



National Association
of Episcopal Schools
Excellence Through Association

Principles of Good Practice for Leadership Transitions in Episcopal Schools

National Association of Episcopal Schools

The board of trustees of an Episcopal school has many important responsibilities: supporting and promoting the school's mission, setting institutional policies, focusing on strategic priorities, ensuring financial strength, evaluating annually the board's performance and, as trust-holders, providing leadership and vision to ensure the school's continued sustainability. In supporting these goals, the board has another significant responsibility: the selection, support, nurture, and evaluation of the person who will serve as the head of the school.

When a transition in school leadership occurs, it must be carefully and thoughtfully handled. The responsibility for selecting the new leader rests with the board; it is the single most important act the board undertakes, an action that impacts every aspect of the school's future.

In parish day school settings, policies regarding authority and decision-making during leadership transitions vary. Thus, the board's

decision in the selection of a new leader may ultimately require the consent of the vestry and the rector. A leadership transition time is an opportunity to clarify and strengthen the relationship between a church and parish day school. However, the transition processes delineated by these principles provide good practices for all Episcopal schools, including independent Episcopal schools. NAES recommends that parish day schools also use the *Principles of Good Practice for Governance in Episcopal Parish Day Schools* as a resource during leadership transitions.

If your school is not facing a leadership change this year, it is likely that sometime in the next few years it will be. The percentage of heads retiring in the near future is expected to be over 50%. According to the experience of NAES, on average 10% to 20% of Episcopal school headships change each year. NAES recognizes that when a leadership transition occurs, it is unsettling for a school and its constituents. School community members feel most vulnerable when a leader departs—especially if it is the head. When the head of school changes, a whole new leadership team must be developed. Trust-building and relationships begin anew. Thus, guiding a school through a leadership transition must be initiated with competence and care.

In an effort to assist leaders of both church and school in navigating the waters of change that leadership transitions bring, NAES developed this set of *Principles of Good Practice for*

Leadership Transitions in Episcopal Schools. The *Principles* are intended to:

- affirm the importance of the Episcopal ethos of the school and its centrality in the search for the new spiritual and academic leader.
- support the professionals and volunteers of both the church and the school as they seek to create smooth, effective transitions in leadership.
- assist boards, vestries, dioceses, and search committees in understanding their roles and responsibilities as they embark upon the process to find the new leader who is being called to serve.
- ensure an impartial, thorough search process that upholds the values and integrity of the institution.

On a practical level, NAES anticipates that the *Principles* will be brought to bear on important aspects of our schools' institutional lives, particularly:

- the Episcopal identity of a school;
- the search process for a new leader;
- the orientation processes of boards and, in parish day schools, vestries;
- the understanding of the various roles and responsibilities of boards, search committees, bishops, and, in parish day schools, rectors and vestries;

- church/school relationships; and
- effective communication with the various school constituencies.

The National Association of Episcopal Schools series of *Principles of Good Practice* has been developed to share best practices found in Episcopal schools, to delineate the important issues that are common to Episcopal schools, and to offer guidance as each school develops and reviews policies and practices. Because each Episcopal school is unique, there is not a “one size fits all” formula. However, NAES seeks continually to promote effective leadership and governance in Episcopal schools and invites school and church leaders to use the *Principles* as a tool in planning, modeling, and encouraging additional reflection about effective governance practices in schools.

Herewith are the principles of good practice for leadership transitions in Episcopal schools.



Preparing for a Leadership Transition Notification

- When a decision is made that the head of school is preparing to complete his/her service, the board chair is first informed. Together, the head and chair determine when the news will be made public via adjoining letters: one from the head and one from the board chair. In a parish day school, the rector is part of this meeting and, with the board chair, composes