ISACS PRIMER for TRUSTEES Part I

MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF TRUSTEESHIP  By Pearl Kane

Independent schools owe their success largely to the high caliber and professional commitment of the people who work in the schools, and most assuredly that includes members of the board of trustees. In the most effective schools, board members are part of the community of learners, continuously seeking to expand their knowledge and develop their skills.

Governance decisions in any given school must be based on a broad understanding of independent schools and the context in which they operate. This publication is designed specifically to assist trustees in the learning process as they develop such an understanding. It is based on a review of literature on boards and on forty-five personal interviews with leaders in independent education -- trustees, heads of schools, association executives, consultants and recruiters.

The first part describes the characteristics of independent schools and their changing environment. The second addresses problems and challenges confronting independent school boards and board-head relations. The Independent Schools Association of the Central States hopes that you will read this booklet and set aside time to discuss the issues that have relevance for you, your board, and your school.

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THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL SECTOR

There are approximately 1,500 independent schools in the United States. Although the marketplace shapes independent schools, they have been relatively free to define themselves. A tremendous range of schools has evolved, varying in philosophy, organization, and style. Some schools are highly traditional, while others are progressive in outlook. Some are boarding schools, some day schools, some a combination of the two. Some are single-sex, some are coeducational. Some are highly academic and selective, others are "second-chance" schools for students who have experienced failure elsewhere. Some are free or inexpensive; some have sliding scales of tuition depending on family income; some have extensive scholarship programs; and some are costly, accessible only to the affluent. Some have the stability of generations of alumni and alumnae, while others have graduated only a few classes. Some have impressive financial endowments and extensive resources in buildings and grounds, and others have recourse only to income from tuition and annual fund raising, and are obliged to operate in modest facilities or even makeshift spaces.

However varied in their student composition, resources, objectives and approaches, independent schools share six basic characteristics: self-governance, self-defined curriculum, self-selected students, self-selected faculty, and small size.
SELF-GOVERNANCE
Though an independent school may have a religious affiliation, it is the independence of
the board of trustees that distinguishes the form of governance from that of other schools.
The trustees choose a chief administrator, to whom are delegated all aspects of the day-
to-day operation of the school. In an independent school, the absence of bureaucracy
allows a fluid organization in which the roles of administrators and teachers are not
rigidly prescribed. Many administrators also teach, and many teachers do administrative
work as department heads, admissions officers, or college counselors. The blurring of
responsibilities between administrators and teachers may help to explain why most
independent school teachers are not unionized.

SELF-SUPPORT
As not-for-profit, tax-exempt corporations, independent schools rely primarily on tuition
for support, supplemented by gifts from parents, alumni, foundations, and corporations
and, for some, endowment income. Most independent schools are not eligible for
significant financial assistance from local, state, or federal agencies. Although aid is
sometimes available for books and equipment and, in many states, for transportation and
mandated state services such as attendance monitoring, independent schools tend to be
cautious about accepting government subsidies because they pose a threat to self-
governance.

SELF-DEFINED CURRICULUM
Though free to experiment, most independent schools offer a highly academic and
rigorous curriculum. Because of the small size of most independent schools, a limited
range of courses is available to students within a school's academic range, and all
students within that school take the same basic curriculum. The independent school's
explicit curriculum has two non-academic facets that are equally emphasized and
interconnected: physical development and the overriding goal of character development.
Typically, independent schools do not have the kind of tracking that allows students to
opt out of academic courses or that precludes opportunities for attending college.

SELF-SELECTED STUDENTS
Although market conditions may cause schools to shift their standards of admission,
independent schools are at liberty to seek and select the kind of students they believe will
benefit from the educational program offered. Selection is mutual: the school chooses the
student, but the student also chooses the school. This mutual freedom of association by
students and schools is fundamental to the sense of community underlying the
educational effectiveness of independent schools.

