Board Chair / Head of School Partnership: a facilitated discussion

Trustee Governance Conference: Thinking for Boards and Heads of School
Saturday, February 1, 2020

Introductions

Agenda

• Partnership discussions
• Helpful resources
• Fostering partnerships
How many of you are a . . . **Trustee**?  
**Chair of Board**?  
**Head of School**?

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**A question for you . . .**

*What is the #1 issue you are currently having to deal with at your school?*
Annual Trustee Governance Conference:
Strategic Thinking for Boards and Heads of School
December 3, 2016

Session 5. Board Chair Forum – a conversation - Moderated by Dane Peters

Opening question presented to the group of 26 board chairs: What is the #1 issue you are currently having to deal with at your school?

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Keeping in mind . . .
managing people’s expectations using . . .
transparency & trust
— Board
— Staff
— Families

Be careful about trying to please everyone all of the time . . .

“3. Defining the Purpose—Duty #1
Organizations must resist the temptation to be all things to all people; to chase popular causes; to overestimate themselves and underestimate what is needed.”
Five elements were consistently present and paramount to strategic effectiveness of boards and to a set of institutional outcomes for independent schools in our study:

#5 The relationship between board chair and head of school is critical.

#4 Boards that rate highly on strategic effectiveness contribute positively to institutional performance.

#3 The purposeful use of committees is associated with increased strategic effectiveness.

#2 Strategically effective boards are intentional about onboarding new trustees.

#1 The percentage of trustees who are current parents has minimal direct influence on strategic effectiveness within boards of trustees.
Five elements were consistently present and paramount to strategic effectiveness of boards and to a set of institutional outcomes for independent schools in our study:

#5 The relationship between board chair and head of school is critical.

Stability Markers

#1 Cash Reserve/Debt/Endowment mix
#2 Strategic Plan/Strategic Financial Plan
#3 Executive Leadership
#4 Hard Income Driven
#5 Faculty Culture & the Student Experience
#6 Enrollment Demand in Excess of Supply
NAIS – “Trustee Table Podcast”

The Trustee Table is an NAIS podcast that focuses on providing insights and information for trustees, board chairs, and school administrators on critical governance and leadership issues. Each episode will include a discussion with an expert in the field on a specific topic or challenge facing independent schools.

Be sure to rate, review, and subscribe to hear a new episode each month.

Find The Trustee Table on iTunes, SoundCloud, Stitcher, and Google Play.

Looking for more NAIS podcasts? Listen to Member Voices for stories from the thoughtful, hard-working individuals who make up the independent school community.

First must-listen to episode . . .

Episode 6:
Building the Future Together: The Board Chair and Head of School Partnership
TOP FIVE TAKEAWAYS

1. Impact on effective governance – Research shows that a trusting relationship between the chair and the head is the starting point for good governance. Each party has a specific set of responsibilities and must honor those boundaries. The chair and head should have a conversation before the start of the school year to discuss their responsibilities and how they want to communicate if/when boundaries become blurred.

2. Take time to build trust – It is important for the chair and head to get to know each other outside the formal setting of the boardroom. Spending time to learn about one another’s histories, motivations, and philosophies related to education helps shape the relationship and provides a foundation for increased understanding when differences occur. Many chairs and heads find it helpful to discuss how each understands the mission statement and where they see it playing out in the daily life of the school.

3. Collaborate regularly – The chair and head should partner to plan board meetings and the annual board retreat. During the retreat, the chair and the head can lead a discussion about mission and how the major initiatives of the year support and align to school goals. It is important for trustees to see the chair and the head working together to implement a common agenda.

4. Build a positive board culture – As the leaders in the school, the chair and the head set the tone and establish standards for how the board will conduct business. The chair and the head need to encourage trustees to ask one another hard questions and to find a level of comfort with civil disagreement on difficult issues. A board with a positive culture will seek to make sense of the data before taking action.

5. Tackle evaluation together – Both the chair and the head should see evaluation as a formative process. It’s essential for the head and the chair to agree on yearly goals and how the attainment of those goals will be measured. As the chair and head have their weekly or bi-weekly meetings, the chair should offer constructive feedback to help the head continuously improve. A more formal mid-year review and summative evaluation should also be scheduled.

