The three spheres of influence: School Culture

In the previous two issues of *I&P*, we introduced the spheres of influence, then focused on the Market Position sphere. This article focuses on the sphere dedicated to *School Culture*.

The second sphere of influence, School Culture, reflects your school's enrollment outcomes and refers to the realm of students and faculty. When the school culture is healthy, the result is enrollment demand in excess of supply and a perception of return on investment for your parent constituency. Strength in the school culture sphere depends on the extent to which faculty are clear about the school's marketplace stance and mission, are committed to it, and play an active role in ensuring it. You, as the School Head, Admission Director, or Marketing Communications Director know that, while parents are not directly part of the school culture, they do have expectations of it. When their children have consistently positive experiences, they perceive value and feel validated in having made the investment.

Consider the graphic.

The highlighted factor positioned at the end of the list with the sphere represents the primary anticipated outcome from a careful evaluation and alignment of your interests in the other factors. The primary factors to examine in the school culture sphere are:

- **Mission delivery**—the extent to which the experiences your students are having meet or exceed their expectations and match the promises made during the initial admission conversations;

- **The student experience**—the extent to which students enjoy predictability and supportiveness, which is strongly, positively correlated with their enthusiasm, satisfaction, and performance, as measured on ISM's Student Experience Profile II;

- **Your faculty culture**—a component of a healthy (or unhealthy) school culture. Assess the extent to which faculty perceive they are providing predictability and support for students (Faculty Culture Profile II)—and the extent to which they, as teachers, experience predictability and support in their interactions with administrators (Faculty Experience Survey);

- **Predictability and support**—because of its strong, positive correlation with student enthusiasm, satisfaction, and performance, this should be a primary retention strategy. Parents do not typically withdraw enthusiastic, satisfied students who are performing well;

- **Growth model and evaluation process**—the need to separate your faculty's professional growth culture from evaluation. ISM believes professional growth, which is aspirational in nature and directly linked to your articulated Characteristics of Professional Excellence, thrives in a culture that:
  - permits healthy risk-taking in matters directly linked to student learning outcomes (actions that are not subject to evaluation), and
  - is supportive of each teacher's growth journey through ongoing coaching and mentoring; and

- The outcome of a strong school culture, when well-managed, is that your parents will perceive a positive return on their investment.

ISM research shows that a strong school culture significantly relates to improved student performance, satisfaction, and enthusiasm. This in turn leads parents to choose your school. As you design your school's marketing strategies, always keep in mind that a healthy school culture is at the core of school management. *I&P*

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2 See “The Faculty Culture Profile II,” *I&P*, 37-7-30.
4 See “Predictability and Supportiveness: The ISM School Culture Matrix,” *I&P*, 38-8-29.