

# Linking Student Recruitment and Retention Strategies to Attract, Enroll and Retain Students<sup>1</sup>

Have you implemented a year-round practice?



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<sup>1</sup> The contents of this resource are credited to New London Public Schools and LEARN Educational Resource Center and based on their Recruiting/Marketing Handbook titled: *Linking Student Recruitment & Retention*.

## BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL SYSTEM IN NEW LONDON

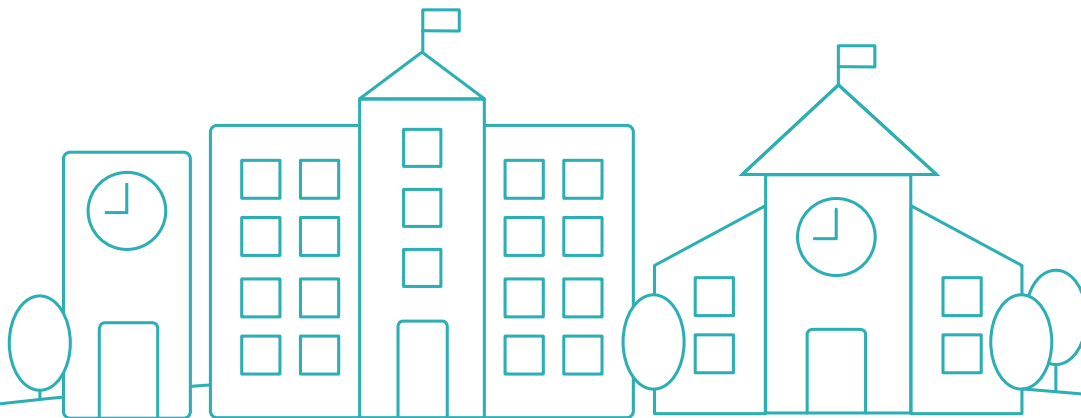
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One Connecticut district changed the direction of their school system, overcame state supervision and funding challenges, and increased student achievement by writing – and passing – unique legislative policy. And they enabled access to the funding sources that will be critical for their growth and sustainability.

New London, CT, is a small community of just 6 square miles on the beautiful Connecticut coastline. Less than 50% of New London constitutes taxable land, making funding schools in New London difficult at best. In 2012, the situation had become embroiled and resulted in a takeover by the state.

It was under state supervision, formally referred to as oversight by a Special Master, that New London started to look at things differently. After months of discussion and proposals, a clear solution surfaced — but community buy-in was mixed and the challenges were real. Was it possible to position New London as the only intradistrict all-magnet district in the state? If they could, the funding resources would save the district.

The executive committee drafted very unique policy to turn New London Public Schools into an all Magnet School District. With the passing of this legislation [New London Public Schools is an All Magnet District per Legislation (CT P.A. 14-90, Sec. 37, (a))], the state allowed New London to become a school system comprised entirely of intradistrict magnet schools. A huge win for this little coastal town.



This reclassification required New London to meet Magnet School Operating Legislation including: 1-District Enrollment Compliance —participating district enrollment must equate to 75% of the total school enrollment and 2-Reduced Racial Isolation Compliance—at least 25% and not more than 75% of students enrolled must be pupils of racial minorities [as defined in section 10-226a of Connecticut law]. This positioned New London to tap into two critical funding sources: 1-school education cost sharing and 2-operating grants.

New London went on to build new schools, recruit students from surrounding cities and towns and implement aggressive marketing goals to support matriculation of students into their schools. The executive team never lost sight of the inherent purpose of building a sustainable school system. After all, it is all about the students.

The executive team of New London holds strong views on choice, equity and diversity throughout student enrollment and SchoolMint is a proud partner and integral part of their lottery process. They shared their recipe for success during The National Magnet School Conference in Chicago this year with a session they hosted: *Honoring Choice, Equity and Diversity in the Enrollment Process*. Inspired by that talk, we've assembled many tips and best practices for magnet and non-magnet schools alike in this playbook.

The story of New London's revitalization brings to mind this familiar quote —“Two roads diverged in a wood and I - I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.” They clearly chose the right path and we look forward to New London's continued success – providing families with different school options, recruiting an intentionally diverse student body and promoting incredible programs, and a year-round commitment to excellence.