SELF-SELECTED FACULTY
Each independent school develops its own criteria for hiring faculty and, in all but a few
states, independent schools are not bound by requirements for teacher certification.
Independent schools show a strong preference, particularly at the secondary level, for
teachers with undergraduate and graduate majors in the liberal arts and sciences who
have achieved academic success in rigorous college programs. Similarly, these graduates
of highly academic colleges may be drawn to independent schools where students are preparing for prestigious colleges.(1)

SMALL SIZE
Typically small, with a median student enrollment of 318, independent schools characteristically resist growing beyond a specified size, regardless of the quality of the applicant pool or the number of candidates vying for admission.(2) There is an important consequence of small size for the "average" student. Researchers have argued that independent schools provide the optimal learning environment for such students, those who are neither top academic achievers nor in need of special supportive services.(3) It is difficult for students to become "socially invisible" non-persons, as happens in many large urban schools.(4)

Small size also provides students in independent schools with increased opportunities to become involved and greater possibilities for leadership than they might have in large public schools. Most students are active in the co-curricular life of the school. Students perform in plays, write for the student newspaper, and participate in sports. Varying degrees of skill and proficiency provide few barriers in independent schools. More often than not, any student who wants to participate in an activity is invited to join, and in some schools all students are required to play competitive sports.

Comparative research on public and independent schools documents that the small size of independent schools permits teachers to devote more time to counseling and tutoring individual students. Parents who send their children to independent schools because of the personal attention afforded their youngsters and the opportunities to participate in the life of the school appear to be getting what they pay for.(5)

THE CHANGES CONFRONTING INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS
Board members have to be aware that the environment of independent schools is changing. Increasing ethnic diversity, financial constraints, demographic change, a slow-growth economy, competition from public schools, and the recent attraction of venture capitalists to education are just a few of the issues that must figure into the planning of an independent school's future.

The largest single problem confronting a number of independent schools is the need to fill seats. Despite two decades of decline in the number of school-age children in the nation's population, independent school enrollment has remained relatively constant. This "stability" represents a growing market share and reflects a broader outlook on the kinds of students independent schools are willing to attract and admit. Many independent schools are now receptive to students with varying abilities and learning styles, and there has been a substantial increase in the number of students of color.

ETHNIC DIVERSITY
Whether out of financial need or social commitment, independent schools welcome ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. The proportion of students of color has increased from an average of 5 percent to almost 14 percent over the past two decades. Although
the largest minority in independent schools is Asian, many of whom pay full tuition, a significant number of minority students are recruited from lower socioeconomic groups, placing a greater financial burden on the school. Through individual and foundation efforts over the past two decades, and by re-prioritizing expenses, the independent school sector has increased by 50 percent the amount of financial aid granted to students.(6)

Increased diversity among independent school students has mutual benefits for the new recruits and for the kinds of students who traditionally attend independent schools. If independent schools are preparing students to become the leaders of society, increased diversity will not only enrich the lives of all students, it will allow schools to prepare students for the world they will lead. By the year 2000, the United States will be a nation in which one out of every three people will be non-white.(7)

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS
The commitment to increase scholarship aid has been complicated (and has also been both a cause and effect of) increases in tuitions. After ten years of increasing tuition, there is growing agreement that a ceiling has been reached. Schools may have to stabilize increases in tuition costs to resemble the rate of inflation, or they will price themselves out of the market. Middle and upper-middle income families who work hard for their money sometimes resent funds doled out in the form of scholarship aid. In some schools, financial aid comes directly from tuition, and families that struggle financially may not be enthusiastic about subsidizing the tuition of other students. Nor do all parents welcome diversity. Some have chosen to leave the public schools for private schools where shared values and backgrounds make child rearing a less threatening prospect. These are the attitudes and behaviors often associated with the "baby boomer" generation. These same parents not only are a vocal part of the clientele; they also sit on the boards of many independent schools.

