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CONNOR ASSOCIATES
EDUCATION MARKETING AND ADVANCEMENT

Building Effective Boards

References: CONNOR ASSOCIATES, *BoardSource*, NAIS *Trustee Handbook*, *Principles for Good Government and Ethical Practice* (Panel on the Nonprofit Sector)

1. **Strategic rather than operational:** *Build your children's children's children's school.*

- a. Does not become involved in specific management, personnel, or curricular issues.
- b. Decisions that will affect the future of the school more than the present
- c. Periodic strategic planning and annual goals based on plan
- d. Get the funds needed to help fulfill the mission and plan
- e. Annual written evaluations for school, head, and board itself

2. **Clear statement of mission, vision, strategic goals** with plans and policies consistent with these.

The 6 Ws:

- a. Who we are
- b. Who we are not
- c. What we stand for
- d. What we won't stand for
- e. Why what we do matters
- f. Where we are headed

A. CORE PURPOSE (MISSION)

- a. Who we are and why it matters
- b. Soul of the school
- c. Reason(s) for being
- d. Glue that binds everyone together in common cause
- e. Basis for allocating resources

Evaluate: *Does it give a compelling reason to support the School? Serve as a guide for decision making? State why the School exists and why that is important?*

B. CORE VALUES

- a. What we stand for (what we won't stand for)
- b. Timeless, guiding principles. We will close before compromising these.
- c. Never compromised, regardless of consequence. Discovered, not created. Who you *really* are, not what you want to be like.

Evaluate: *How is this evidenced? Are these values credible? Will they align us through change? Will they guide decision making? Are they widely held?*

C. VISION (ENVISIONED FUTURE)

- a. Where we're headed. What is the one thing we do better than anything else? What will we be known for in the future? Will that attract commitment? Create meaning and purpose we are proud to be associated with? Offer a better future and inspire us to achieve it? Bridge the past and present with the future? Is it ambitious, achievable, and believable if we "stretch"?
- b. Inspires higher standards, achieves higher performance
- c. A vision is a mental model of a future state
- d. Describes a realistic, credible, and attractive future
- e. The picture on the top of the puzzle box
- f. The northbound train
- g. Star on the horizon
- h. Not an analysis or prediction

How to Evaluate a Great Vision:

- a. *Will this vision attract commitment and energize people to want to work or attend our school?*
- b. *Will it resonate with and motivate the outside community, creating new alliances and support?*
- c. *Will it provide purpose and direction?*
- d. *Set standards for excellence?*
- e. *Create meaning in people's lives?*
- f. *Create pride of association?*
- g. *Does it focus on a better future?*
- h. *Offer encouragement and hope?*
- i. *Appeal to core values?*
- j. *Emphasize the strength of a unified group?*
- k. *Use word pictures, images, metaphors?*
- l. *Communicate enthusiasm and kindle excitement?*

3. Loyalty, obedience, care.

- a. Loyalty: Interest of school before self, e.g., separates the needs of particular child or constituency from the school as a whole. School first. Inspire others to support school with time, expertise, funds (time, talent, treasure)
- b. Obedience: complies with all laws, regulations, and accreditation standards, policy on conflict of interest. Personal life is a reflection of school's mission.
- c. Care: make good decisions with reasonable care. Show up prepared and participate. Make sure your donations come in first.

4. Accountable for financial stability and financial future, preserve capital assets and endowment, oversee operations budget, participates in giving and actively raising funds. Ensure that the School has a secure and diversified funding base. (Annual giving, campaigns, endowment, special events, grants, bequests/planned gifts, in-kind goods and services).

5. Ambassadors: maintain good relations with constituents and broader community.

- a. POWER IS THE CAPACITY TO GENERATE RELATIONSHIPS
- b. Seek out formal and informal opportunities to spread the word
- c. Actively promote and advance the mission, policy, programs
- d. Remember alignment: Board speaks with one voice to the public

Board Survey Review

What does it tell us about ourselves as a board? How do we compare to the principles and expectations of great boards? What is our sphere of influence? How can we leverage who we are and who we know and create a **Board outreach plan**?

1. Depth and breadth of professions and expertise represented
2. Other Boards represented
3. Service organization contacts
4. Youth organizations
5. Media contacts
6. Government contacts
7. School and college contacts
8. Possible Funders
9. Possible potential families
10. Ideas to raise visibility

Board Priority Setting

What should our priorities be as a Board for the next year?

1. Increasing Effectiveness as a Board
2. Increasing referrals, enrollment, and retention
3. Increasing non-tuition revenue
4. Improving the product

6. Positive relationship with Head of School

- a. Selects, supports, nurtures, and evaluates HOS annually
- b. Always focused on a dynamic and positive relationship
- c. Publicly supports Head: no silence, no comment
- d. Marriage more important than the wedding: takes effort on everyone's part!

7. Actively seeks to recruit trustees with strategic expertise and perspectives that will achieve the mission and strategic goals of the school.

8. Committed to Board professional development and education, and trustee evaluation. Ensures all board members are actively involved in the work of board and committees

9. Committed to inclusivity, diversity (quantitative), and multiculturalism (qualitative)

Work of Committee on Trustees

- a. Does the board represent those we seek to serve?
- b. Are we missing perspectives that could expand our thinking?
- c. NAIS recommends no more than 50% current parent representation (advantage: less preoccupation with the present).

6 Dimensions of an Effective Board

1. **Context:** Understands mission, tradition, history
2. **Educational:** values self-assessment, trustee professional development and evaluation
3. **Interpersonal:** Encourages collective board strengths and looks for synergy
4. **Analytical:** Tolerates ambiguities and complexities and understands how one decision may impact other programs or constituents
5. **Political:** Builds healthy relationships among constituencies
6. **Strategic:** concentrates on few priorities that have long-range importance to sustainability and resilience

Notes:

50% of board meetings should be devoted to education, training, and discussion of strategic issues, and 50% of boards meet every other month