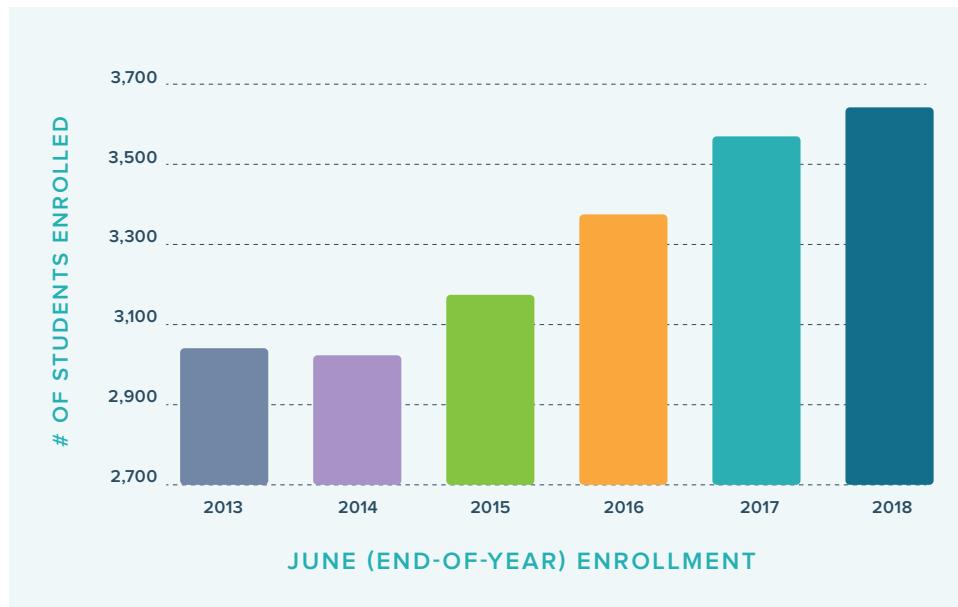


The sum of these is exactly why parents are interested and enrollment is up by 18% since the 2012-2013 school year.

## NEW LONDON PUBLIC SCHOOLS ENROLLMENT TREND

*Student Counts by School and Year – New London School District*

SCHOOL	Grades	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
C.B. Jennings	PS-5	555	570	516	564	544	529
Harbor	PS-5			126	132	250	292
Nathan Hale	K-5	450	527	477	496	524	534
Winthrop	PS-5	546	544	556	583	556	534
BDJMS Campus	6-8	592	556	601	619	697	705
NLHS	9-12	578	507	512	580	602	662
STMHS	9-12	336	343	363	372	370	362
<b>DISTRICT END OF YEAR TOTAL</b>	<b>PS-12</b>	<b>3,057</b>	<b>3,047</b>	<b>3,151</b>	<b>3,346</b>	<b>3,543</b>	<b>3,618</b>



*Two roads diverged in a wood and I - I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference.*

## INTRODUCTION

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Establishing a year-round practice for recruiting students and marketing your school(s) will ease the pressure and burden of seasonal recruiting. It can also increase your fill rates. Starting with the end goal in mind — a school with every seat filled — this playbook offers a framework for re-thinking and planning a year-round marketing and recruiting program.



This approach has been successful for New London Public Schools. It afforded New London an 18% increase in enrollment from 2012-2017, during which surrounding communities were experiencing enrollment decline.

We urge you to re-think your strategies and adopt some or all of these proven tactics.

## THE THREE SEASONS OF RECRUITING

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To successfully market and recruit, be prepared for a marketing season that never ends.

This pre-, mid-, and post-season playbook has been created to guide and support recruitment and retention tasks and to create an understanding of the breadth of work needed to ensure success.

Think like an athlete. Your planning is training, and planning equals preparedness and success. This Playbook will coach you through all of the necessary steps.

**GOOD LUCK!**

### 1 PRE-SEASON STRATEGY

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Launching a new approach requires reflection of past challenges and successes, and summertime is the perfect time to reflect on student recruitment outcomes from the prior year.