Even if scholarship aid is obtained through outside sources and separate funding, cost reduction is difficult. Independent schools must be prepared to confront potential competition from increased funding for public schools and the highly publicized private-enterprise schools, which promise technological advances and convenience services to parents. As public school reforms of the past ten years begin to be institutionalized, some of what is offered only in private schools, such as smaller schools and smaller classes, will be available to students in public schools. Growing acceptance of private enterprise in public education has opened another door to new competition.

Venture capitalists see the possibility of offering educational consumers what they want at a cost that may be significantly less than tuition in independent schools. Their focus on technology and year-around schooling, for example, may appeal to public school parents and those independent school parents who are not convinced that the school their child is attending is worth the investment. It is important for the independent school sector to communicate to their constituents and prospective families what is special about their schools and what is distinctive. Parents need to understand the "value added" for their tuition dollars.
FACULTY COMPENSATION
Formal and informal surveys point to academic quality as the chief reason that parents choose to pay the added costs for independent education. The high caliber of the teaching staff has remained the most significant element in the schools’ success. Attracting and retaining excellent teachers is an important priority. Keeping salaries somewhat competitive has been difficult with growing demands for school services from parents.

Approximately 80 percent of the instructional budget of many independent schools is devoted to teacher salaries. Salary increases have come slowly but steadily over the past decade, in line with a school's financial situation. When student enrollment becomes a major problem, teacher salaries are often "frozen" to offset the reduction in income from tuition. The administrators of these schools must deal with the negative effect on morale and the possibility of teachers' leaving, particularly with the potential competition from new forms of private schools.

Currently, average salaries are approximately 20 percent higher in public schools, and such jobs are now open to independent school teachers through "alternate routes to certification." The monetary incentive to enter public schools or to join schools developed by venture capitalists that offer higher compensation may be irresistible to some independent school teachers.

CONSUMERISM
Heavier demands on the till for teacher salaries have been matched by the consumerist demands of families. As one head of school observed, "We exist in an environment in which people expect independent schools to provide the very best because that's what we sell. People who are paying tuition don't want to hear that they are getting second best." In a sense, tuition costs are regarded as payment for a service; trustees and heads of schools tell us that parents are not reluctant to demand that service or to take legal action when they feel an injustice has been done to their child.

The consumerist attitude toward independent schools has replaced a familial feeling that once characterized the relationship. Being a customer rather than an extension of a family provides a sense of removal that makes litigiousness as likely in independent schools as in other American institutions. Consumerism also results in special demands on the schools to accommodate dual-career and single-parent families. High on the list of demands are "convenience" services, such as after-school and extended-day-care programs, services that private-enterprise schools are considering. To increase the appeal to working parents, some independent schools have been pressed to provide these extra services. Additionally, since parental responsibilities are often shared in dual-career families, both parents have less time available to give the school as either occasional volunteers or board members.
MANAGERIAL COMPLEXITY
Only recently has the word business been acceptable parlance when referring to the financial operation of the independent school. In former times, teacher salaries were privately arranged with the head of school, and there were few administrative functions to oversee. The roles of the admissions director and business manager, once occupied by the head of school, are now filled with specialists who talk about strategic planning, marketing, plant management, benefits packages, and staff negotiations, concepts that were foreign to independent schools in earlier years. The increase in the number of specialists has necessarily contributed to escalating administrative costs. While teachers are not union affiliated, school heads are often obliged to negotiate with several unions for support services. All of these functions and personnel have increased the complexity of managing personnel.

The management of facilities poses additional challenges. The historic buildings and spacious campuses that adorn and distinguish independent schools are often as costly to maintain as they are aesthetically pleasing. Many schools are struggling with upkeep. Some offset the cost of maintaining and repairing facilities through income generated from year-around use of facilities. Ancillary programs and income of this sort increase revenue, but they also increase insurance rates and the need for management personnel. In several towns, income-generating activities have raised questions about tax-exempt status, and there appear to be increasing demands on independent schools to contribute to the municipal government to offset the cost of services.

