the district	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track number parents who respond and do a school tour 	Measure monthly
Organize community events to increase environmental awareness led by students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signup / RSVP - Attendance - Return attendees 	Use the first event to set a baseline. Measure subsequent events to understand trends.
Newsletter to all parents updating them on the recent activities and driving traffic back to student led blog	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Click through rate (CTR) - Increased traffic on the blog 	Measure monthly

Objective 3 - Increase knowledge about the work the students are doing among their current peers, future and former students, their parents, family and friends along with the broader community

Tactic	Measurement	Frequency
Partner with the zoo for co-branding opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track number of co-branded membership cards distributed - Increase in school tours due to awareness created by the zoo - information can be captured during tour requests 	Measure monthly
Sell branded school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of items sold 	Measure monthly

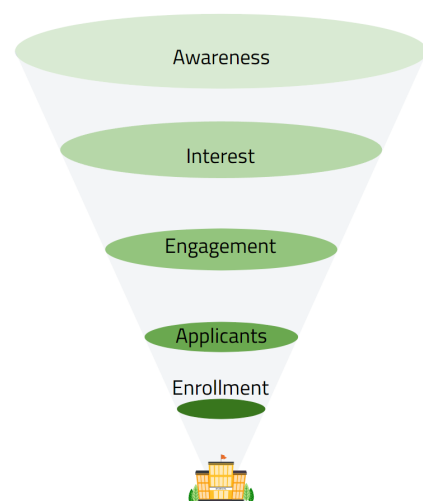
merchandise at the souvenir store at the Zoo and engage in storytelling through these products (T-shirts, hats etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Frequency of items sold - Popular items 	
Partner with local businesses including Fortune 500 companies based in MN for co-marketing opportunities surround student led projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of connections between businesses and students - Mentions in owned, earned and paid media by the businesses - Number of new parents / students who learn about the school through these channels 	Measure monthly
Media relations outreach to media outlets including local TV networks to showcase student led work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Track media coverage - Interest generated - can be captured via application form or at tour requests - Video can be captured and posted on the official YouTube channel to track views, completion rate and engagement 	Measure ongoing

Objective 4 - Differentiate from the competition		
Tactic	Measurement	Frequency
Offer an additional course to students that kickstarts student led marketing initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Number of students enrolled - Number of student led marketing initiatives and effectiveness - Student feedback 	Measure ongoing
Start a student run supervised blog that documents distinguished school projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEO & Number of visits - Unique visitors - Newsletter subscription - Click tracking and other Google Analytics metrics 	Measure ongoing
Formal Alumni section in the blog that recognizes past students for their previous, current and upcoming work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - SEO - Visitor origination, geo data - Newsletter subscription - Return users and other Google Analytics metrics 	Measure ongoing

Alumni day for former students to come together and invite current and future prospect students including their parents - sense of community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signup / RSVP - Attendance - Return attendees 	Measure ongoing
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Using the evaluation methods above, we should be able to start telling if a tactic is working or not and that will be used to inform any adjustments that need to be made. The tactics above will drive the following outcomes:

- Increase buzz surrounding the school in the community to create awareness
- Increased interest that can be measured by the amount of signups and attendance for school tours
- Engagement with the students and their families through the events and school tours
- Increase engagement should translate into an increase in the number of applications
- Increased number of applicants provides the school the opportunity to maximize its enrollment



Attending a magnet school is a change in behavior which requires a change in attitude. In order for the school to change attitude, it needs to provide itself an opportunity to get the word out and increase the number of tours. With the school tours along with the media buzz, the school has the best shot at changing people's attitude towards it. All the work the students are already doing is a great way to captivate and engage the audience and finding opportunities to showcase that through school tours and other tactics mentioned above will encourage people to look at the school differently resulting in a change in attitude towards the school. This will ultimately drive behavior change. In this case, behavior change means, applying for the school and following through with attending it.

Future State

Upon the successful implementation of this plan, the school should expect an increase in the number of applicants and enrollment each year. Being accepted by the school will become more competitive overtime and the school will have the liberty to be selective in who gets admitted. This in turn will have a positive effect on the district's overall brand. Prestigious districts tend to create more desirable communities which drives property values up. And increased property values will drive property taxes up which is how the school system gets funded mostly in the first place. This flywheel effect will enable the School of Environmental Studies to stay put on its mission to create a thoughtful community of leaders for a sustainable world.

In my research, I learned that school districts treat magnet schools mostly like the other schools in its portfolio. This is a very competitive market where the non-magnet schools enjoy an unfair advantage, it's the default choice. District 196 has an opportunity to do things differently. Upon the success of this plan, the district can act as a model for other districts to follow. This would establish District 196 as a pioneer in education at the highest level.

The School of Environmental Studies is a unique school in unique circumstances. District 196 has the opportunity to support its most unique school with some unconventional methods. This will require courage, vision and leadership. Tackling the climate crises in front of us will not be easy. The School of Environmental Studies is on a mission to grow the next generation of leaders who will be tasked with solving the biggest challenges of our times. Supporting this mission can potentially change the future of our planet.

It always seems impossible until it's done - Nelson Mandela

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