- **REVIEW** student data: demographic, residential, sibling and any survey data (climate, family exit interviews) and review student academic achievement. Combine this data with last year's recruitment experience.
- Utilize these results to plan and **SET GOALS** for the upcoming year. Use this time to create a master plan, establish what enrollment outcomes you need/desire and set goals.
- **DOCUMENT YOUR PLAN** — create a Recruitment Timeline and Calendar, be planful about the entire calendar year. It is helpful to schedule your lottery date first and then work backwards from that date. Include:
  - Internal Communications/Reminders
  - External Communications/Reminders
  - Schedule Building Power Walk and Talks
  - Open Houses
  - Community Events
  - Open Application Portal
  - Close Application Portal
  - School Tours
  - Run Lottery
  - Acceptance Party
  - Summer Retention Events

## EVERYONE IS A MARKETER!

It is also a time to build **school culture** with staff. Move to a culture of engagement and one that is supportive of all families. Set the tone with central office staff and school staff that **Everyone is a Marketer**. The positive culture will also be validated by the overall building appearance. Plant some flowers or take other small steps to spruce up your buildings. This is an area where the school community can come together and help -- especially older students, instilling pride in their school.

## ALLOCATE / FINALIZE A MARKETING BUDGET

School marketing can be done on a small budget, but aggressive student recruitment requires a generous school **marketing budget** to cover items well beyond the cost of printed communications. A school recruitment and marketing budget should include:

- All printed recruitment publications
- Give-away items
- T-shirts
- Trade Show displays and tablecloths
- Video creation/production
- Website and social media support
- Social media advertising
- Print advertising
- Radio/TV advertising
- Tour and open house event decorations, refreshments and supplies
- Recruitment fairs
- Staff mileage reimbursement
- Postage costs

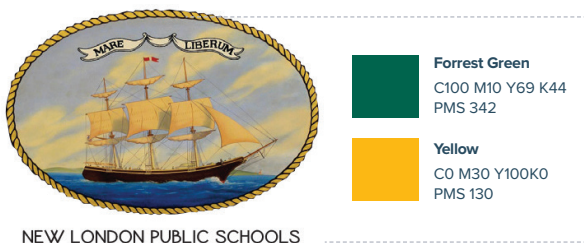


*If you do marketing correctly, it is building a great school culture. It is using data to drive decision making. It's promoting your school to your families and community.*

## DOCUMENT BRAND IDENTITY

Consider creating and sharing a **Brand + Visual Style Guide** for the district. This will guide everyone working on recruiting. Document logos, colors, tag lines and rules for print and social media marketing/advertising so all school staff are informed on how to best use their school's respective logos, colors, and tag lines. Sample guides can be found with a quick google search. ( [Here](#) is an example from New London Public Schools.)

Effectively communicating your district brand and associated school brands supports the district in its journey to operational excellence – spreading the word and sharing what you're all about.



## CRAFT THE STORIES

Crafting stories for each school, including information about the students served, school highlights and successes, as well as distinct school qualities and culture are important for consistent communication. Telling each school's story as part of the bigger district story will engage community members and families and foster district-wide unity.

Sharing each school's recruitment dates, admission schedules and literature will support the entire recruitment and retention process for the district. When something exciting happens at one school be sure to share the excitement across all schools.

## IDENTIFY THE MARKETING TEAM

Ideally one person per school, in addition to central office staff, would make up the team and work together to punch through this pre-season list of action items.

## CREATE CUSTOMER PERSONAS

Do you know what keeps your customers up all night? Being able to answer that question will lead you to successful recruitment and retention. Customer personas are fictional, generalized representations of your ideal customers. They help you understand your customers (and prospective customers) better, and they make it easier for you to tailor content to the specific needs, behaviors, and concerns of different groups in your community.

According to Hubspot, the strongest buyer personas are based on market research as well as on insights gathered from your actual customer base (through surveys, interviews, round tables, focus groups, etc.). Depending on your school, you can create as few as one or two personas or as many as 10 or more.

## CREATE CUE CARDS/SCRIPTS

Create several different topic specific scripts for your entire faculty to have at their fingertips. This is very useful when answering the phone, when giving tours, hosting open houses or for those awkward stops in the grocery store where a parent or community member wants to know about your theme or recruitment schedule. It is a way to make sure the correct information about your school and district is being shared in the community.