CHALLENGES TO INDEPENDENT SCHOOL BOARDS
The image of trustees of the past, as people who gave much and demanded little, is no longer accurate or tenable. In John McPhee's The Headmaster, the story of Frank Boyden, who ruled Deerfield Academy for sixty-six years, the school's trustees had a clear role. They showed up with their checkbooks when summoned. The trustees gave money and unquestioned authority over school governance to their charismatic headmaster.(10)

Times have changed. An environment hostile to the survival of independent schools and increased pressures from demanding constituencies make the job of overseeing schools more challenging. Even the division of labor that once characterized school board composition - work, wisdom, or wealth - is no longer feasible to meet the challenges confronting many schools today. Schools need money, but money alone will not guarantee survival or ensure that a school is worth supporting. Boards need members who have money or access to money, but they also need a majority of people who are intelligent and thoughtful, who care deeply about the school and its survival, and who can bring sound judgment and skills to its governance.

Although the role and prestige of trustees vary with the size and resources of an institution, there appears to be consensus on the issues confronting independent school boards. Four major areas of concern emerged from our interviews: commitment, composition, structure, and board/head relations. All have implications for board leaders.
COMMITMENT
Boards are being called on to play a more active role in the governance of their schools. Often, trustees are lured onto the board with a promise that the job will require minimal time, with the frequency of meetings cited as an index of the time commitment. Members quickly discover that the work of the board is accomplished by committees or individuals in between monthly or bimonthly meetings. Many trustees are not prepared to make the time commitment required to deal with the increased fiduciary problems, enrollment concerns, and legal matters that they find they must oversee.

James Ledyard's study of boards indicates that the average time trustees spend on school affairs is ten or eleven hours per month, an increase of 35 percent over the time commitment reported in similar studies conducted fifteen years earlier, as reported by Otto Kraushaar.(11) Such boards may require more time and attention for trustee matters than their members are prepared to give. The largest representation on boards is parents of current students, and most are from dual-career families. Many share child-rearing responsibilities and are reluctant to compromise their schedules.

COMPOSITION
Boards function smoothly when members have similar backgrounds and travel in the same social circles. It is hardly surprising that homogeneous boards perpetuate themselves. They nominate new members from the pool of people they know, those with whom they interact and feel comfortable. These status-congruent boards are likely to approve or disapprove decisions with unanimous votes and to have few disagreements.

Smooth sailing is convenient and pleasant, and perhaps efficient, but it is no measure of board effectiveness. There is some evidence that boards with high levels of interaction, communication and identification with school constituents may have more stable leadership patterns and may be more effective in making decisions than homogeneous boards. In recent years, the composition of boards has changed to reflect the changing nature of the parent body. Deliberate efforts have been made to recruit more women and people of color as trustees. The growing diversity of trustees may ultimately result in more interaction and more effective board performance; but it will also make the management of the board more difficult.(12)

Trustees and school heads interviewed for this study agreed that a predominance of board members who are parents, inexperienced with independent schools and unfamiliar with the concept of trusteeship, influences the tenor of the board in negative ways. Many parents on boards attended public schools themselves and are not steeped in the culture or traditions of independent education, nor are they accustomed to working on boards. Labeled "first-generation independent school trustees," these newcomers to independent schools often fail to understand a critical aspect of their role, which is to serve as advocates externally and informants internally, a role described in the literature on non-profit organizations as "boundary spanning." As boundary spanners, trustees are expected to buffer the school from interference by parents by addressing criticisms informally, but they must keep the board connected to the school community so that the board can respond to information and criticism appropriately.(13)
The preponderance of current school parents on boards, particularly in day schools, distinguishes independent school boards from those of other nonprofit organizations and often creates another major obstacle to effective board performance. Even experienced trustees may relinquish a sense of corporate responsibility and behave out of self-interest when the matter at hand has implications for their own child. Parents can become champions of single issues that divert and disrupt board proceedings.

