

The Head of School Evaluation Process

In an independent school, one of the primary sets of responsibilities for the board of trustees is the hiring, nurturing, and evaluating of the head of school. The evaluation, when done correctly, enhances communication between the head and board around the school's strategic goals. It establishes common goals for the year and utilizes appropriate assessments for measuring progress on these goals.

Guiding Principles for Effective Head of School Evaluations

The head of school evaluation process should be structured to focus on areas relevant to the board's expectations of the head.

The evaluation of the head is solely the responsibility of the board and should never be relegated to stakeholders outside of the board. It is appropriate to assess key constructs for which the head might be held responsible; however, these assessments should be undertaken with an understanding that no one outside of the board has a vote in the evaluation.

Boards should be specific in identifying the goals and objectives to be used in the evaluation process. Upon defining these items, a plan to assess them in a reliable and valid manner is important.

Clearly stated goals and areas of evaluation should be defined prior to the year for which the head will be evaluated. As much as possible the goals should be developed jointly by the board and the head; regardless, the head's evaluation should be conducted on areas that have been defined in advance.

Beyond the established goals, it is expected that the head will act in a legal and ethical manner. It also is expected that the head will adhere to board policies regarding the administration of all school business.

At times, the board may wish to evaluate the head on various factors about which the board may not have direct knowledge, but which are important to mission fulfillment and fall within the head's general responsibility. These factors might include the following:

- Academic progress
- Faculty morale
- Parent satisfaction
- Student satisfaction
- Community relationships
- Advancement of the school (admissions and fundraising)

The assessment of these areas is a process that should remain separate from the head's evaluation even though the results in these areas contribute to the head's evaluation. For example, if the board agrees that faculty morale is important to fulfilling

the school's mission, this area could be included as one of the criteria on which the head is evaluated. However, an assessment of faculty morale should be undertaken separately from the head's evaluation process to underscore the clear message that no one outside of the board has a vote in the evaluation.

There are various ways that data can be gathered in assessing those factors that are outside the board's direct knowledge, including the following:

- **Surveys.** Whether commercially developed or self-developed, care should be taken to ensure surveys' reliability and validity.
- **Focus groups.** Using a trained facilitator is important.
- **Personal interviews of individuals from the target demographic.** Whether using one or several interviewers, it is important to have a clearly defined protocol for conducting these interviews.
- **School data.** This could include data on student academic achievement such as AP, SAT, ACT, or ERB scores and/or development data, including dollar amounts generated by the annual fund or capital campaign.

Developing the Evaluation Process

In general, an effective evaluation process should include the following steps:

- **Review, as a board, the school's mission** to determine what expectations are appropriate to ensure that the mission is being implemented. This discussion could include such topics as the admission of mission-appropriate students, adherence to school policies, and management of the board-approved budget.
- **Review, as a board, the importance of other factors key to the sustainability of the school.** This discussion should recognize how various factors may interact to impact the head's performance (for example, how faculty morale might be impacted by a board-mandated reduction in faculty or reduction in budgets).
- **In collaboration with the head of school, establish goals and objectives for the upcoming school year.** These goals and objectives should be central to fulfilling the school's mission and should be measurable, either by quantitative or qualitative methods.
- **In collaboration with the head of school, decide what data should be collected, how it will be reported, and what process will be used for assessing the goals and objectives.** Data collection could include the use of a board survey (see below).

The Head of School Evaluation Survey

Surveys are often administered to individual trustees seeking their ratings of the head's performance on several items. (See a sample survey below.) The areas represented on this survey should either be ones for which the trustee has direct knowledge, or an informed knowledge based on data gathered from pre-established methods. The evaluation survey should likely include the following areas:

- Relationship with the board
- Representation of the school
- Overall leadership
- Objectives and goals, as agreed upon prior to the beginning of the year
- Additional comments

Sample Evaluation Timeline

The following is a sample yearlong timeline for the elements of a head of school evaluation:

- Prior to the start of the year: Establish jointly with the board and the head of school the goals, objectives, and expectations for the year.
- Prior to the start of the year: Identify additional areas to be evaluated.
- Throughout year: Commission an assessment of additional areas identified to influence the board's evaluation.
- Bi-monthly: Board chair and head discuss progress toward goals, objectives, and expectations at regular intervals throughout the school year.
- Late spring: Request of the head of school a self-evaluation related to goals for the year.
- Late spring: Request of the head of school proposed goals for the following year.
- Late spring: Administer the head evaluation survey to all trustees.
- End of the school year: Convene the board or evaluation committee to discuss the head's self-evaluation and the trustees' evaluations of the head.
- Prior to the start of the next year: Draft the evaluation report for approval by the board. Prior to the start of the next year: Present the evaluation report to the head of school and establish goals for the following year. Following presentation of the evaluation to the head, identify any areas in which the head would benefit from a specific professional development opportunity.

The guiding principles and suggested timeline above and sample survey below were originally developed by Steve Robinson, former SAIS president (2017-2015), with Damian Kavanagh, former SAIS vice president (2010-2017). The document was later revised by Kirk Walker, former SAIS president (2015-2019)

Sample Head of School Evaluation Survey to be completed by board members

Please respond to the following items regarding the effectiveness of the head of school on the following items:

Working with the Board	Not at all effective	Effective	Less effective	Highly effective	Extremely effective
Participates meaningfully in board discussions					
Communicates well with the board					
Informs the board of independent school best practices					
Generates meaningful ideas for board consideration					
Provides appropriate support to the board in strategic planning					
Representing the School					
Appearance is appropriately professional					
Is appropriately visible at school functions					
Maintains an appropriately positive attitude					
Communicates well with the school community					
Leading					
Is mission focused					
Administers board policies					
Executes the duties of head of school ethically					
Displays stewardship with school resources					
Provides leadership for academic programs					
Provides leadership for co-curricular programs					
Provides leadership for fund raising activities					
Provides leadership for campus operations					
Accomplishing established goals and objectives					
Goal 1					
Goal 2					
Goal 3					
Please provide additional comments related to the head's effectiveness during the past year:					