

**WHY**  
DO PARENTS  
**CHOOSE**  
INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOLS?



*Find out what prospective  
families want from your school with  
NAIS's Jobs-to-Be-Done research*

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National Association  
of Independent Schools

*The National Association of Independent Schools provides services to more than 1,900 schools and associations of schools in the United States and abroad, including more than 1,600 nonprofit, private K-12 schools in the U.S. that are self-determining in mission and program and are governed by independent boards. NAIS works to empower independent schools and the students they serve.*

**LEARN MORE AT** [www.nais.org](http://www.nais.org)

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Independent schools are facing rapid change in a complex environment. Some schools are struggling to reach full enrollment. Many are working to control expenses and achieve financial sustainability.

Determining what motivates both your current and prospective parents can help your school focus its offerings and rein in expenses. It can also help you tailor how you communicate your school's unique value, boosting enrollment and parent satisfaction levels.

To assist you and other NAIS members in this venture, NAIS conducted research on parental decision-making using a methodology called Jobs to Be Done. The findings, drawn from a series of interviews with parents who recently made an enrollment decision for their children, can help your school focus on the things that matter most to families.



# WHAT *is* A JOB TO BE DONE?

*Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) is based on the theory that consumers have a particular “job” that they want each product or service to help them accomplish. The job may be little (such as “help me pass the time on a long airplane flight”) or big (“help me gain the credentials to get a better job”). But in each case, the purchaser wants to make progress in some way.*



**When my child’s school is failing him or her – either academically or by not providing a safe learning environment – help me find a school that will address those obstacles, so I can ensure that my child will not fall further behind and will eventually thrive in school.**



**When I have a child who is intelligent and emotionally mature, help me find a school that will continue that growth so I can ensure my child will fulfill his or her potential, mature, and be prepared for college.**

JTBD research begins with a series of interviews with people who have just started using a product or service (“hired”) or just stopped using it (“fired”). The interview results are analyzed to find common behavior patterns that are observable (what customers did) rather than aspirational (what customers say they would do).

Because the JTBD interviews are based on actual behavior, they include the true hiring and firing criteria and the trade-offs people actually made. JTBD helps uncover what truly motivates a person to buy or use a service, not just features they might like.

NAIS used the JTBD methodology to better understand what motivates parents to choose independent schools. By analyzing interviews with parents and conducting a cluster analysis, NAIS was able to identify four primary reasons parents choose independent schools. Parents in each of the four “Jobs” have similar functional, emotional, and social needs that they are trying to fulfill.

By using the JTBD research to understand parents’ needs, your school can better communicate your unique value and focus your offerings to better align with market demand.



**When a school is focused almost solely on test scores and academic curriculum, help me find a school that will focus on my child’s social and emotional development, so I can be sure that my child will be a well-rounded and productive member of society.**



**When my child has talents that must be cultivated and I have a select set of acceptable colleges, help me find a school with an excellent academic program and outstanding reputation, so I can ensure my child gets into one of the select set of schools and fulfills his or her potential.**

## WHAT A JOB 1 PARENT WANTS

*When my child's school is failing him or her — either academically or by not providing a safe learning environment — help me find a school that will address those obstacles, so I can ensure that my child will not fall further behind and will eventually thrive in school.*



### “Michael and Tony”

Michael and Tony's daughter is in third grade and struggling with reading. She was diagnosed with dyslexia recently and started receiving some extra help, but her current school is not providing the attention she needs. Her classmates are teasing her, and she is beginning to dread going to school. They need a new school that can give their daughter more attention so she doesn't fall behind.

## JOB

# 1

### THIS SITUATION IS MORE ABOUT

- Leaving the current school because it is not working
- Reassuring parents that the new school is capable of helping their child thrive
- Helping a child overcome a bad experience in school
- Solving a problem quickly or addressing the situation immediately
- Preventing the child from falling behind or continuing to struggle to learn

### THIS SITUATION IS LESS ABOUT

- Having a plan or knowing the plan for the child
- Having a school that is close to home (within reason)
- Finding the lowest-price option
- Achieving academic excellence in the traditional sense



### “Anne and John”

Anne and John’s daughter is about to graduate from a K–8 school. They want to give her a safe space to grow and learn, free from the social distractions she may encounter in a very large high school. They are looking for a school that will challenge their daughter academically and emotionally while providing solid guardrails to keep her focused. They also want to find a community where other parents share similar values.