Such parents choose the private school over the local public school, but are not necessarily committed to independent education. They often have a passion for one aspect of school life that may or may not be entirely satisfied in the chosen school or that may cloud their judgment as trustees, as they attempt to satisfy an immediate and specific interest for their child. Programs for learning-disabled youngsters or the organization of a special sports team are examples of such issues.

One school head provided an illustrative anecdote. The school had a strong football team, but did not pay sufficient attention to the overall physical education program. When the faculty decided to introduce a boys' volleyball team, it upset several trustees who were parents of football players. They were convinced that volleyball would attract prospective football players and ultimately destroy the school's winning football record. Single-issue trustees may persist in imposing their agenda on the board even when resources are limited and their objectives are shortsighted.

Team skills are necessary, particularly for board members who bring different perspectives to the work of the board, but they are often lacking even among accomplished and prominent people. Trustees who may be successful in individual practice as doctors or entrepreneurs or investment bankers, for example, may be at their best when working alone. Others who lack corporate or business experience may not know how to be team players. However highly skilled and personable in their own right, without specific training these individuals may impede group process within a governance structure where power must be exercised jointly.

Generally, building a strong board has become an arduous task. Staffing a board is analogous to staffing any organization. It requires careful planning and recruitment of people with a range of technical skills and other kinds of expertise, but increasingly boards must compete for talent. Corporate people with professional skills in financial management are in demand, and they are being tapped for high-visibility public service boards such as those of art museums and hospitals. People who are recruited for their wealth may have little interest in doing the work of a board. If contributions are a primary motivation for recruitment, the board may also lack the range of trustee skills that are needed.

There is growing recognition that building boards is an ongoing task that cannot be accomplished in a once-a-year scramble to find prospective members. With respect to recruitment, several lessons from higher education boards are beginning to influence independent school boards. Many boards have added a committee on trustees, for
example, which performs several functions, including board and school head evaluation, orientation of new members, and year-around recruitment. A second procedure borrowed from college governing boards is the institution of donors' councils, which meet annually to receive a briefing on the school's progress, a potential alternative to filling places on the board with people who are recruited mainly for their wealth.

The move toward diversity in the schools is beginning to be reflected in board composition. There is wider acceptance of women. Schools actively recruiting children of color to their ranks will be wise to recruit people of color to their boards. Board composition makes an important statement about the seriousness of the commitment to diversity. Necessarily, women and people of color will bring perspectives different from those of the like-minded people who governed schools in previous decades. Like their newly arrived colleagues from outside traditional independent school circles, they will make decision making more difficult.

The popular management writer Peter Drucker believes that good decision making requires dissent. Different factions on a board can be a vehicle for promoting mutual understanding and informed decision making. However, schools have an obligation to provide new recruits with the skills and knowledge that will enable them to handle their differences and their responsibilities deftly. The increasing diversity of the independent school board may turn out to be its greatest asset if it enhances dimensions of understanding in decision-making.

STRUCTURE
Many questions about the organization of boards emerged in the materials reviewed for this study and in discussions with trustees and board chairs. Board committee structure, monitoring and feedback procedures, faculty representation, and terms of office were topics that occupied conversations. Although the work of boards is accomplished mainly through committees, the mere appointment of committees does not ensure that they will function effectively. Committee chairs need guidance on how to run their committees and how to communicate with the board chair. There is no evidence that standard committees should exist in every school.

According to James Ledyard's study of independent day school boards, approximately one-fourth of the schools sampled has faculty representation. Some faculty representatives vote; others are appointed ex-officio. The Trustee Handbook published by NAIS indicates that approximately 15 percent of all member schools, day and boarding, have faculty serving as full trustees and an additional 38 percent have faculty observers at board meetings. Research on the advantages and drawbacks of faculty involvement would be useful for boards.

