

Leadership Transition Checklist

SAIS has developed resources for outgoing heads, incoming heads, boards, and other departments in the school community for reference during a leadership transition. This checklist is a simplified version of those resources. You may access the full list at www.sais.org/transition.

Outgoing Head			
☐	Remain responsible for day-to-day operations until the new head's start date.	☐	Examine current senior leadership team.
☐	Manage expectations from board, faculty, and school community.	☐	Make final administrative hires consulting with incoming head when appropriate.
☐	Address sensitive conversations in person with new head.	☐	Identify faculty members ready to assume leadership roles.
☐	Be mindful of new head's ongoing responsibilities.	☐	Address personnel concerns, including necessary staff terminations.
☐	Discuss specifics on any overlap in leadership.	☐	Collect and compile updates from all departments.
☐	Share recent challenges or difficult decisions.	☐	Address outstanding tuition payments.
☐	Create a new, non-school email.	☐	Prepare faculty and staff for transition in leadership.
Incoming Head			
☐	Share preferred method of communication during transition.	☐	Review current or previous legal issues with school attorney.
☐	Understand school's overall health. Form your own opinions.	☐	Schedule campus visits needed between acceptance and start date.
☐	Schedule time off campus to share observations with outgoing head.	☐	Build trusting relationship with CFO to understand how resources are being used.
☐	Create list of people to meet during the transition.	☐	Obtain status update on current strategic plan.
☐	Identify behind-the-scenes players that get things done.	☐	Identify required personal appearances (events, graduation, etc.).
☐	Obtain reports from any surveys deployed in the past three years.	☐	Ask different groups about unspoken rules and culture of the school community.
☐	Review most recent accreditation report.	☐	Meet with school's accreditation coordinator.
☐	Connect with accrediting agency, give notification of leadership change.	☐	Review ongoing requirements of accrediting agency including standards, process, and timeline for next review or report.
☐	Determine dual accreditation with state or other association, if applicable.	☐	Review specific state guidelines and required reporting applicable to independent schools.

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	Advanced Preparation for Board and Current Head		
☐	Develop a succession plan before it is needed.	☐	Outline necessary communication to community stakeholders.
☐	Clearly define process of replacing existing head of school for both planned and unplanned instances.	☐	Include financial considerations for conducting a search.
☐	Outline and agree upon future direction of the school.	☐	Develop a dynamic list of possible internal candidates.
☐	Identify skills, traits, and experience of an ideal candidate.	☐	Consider merits of an interim head, determine scenarios in which an interim head would be preferred.
	Board		
☐	Develop a joint written announcement to the school community.	☐	Be transparent with the new head and about the state of the school, no surprises.
☐	Keep school community informed during search process.	☐	Discuss goals for new head and develop potential timeline.
☐	Develop clear plan for departure of outgoing head.	☐	Provide executive coach or mentor as part of head's contract.
☐	Identify school goals in progress, past and future action steps, and persons responsible.	☐	Review tax implications of compensation package benefits.
☐	Create stability with board leadership.	☐	Include specific terms and evaluation schedule in head's contract.
☐	Do not view a transition as an opportunity to overstep board's role.	☐	Give incoming head full and complete support of board.
	Finance and Facilities		
☐	Determine how new head might be involved in budgeting for upcoming school year.	☐	Provide both periodic reports and long-term financial and facilities plans.
☐	Identify risks and liabilities.	☐	Discuss long-term financial strategies and challenges for the school.
☐	Detail current operating expenses.	☐	Outline school's investment policy and how endowment is used.
☐	Identify programs, projects, or maintenance that have been put on hold.	☐	Identify both short- and long-term cash flow.

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Senior Leadership, Faculty, and Staff			
☐	Determine how new head will be involved in hiring of personnel for next school year.	☐	Identify members of senior leadership team and those on broader leadership team.
☐	Detail faculty compensation models including salary scale if applicable.	☐	Discern dynamics of leadership team.
☐	Compare compensation and benefits package to peer, competitor, and local public schools.	☐	Identify and acknowledge current concerns from each member of the team.
☐	Detail history of tuition remission for faculty and staff.	☐	Compile a report of goals, vision, accomplishments, and challenges for each division and department.
☐	Identify top issues for faculty.	☐	Have directors identify one to two people to meet with first in each division or department.
Enrollment, Marketing, and Communications			
☐	Identify current enrollment goals.	☐	Detail flow of financial aid by year and impact on financial sustainability.
☐	Detail yield history, yield by division, and acceptance rate history.	☐	Describe current market demographics.
☐	Develop overview of enrollment funnel history by grade.	☐	Compile list of competitor schools both public and private.
☐	Develop overview of retention rate by grade.	☐	Review current and previous marketing campaigns.
☐	Outline financial aid policies and historical data.	☐	Assess social media channels, usage, and reach.
Advancement			
☐	Identify donors to meet with immediately, and those to meet in first three months.	☐	Identify under-performing or non-performing pledges that could have an impact on the school.
☐	Describe overall state of donor health.	☐	Discuss previous fundraising strategies.
☐	Develop list of 20 key historic and current donors.	☐	Describe current alumni engagement and future goals.
☐	Outline makeup of donor base – parents, alumni, friends, community, etc.	☐	Identify opportunities and challenges in advancement.

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	Executive Assistant to the Head		
☐	Establish preferred methods of communication for email, phone, and appropriate hours to contact.	☐	Develop a monthly one-page reminder to highlight meetings and events, especially those unique to the school.
☐	Coordinate meetings between outgoing and incoming heads.	☐	Coordinate with technology department to obtain new email address, laptop, mobile phone, software, and web-based program access for new head.
☐	Schedule on campus meetings.	☐	Coordinate with facilities department for access to school grounds including keys, gate and alarm codes, badge, etc.
☐	Support efforts of board's transition committee.	☐	Complete SAIS substantive change report.
☐	Share current policy manuals or electronic resources.	☐	Update listing and contact information in other membership associations and community organizations.
☐	Manage new head's calendar to ensure every meeting has a clearly defined purpose with names and positions of those attending.		
	Community Relations		
☐	Create short video with incoming head to introduce themselves and share a message directly with the community.	☐	Identify non-profit boards and other places outgoing head is active.
☐	Schedule meeting with representatives from Parents Association.	☐	Identify major employers in local area.
☐	Join local independent school association or heads group.	☐	Identify local initiatives that could impact the school.
☐	Identify other independent school heads to expand network.	☐	Identify existing partnerships with other public or independent schools and colleges.
☐	Create a list of community members for initial contact.		