## REVIEW AND REFRESH WEBSITE

This is a great time to update staff contacts, add important enrollment dates, and highlight happenings in the district for the upcoming school year. Don't forget to archive irrelevant pages and content.

## PLAN FOR SOCIAL MEDIA

Today's families are busier than ever, and they now have countless ways to receive communication and digest information. Families expect schools and districts to keep them up-to-date at all times. This is especially true when it comes to their own child and the school where their child is enrolled. Maintaining this communication will support the retention of students and families at your school by keeping them engaged and fostering a sense of belonging even if/when they cannot be present. Don't forget to share news and information with all district employees, building staff, and most importantly those who answer the telephones.

## IDENTIFY AND PREPARE CONTENT YOU WILL NEED INCLUDING MARKETING MATERIALS, BROCHURES, INVITATIONS AND MORE

Create relevant and interesting content that tells your school story and explains why your school is remarkable and distinct. This is your opportunity to publicly report out on your school data and tell your school stories consistently throughout the calendar year. Note the words "calendar year" here. Good school marketing means telling your story constantly and not letting off the gas pedal, even in the summer, in

order to achieve success. Share the admissions timeline, tour dates, and explain clearly how and when a family can apply to your schools.

## STUDENT APPLICATION

It is helpful to have paper applications, scanner cards, laptops and iPads available, so when families and interested parties ask to fill out an application you will not miss a beat. Providing online access to families is easy and efficient when your recruitment team is at an event.

Remember each year the application content should be reviewed and updated before the application period begins. Consider having access to the online application available during all internal and external recruitment events.



### CREATE A “ROAD SHOW KIT”

Purchase a rolling bag and fill with all recruitment materials:

- Projector
- Extension cords
- Trade show display
- Tablecloth
- Give-aways
- School and enrollment information

### SCHEDULE SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

It is important for each school to have their own presentation kit available and ready to roll at a moment’s notice. As discussed above, create a “Road Show Kit.” Purchase a rolling

bag and fill with recruitment materials to be ready at a moment’s notice.

If you are asking yourself, “Does this mean I need to be a sales person?” The answer is a resounding “Yes!” Being able to talk about your magnet school and present your magnet school theme, the district and school goals, and share your school story is all part of the recruitment and retention process. Community events are also perfect opportunities to share information about your school and theme. Some community events to consider are: summer beach venues, parades, car shows, craft shows, and holiday sing-along events to name a few. Plan ahead and reserve a table, make a float, or even provide student entertainers.



## MID-SEASON STRATEGY

During the mid-season you will start to see the results from your pre-season planning work. This middle part of the recruitment season is all about monitoring and interpreting the applicant pool data. Keep an eye on the student data collected in the pool. Based on that information, recruitment efforts might need to be adjusted or redirected in a different direction. Mid-season is also the perfect time to begin thinking about how you and your marketing team will engage the new students and families once they are accepted through the lottery. Student recruitment and retention is ever-evolving and staying one step ahead of the curve will keep your magnet school student numbers right where you want them. **Keep at it!**