Ledyard found that approximately a quarter of the boards in his study evaluate their own performance and about two-thirds evaluate the head of the school. Less than a third provide a written evaluation. There was consensus among those consulted for this study on the importance of written evaluations for the board as a whole, individual board members, and the head of school. Several handbooks on governance advise boards to
conduct such evaluations, but boards and board chairs do not appear to turn to the literature on school governance to improve or inform their practices.

Other structural issues can evolve in response to a specific problem or as a result of unexamined tradition. For example, a policy change aimed at getting rid of a particular board member, without full consideration of the long-term effects of the policy, can leave the board with a dysfunctional rotation policy that is difficult to change. Similarly, the creation of "first- and second-class citizens" within boards may arise from insensitivity on the part of the board chair or the continuation of long-established procedures without consideration of their consequences. When the board chair asks the executive committee to remain at the end of a meeting, for example, those not involved may feel slighted. Individuals who are recruited to boards because they are high achievers in their own right want to feel competent and effective as board members. They can become alienated if their expertise is not tapped or if they feel they are not making a meaningful contribution.

These examples illustrate that boards would benefit from learning about optimal ways to structure their work and manage people. Clearly, managing a board requires special skills. In his book Boards That Make A Difference, John Carver argues that board difficulties stem from board design, observing that poor design is the reason most boards function as incompetent groups of competent people.(18) While it is important to learn about guidelines for structuring boards, there is no template for effective board design. Each school has to assess the needs of the school as well as the talent and expertise of members in setting up a structure for a particular school.

**BOARD/HEAD RELATIONS**

In his dissertation on board/head relations, headmaster James Scott describes the creative tension that exists between the board and the school head: the head is employed by the board and answerable to it, but the board also looks to the head for leadership and direction. The board is responsible for setting policy, but the school head usually guides the board in developing policy. (19) There are different perspectives on how the lines between administration and policy should be cast. In Private Schools, William McMillan sees the head's role as key in the development of school policy. McMillan observes that the school head's role is to initiate policy; the trustee's role, to evaluate and respond. In essence, McMillan views the board as an arm of management rather than an overseer of management, a model that seems unlikely to take hold in the economic climate of the 1990s.(20)

In the Independent Sector's publication Governance is Governance, Kenneth Dayton argues that governance is the distinct province of the board, and management is the exclusive province of the chief executive officer.(21) In most independent schools, neither a clear-cut division of responsibilities nor a policy-setting role for the school head is feasible or desirable. More typically, authority is shared, but school heads understand that working with their board is an essential part of the job, often consuming up to 25 percent of their time. Newly appointed heads are often surprised to discover the time, effort, and skill required to work with boards.
Search consultant James Wickenden surveyed 190 school heads to identify the skills necessary for successful headships. Head/board chair relations were ranked the highest, and head/trustee relations in general were ranked third. Most school heads are not trained to deal with boards and boards are not trained to give heads the kind of support that will ensure that they want to remain on the job. The NAIS 1991 survey of board chairs indicated that in approximately 60 percent of the schools studied the heads had no prior experience as heads of schools, and few had business or legal backgrounds or the kind of professional education that would prepare them for the political realities of the job.

Neophytes require greater support from the board, but are less apt to get it at a time when boards are experiencing financial pressures and are more bottom-line oriented. According to the NAIS 1991 survey, there may be a deterioration of board/head relations because boards expect heads of schools to have skills in finance and strategic planning, areas in which school heads say they have limited expertise.

The perception that the tender relationship between boards and heads is breaking down is fueled by the widespread belief that "Saturday night massacres," the sudden dismissal or forced resignation of heads, are occurring with increasing frequency. Empirical evidence on the causes of job termination is hard to find, but there appears to be a correspondence between the sudden dismissal of a newly appointed head and a change in the board chair.

In sum, the explanations for sudden dismissals include a number of problems related to school governance.