### WHAT A JOB 2 PARENT WANTS

*When I have a child who is intelligent and emotionally mature, help me find a school that will continue that growth so I can ensure my child will fulfill his or her potential, mature, and be prepared for college.*

### THIS SITUATION IS MORE ABOUT

- Moving to an environment that fosters the child’s growth
- Providing a meaningful school experience
- Providing a challenge academically and emotionally
- Preparing the child for college and helping him or her mature

### THIS SITUATION IS LESS ABOUT

- Getting the child into the “best” middle schools, high schools, or colleges (Ivy League, etc.)
- Handling difficulties with learning or troubled situations
- Fulfilling the parents’ desires for the child, regardless of what the child wants

JOB

2



## WHAT A JOB 3 PARENT WANTS

*When a school is focused almost solely on test scores and academic curriculum, help me find a school that will focus on my child's social and emotional development, so I can be sure that my child will be a well-rounded, productive member of society.*



“Jen”

Jen's son is starting kindergarten this year. Until now, Jen's mother has taken care of him at home. Jen is concerned her son is too used to being the center of attention and may be a bit selfish. She wants to expose him to kids from all different backgrounds in a school that will address his social and emotional development and teach him to be a good member of society. In addition, she is concerned about the public schools' focus on standardized testing.

JOB

3

### THIS SITUATION IS MORE ABOUT

- Helping the child be a “whole” or “better” person
- Helping the child integrate into society
- Teaching the child how to interact with others who might be different
- Applying knowledge in the real world through projects, etc.

### THIS SITUATION IS LESS ABOUT

- Focusing solely on academic learning or pressures
- Learning through traditional skill-and-drill pedagogy
- Reinforcing a specific set of values, morals, or ethics





### “Gina and Tim”

Gina and her husband Tim both graduated from Yale. Their son is in sixth grade and is very bright, placing at the top of his class regularly. He’s also very good at sports and other extracurricular activities. Gina and Tim feel that their role is to give him the “best” education so he can get into Yale or a comparable Ivy League school. They want him to have an elite network and top job opportunities.

### WHAT A JOB 4 PARENT WANTS

*When my child has talents that must be cultivated and I have a select set of acceptable colleges, help me find a school with an excellent academic program and outstanding reputation, so I can ensure that my child gets into one of the select set of schools and fulfills his or her potential.*

### THIS SITUATION IS MORE ABOUT

- Getting into the best colleges
- Meeting the goals of highly educated and motivated parents who believe education is important for their child
- Choosing a school that has a good reputation locally and top rankings nationally
- Choosing a school that can demonstrate high matriculation rates to the most selective colleges
- Fulfilling the parents’ educational plans for the child

### THIS SITUATION IS LESS ABOUT

- Achieving social and emotional well-being, unless it’s required for success
- Letting the child make his or her own decisions
- Having a diverse environment

JOB

4

# NEXT STEPS



Use NAIS's Jobs-to-Be-Done research to move forward strategically at your school. Consider these steps.

- 1** Know the makeup of your market and find out what Jobs your school fulfills for current parents.
- 2** Listen carefully to prospective parents and ask more questions. Seek to understand their reasons for leaving previous schools and choosing new ones, their anxieties, and their desired outcomes.
- 3** Understand what Job(s) your school can serve well. Note that most schools are really good at just one or two. Trying to be all things to all people risks running up costs and diluting your brand in the marketplace.
- 4** Examine how well your school's current programs and communications align with those Jobs. Also adjust what you invest in and the way you talk about your school to match parents' desired outcomes.
- 5** Listen to unsatisfied parents in other schools to understand how you might create new offerings or package existing ones differently to resonate with those parents.
- 6** Use the JTBD findings in discussions with your board or leadership team, as well as teachers. What conversations could help you be sure that your offerings match market demands? How can you use Jobs to inform conversations with prospective families or in admission efforts?



➔ Find out more about how you can use NAIS's research by going to [www.nais.org](http://www.nais.org) and searching on "Jobs to Be Done."





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have any questions or feedback.*

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