Attributes of an Outstanding Board Chair

1. Personal Commitment to the Nonprofit
2. Exude Enthusiasm
3. Ability to See the Big Picture
4. Is Not “OVER” Committed
5. Relationship Magician
6. Results Oriented
7. Huge Rolodex
8. Existing Mutual Respect with the CEO/Exec. Dir.

“Attributes Of An Outstanding Nonprofit Board Chairman” by Jay Love SmartBrief BoardSource
Board Culture

John E. Creedon, author of the NAIS (National Association of Independent Schools) *The Board Chair Handbook*, wrote this excellent article, "Boardroom: Cultivating a Positive Board Culture." There is so much good information.

The author captures the essence of his piece in this opening sentence: “A negative board culture can introduce toxicity, where the self-interest of a few board members prevails, influential people yield imbalanced power over others, and only a few positive rituals bring people together.”

The Bottom Line

SHAPING TRUST in Your School

By Sam Peirce
Decisions John Carver Style

**STRATEGIES**
- Mission
- Survival
- Leadership

**PARTNERSHIP**
- Authorizations
- Finance Policies
- Enrollment
- Employment terms

**OPERATIONAL**
- Admissions
- Staffing
- Program
- Systems

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- Board’s Advice
- Head’s Advice

*BOARDS That Make a Difference* by John Carver

A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations

*THIRD EDITION*
1. Implementing Best Practices
2. Building Board Diversity
3. Leveraging Social Media
4. “Refreshing” the Board
5. Using Tech Effectively

Five elements were consistently present and paramount to strategic effectiveness of boards and to a set of institutional outcomes for independent schools in our study:

#3 The purposeful use of committees is associated with increased strategic effectiveness.
“Committees, it should be clear, do not act for the board. They prepare issues for the board to then act on. Committee work is always subject to board approval.”

Great book for new trustee orientation

Other Committees Within a School Community

- FACULTY & STAFF
  - Professional Development
  - Curriculum
  - School Support
Other Committees Within a School Community

SCHOOL COMMITTEES

Diversity
Fund Raising Events
Safety

... and - Parents Association

Working as a Team to Make the Best Decisions
ONE BOARD’S RETREAT ACTION ITEMS
(Notes taken at a Board Retreat)

• **ACTION:** Create an application for trustees (Dane will share).
• **ACTION:** Each committee needs to create its own charter—what that committee is charged to work on (Dane will share); Governance Committee reviews all charters annually.
• **ACTION:** Create matrix/spreadsheet of trustees, committees, chairs, roles, etc.
• **ACTION:** Establish a Provision for Plant Renewal, Replacement and Special Maintenance policy (PPRRSM) account (rainy day fund).
• **ACTION:** All committee materials (agendas, minutes, support materials) should be posted for board to review. People appointed to take committee minutes should be those who can make good committee chairs. This will help with succession.
• **ACTION:** Set up Prospective Candidate Matrix: for recruiting board members, who suggested, when, keep track of candidate details.

**ACTION:** Auditor will review Conflict of Interest forms. If a conflict does exist/occurs, the conflict is declared and then justified via governance committee. If they are comfortable with the decision, then reported to board for approval.

**ACTION:** Need to put a Whistleblower Policy in place. Dane has policy that we can use as a model.

**Bylaws Questions:**

- **ACTION:** Be sure that there is an article on approving amendments in the bylaws; when you amend the bylaws, you want to have it reviewed by legal counsel.
- **ACTION:** Have bylaws link in Board Manual. Be sure to post online; only trustees can access; only governance chair can edit; others view only.
- **DISCUSSION ACTION:** Review length of service for officers of the board.
- **DISCUSSION ACTION:** Remove the restrictions on number of present parents on the board.
- **ACTION:** Check bylaws: strive for trustees to serve two, 3-year consecutive terms and then they must rotate off for at least one year.
Outstanding Resources

Many more resources at http://danesedblog.blogspot.com/

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