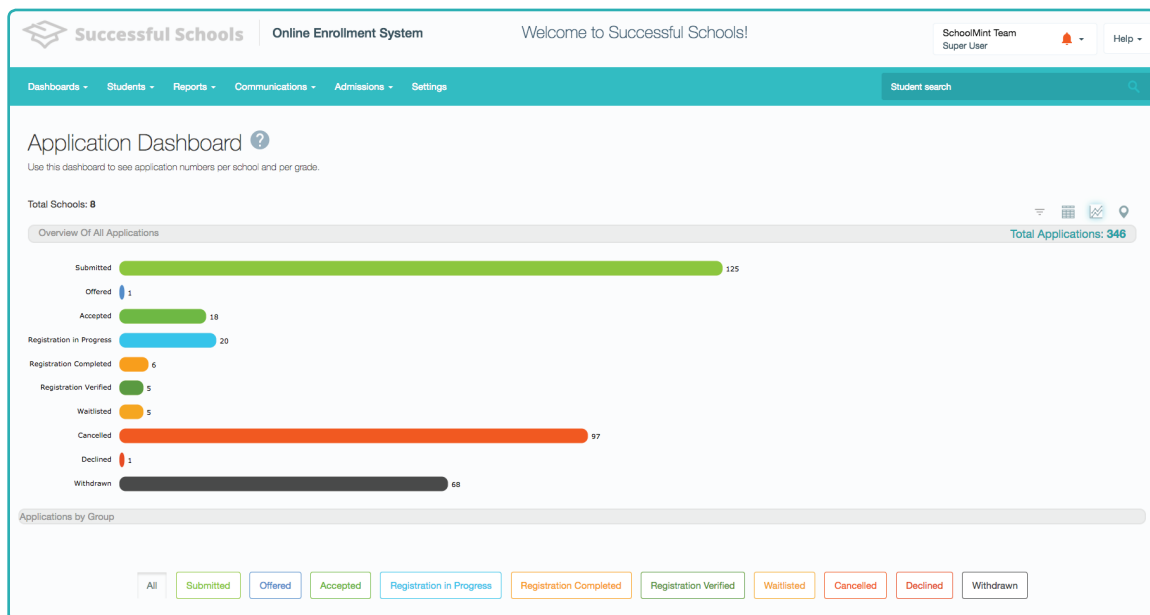
### MONITOR THE STUDENT APPLICANT FLOW

Throughout the application season, continue monitoring the applicant pool. It is important to keep an eye on the following student data collected: residence, gender, age, siblings, race and ethnicity.

Monitoring the break-down of these categories will provide direction for a balanced applicant pool. An applicant pool that is balanced will help produce a student lottery that is balanced. For example: if the current applicant pool has a low number of female applicants, then the recruitment team should apply marketing and recruitment efforts to female-focused community venues such as: dance schools, softball clinics, and girl scouts. The team should also review the printed materials to be sure females are represented properly in the literature. The database manager is responsible for reviewing the content on the application for accuracy and typing mistakes by the applicant during the applicant verification process. Key areas to verify are: date of birth and grade level.

## ENGAGE YOUR APPLICANT POOL

The beginning of the application period through the end of the application period can be a two- to three-month time frame. This is a long time. Imagine if you completed one of the first applications during the application period; it could be up to four months before you heard about the results of the lottery. This is why it is very important to maintain contact with the applying families throughout the open enrollment timeframe. A recruitment goal to keep families engaged throughout the months before the lottery would be a great addition to your plan. A perfect way to stay in touch is to have pre-printed postcards created and mailed to families during this period.



A post card thanking them for completing an application or for participating in a tour is a nice way to maintain a connection. Email blasts are another way to share information to the interested families. Additionally, through email, you can send updates and stories about what is happening inside your school(s). Use SchoolMint to export applicant mailing information into a CSV file format to print labels for easy mailing. The labels should always be printed and should professionally mirror the school's branding guidelines. Below is an example of one of the postcards a New London school sends to students in the applicant pool.



## COLLECT THE PAPER APPLICATION DATA

Most of the student applications will be completed online through SchoolMint. However, as the recruitment season continues, it is important the database manager is also entering all of the submitted and collected paper applications into the system. Every application counts! As discussed prior in this document, the application acceptance closing date is set during the pre-season planning.

It is important that this date is on all the admissions literature and posted to your school website. Making this process as transparent as possible helps parents know when the application period begins and ends, which will prevent stragglers after the application period is closed or the lottery is complete.

## CLOSE THE APPLICANT PORTAL

Remember to close the application portal on the designated open enrollment end date.

## PRE-LOTTERY TASK LIST

Ensure all data on the completed online applications is accurate to the best of the database manager's knowledge. Review priorities and preferences for eligibility and accuracy.

## RUN LOTTERY

Once the database looks orderly and ready, it is time to run the lottery!

## COMMUNICATE LOTTERY RESULTS TO FAMILIES

Upon the completion of the lottery, it is now time to communicate to the families of the accepted students and to the students not

selected through the lottery process. Some schools chose to make phone calls home to all the accepted students and then follow up with a formal acknowledgment in the mail. Whatever your team decides, it is important to be consistent and timely with this communication because many families are waiting with anticipation!

In the same way that the “yes, you are in” communication should be shared in a timely fashion, so should the unfortunate “we are sorry, you were not selected” information be communicated as soon as possible.

