Generation X Parents: From Helicopters to Stealth Bombers

Have you noticed that, just when you thought you were starting to understand Baby Boomer parents, suddenly the parents of students in your division seem to be acting differently? What you are recognizing is that the majority of parents of K-12 students today are no longer members of the Baby Boomer generation. Those parents, who were children of the ’60’s (think “flower power”) have been replaced by members of Generation X. Recognizing the characteristics of this generation - as individuals, as parents, and as taxpayers - can help your division provide the best possible education to your students.

The characteristics and expectations of Generation X parents are discussed in an article by Neil Howe entitled “Meet Mr. and Mrs. Gen X: A New Parent Generation” which appeared in the January 2010 edition of The School Administrator. You can read the entire article here: http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=11122

Some of the highlights of this article are:

- “helicopter” parents have been replaced by “stealth bomber” parents.
- GenX parents are very comfortable researching teaching methods and want to discuss what they’ve found with educators.
- GenX parents have a market view of almost everything—including education. In accordance with market principles, they expect there to be multiple competitive options for everything—including their children's education. And, if such options aren’t readily available, this generation of parents will create them.
- So, what’s a public school division to do? Mr. Howe suggests that school divisions should market to parents, building trust and not assuming that parents will bring any brand loyalty to their relationship with their local school division. He emphasizes that public schools can no longer afford the luxury of being the default option for educating the children of modern parents.

We highly recommend that you take the time to read Mr. Howe’s article. You will come away with a better understanding of the parents in your division and thus a better understanding of how to educate their children.