- Boards are business-oriented and demand bottom-line accountability.
- The fragility of the board/head relationship is a function of a softening enrollment market.
- School heads are unable to fulfill the mission of a high-profile college admissions record when they are attracting students of lower ability.
- There is a direct correlation between the rotation of the board chair and the tenure of the school's head, particularly with new heads of schools.
- Inadequate communication, both formal and informal, is the source of most problems.
Filling a vacant headship is disruptive to school life and expensive in human and financial resources. The recruitment process is an added burden to a school having problems already, but schools experiencing difficulty may be the most likely to displace the school head. Most schools employ a search firm or search consultant to aid in the head search process, adding to the in-house cost. Nancy Henningsen's study, The Search Process In Independent Schools, indicated that of the eighteen search firms surveyed, half have fees of $20,000 or more per search, and some firms charge a minimum of $30,000 or one-third of one first-year cash salary. (26) With the financial burden of paying off an employment contract and hours of faculty and board time devoted to the search, the energy of a school may be misdirected. More care must be exercised in fostering good board/head relations, since the consequences of a breakdown in this crucial relationship can be dire for both the school head and the board.

Already there are signs that fewer independent school educators are seeking top administrative posts. In Henningens's survey, head search consultants reported a diminished pool of traditional applicants for headship positions, although an increase in candidates who are women, minorities, college faculty, and public school administrators has taken up the slack. (27)

THE EDUCATION OF TRUSTEES

This exploratory study of independent school boards points to changes in the environment of the schools and to new challenges and opportunities facing their governing boards. To confront these challenges, board members need to work effectively as a team to maximize their collective strength and increase the skills and effectiveness of individual members. Boards must recruit capable people who are willing to commit to continued learning.

Boards that have not been tested in recent years may find that financial difficulties and the conditions of the marketplace will force them to get their houses in order. One school head in The South claimed that the recession provided an incentive for honing the skills of the board, which ultimately had a positive effect:

We had to work together to become a better school. You get sloppy when you don't have to win people over, sloppy in financial management and wasteful in opportunity. Our board and our school emerged stronger.

In the face of financial challenges and competition, board effectiveness will be pivotal in determining which schools improve and which schools survive. Given the magnitude of the task confronting independent schools, the absence at most schools of a systematic plan for trustee education appears to be a major limitation. This study shows that board members need education in how to be effective trustees; and education needs planning.

Trustee education is not a one shot deal. Similar to the development of faculty, learning among trustees requires a systematic and ongoing approach. Out of approximately 22,000 trustees whose schools are members of the National Association of Independent Schools 3,000 to 4,000 are new to this role each year. New trustees need to be oriented to their
responsibilities and to the organizations they hold in trust. As the configuration of a board changes each year, the board must strive to train and retrain itself if it is to work as an effective group.

Just as the school needs a strategic plan, boards need educational plans for their development. The educational plan may include team building, fund-raising, evaluation, and recruitment skills, as well as information about various aspects of school life and the broader social context of education. Board chairs request special training in conducting meetings, in board design, in monitoring performance of committee chairs, and in working in tandem with the head of school.

There are barriers that stand in the way of giving trustees the kind of education they need. The most significant is getting people to the gate. This study revealed a widespread problem: neither boards nor their individual members are predisposed to the notion of trustee education. The unwritten contract that trustees adopt when they commit themselves to boards does not usually include spending time on self-development or investing time on group development, such as the social skills of team building. Trustees must be persuaded to include board education as part of the responsibility of serving on a board. Board development must be scheduled into the year, and the board must encourage individual members to take advantage of trustee education outside of the school.

One way to ensure that expectations of trusteeship are clearly understood is to ask board members to sign an annual contract that delineates the mutual obligations of the individual trustee, the board and the head of school. The contract may be a simple one-page description that specifies expectations and responsibilities of the trustee such as attendance, contributions, participation on committees, and engagement in self-education. The contract may also clarify the school's obligation to the trustee such as orientation and training, timely information, well planned meetings and annual evaluation and the obligation of the head of school to provide accurate and timely information and to notify trustees in times of crisis. The contract will make explicit what is often conveyed casually, implicitly or not at all and provides a basis for evaluation. Items that may be important to address in the contract are outlined below:

Establishing the Mutual Contract: What is Expected of...