## REGISTER/ENROLL

The students selected through the lottery process now turn into enrolled students in your school. In order to facilitate this, registration forms need to be completed. SchoolMint can be used to automate the registration process and streamline the submission of student data already captured in the application process. Whatever your school or district is using for this process, be sure to clearly communicate to families how they can/should register their child.



## COMMUNICATE TO THE SENDING DISTRICT *[If Applicable]*

Each year, magnet schools and charter schools need to communicate to the student's home district, which is sometimes called the "sending district." Timeframes for communicating are based on state legislation. The list should be sent to the district Superintendent's Office and copies to the Transportation Department and the Special Education department can also be helpful.

## CONTINUE TO TELL YOUR SCHOOL'S STORY

This is an exciting time for the families who will be part of your school next year. This is the time to shine a light on your school and district and widely share on your website and social media sites. It is important to recognize the communication can also be a bit challenging because you do not want to upset the families not selected through the lottery.

Use Social Media channels to deliver information such as: "[insert your school

name here] has conducted its lottery and communication to all families was sent last week. If you have not heard from us, please give us a call."

You can also share information about new student orientations or other events being hosted for new families. Remember communicating all that is going on from the inside out is good marketing practice and builds a strong community.



*We have a centralized welcome center. That means families can come in and, basically, engage in the entire enrollment process at our central office, in order to not be going from school to school.*

Once the lotteries are complete and families have been notified, it is now time to transition into the Post-season. The time from when families receive their acceptance to the first day of school can sometimes be a long time – several months for some schools. During this time, students may choose to not attend your school which leaves an empty seat to be filled.

A Post-season Retention plan for the accepted students is different than school-wide retention, but it certainly can be combined to add to your school's culture and climate and aid retention. Working with your team to host special events for the new students and families will help build community and support the new students during this period of transition for them.

School-wide student retention needs to be a priority as well. Even during the summer months, it is important to keep websites and social media channels up-to-date. Maintain a presence by posting tips, helpful hints, friendly reminders about physicals, sports, clubs, and other school-related interests.

### ACCEPTED DAY CELEBRATIONS

Remember to always put yourself in your “customers” shoes. Think about how a student might feel transitioning from one school to another. Attending your school will be a new beginning for students and families and new beginnings can be intimidating and scary for some. Plan an accepted students event to celebrate this new beginning and to ease

feelings of transition.

Print branded invitations, have student ambassadors, prepare a presentation, decorate with balloons and have staff there as well. Customize your school's accepted students day to be special and unique to your school building. Make it a tradition for years to come.

### ACCEPTED STUDENT RETENTION PLAN

Engage with the accepted students throughout the summer to stay connected and ensure they will walk across your school threshold at the beginning of the school year. Develop a plan of touch points (customer contacts) to be executed throughout the summer.

Here are some ideas:

- Summer reading hour held at the school
- Email communication about summer reading tips or a fitness challenge or even a vacation photo challenge
- Host an event to meet the principal
- Provide a digital learning series for parents or a college planning series for students and parents
- Send an invitation for a back to school barbecue

Remember that social media channels are a great way to push out helpful summer tips that link back to your website and showcase the school as well as the experience and knowledge of your staff.

## RETENTION

Families may have circumstances that make it necessary for the student to leave your school and that is to be expected. However, some students and families might be transferring out of your school for other reasons. When a student transfers out of your school, it is important to understand why he/she is leaving your program. Collect this data to create a clear understanding of shifts in attrition. Knowing WHY is what you will need to make adjustments and improvements. Some schools promise more than they deliver and some do not deliver a desired experience. To support school-wide retention, consider the Four R's Framework and set a course for your district or school!



*With SchoolMint [during the application phase of enrollment], we've really just had a lot of success because we can see exactly who's applying, where they're from, and what grades they are in.*



## Continue Telling Your School's Story

The marketing trend for 2018/2019 school year is to "Tell Your School Story." As you move forward with recruitment and retention efforts, remember marketing is everything!

If you'd like to discuss how SchoolMint can make your recruitment and enrollment efforts more effective, call us today at (844) 287-2466.

[SEE A DEMO NOW](#)