The Board Member * Term of service * Role expectations--trustee vs. delegate . * Attendance--meetings, other events * Confidentiality * Monetary contribution * Commitment to learn skills for successful trusteeship

The Board * Orientation & training * Annual calendar of meetings and events * Organized meetings * Evaluation & feedback

The Head * Accurate & timely information * Immediate communication in times of crisis.
Board membership carries much more than an honorific title or a recognition of generosity. As a trustee, one joins a historic tradition of voluntarism in private education that has contributed to the excellence of private schools in America. The task before trustees is to continue that tradition of excellence in the face of mounting challenges and the unprecedented opportunity to serve and educate a more diverse clientele.

FINAL THOUGHTS: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH ON INDEPENDENT SCHOOL BOARDS:

SEARCH FOR EXPERTISE
Boards need specific kinds of skills and need to recruit trustees who bring those skills. Staffing a board is similar to staffing any organization.

SEEK DIVERSITY
Boards that are diverse with respect to gender and ethnicity will bring perspectives that enhance decision making. Diversity requires increased effort in communication and teamwork.

DEVELOP A TRUSTEE CONTRACT
Individual trustees for boards must know exactly what is being asked of them and what they should expect from the board and from the school administration. A written contract specifying mutual obligations will clarify expectations.

PROVIDE TRUSTEE ORIENTATION
An annual training session helps to clarify roles and responsibilities, to acquaint members with the school and its purposes and to prepare board members to work as a team.

PLAN FOR CONTINUED LEARNING FOR ALL MEMBERS
Board effectiveness requires a broad understanding of education and specific skills of trusteeship. Boards function best when they commit to ongoing learning throughout the year.

Interviews Conducted:

NAME POSITION ORGANIZATION

Aitken, H. Peter Dir. of Research & Info Services NAIS, DC
Arnold, Chris Editor, The Trustee's Letter Educational Directions, RI
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Barr, Rhoda Associate Director Volunteer Consulting Group, NY
Barter, Richard Head of School Hawken School, OH
Belding, Richard Executive Director I.E.S., NJ
Bing, Cynthia Executive Director Indep. School Chairman's Assn., NY
Boese, Sally Executive Director VAIS, VA
Butler, Geoffrey Head of School Fort Worth Country Day School, TX
Calder, Frederick Executive Director NYSAIS, NY
Carney, James Chairman Carney-Sandoe Inc., MA
Chait, Richard Consultant Univ. of Maryland, MD
Cocke, Sara Ann Assistant CASE Reference Center, DC
Darin, Anna Program Coordinator CASE, DC
Edwards, Katherine Independent Consultant
Foster, Esty Business Manager The Collegiate School, NY
Frischling, Adele Trustee Dalton School, NY
Gibbs, Linda VP for Institutional Leadership NAIS, DC
Graham, William Admissions Director Gould Academy, ME
Hogan, Thomas Independent Consultant
Holmberg, Selby VP for Promoting Independent Ed. NAIS, DC
Ingram, Richard Executive Vice President Association of Governing Boards, DC
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FOOTNOTES


5. Kane, Teachers in Public and Independent Schools, pp. 40-47.

6. National percentages of students of color reported are for 806 members of the National Association of Independent Schools, NAIS Statistics 1992, p. 83.


8. See survey given to 30,479 students taking the SSAT administered by the Princeton Institute for Educational Research which indicates that 82 percent of those surveyed choose independent schools for the academic program.


13. Ibid., p. 141.


15. Ledyard, Independent Day School Boards, pp. 73-74.


17. Ledyard, Independent Day School Boards, pp. 105-06.


24. Gibbs, Overview of Results, pp. 2-3.


26. Ibid., p. 83.

27. Ibid., pp. 86-87.
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