

# Episcopal Identity and Culture Self-Study

Episcopal schools exist not merely to educate, but to demonstrate and proclaim the unique worth and beauty of all human beings as creations of a loving, empowering God...

Episcopal schools ensure that their missions are built on the sure foundation of a Christian love that guides and challenges all who attend our schools to build lives of genuine meaning, purpose, and service in the word they will inherit.

— *Episcopal Identity (NAES website page)*

INTRODUCTION . . . . . 2

MISSION . . . . . 5

GOVERNANCE . . . . . 6

SCHOOL MINISTRY . . . . . 8

CHAPEL AND WORSHIP . . . . . 9

STUDY OF RELIGION . . . . . 11

EQUITY, JUSTICE, SERVICE, AND SERVICE-LEARNING . . . . . 13

SUMMARY AND REVIEW . . . . . 15



National Association  
of Episcopal Schools  
*Excellence Through Association*

## INTRODUCTION

By their nature, Episcopal schools are centers of inquiry, reflection, and engagement. Regardless of what age groups they serve, they are places where people think about what they do and why. It is not only part of the character of our schools, but a basic tenet of the Anglican tradition to question, evaluate, and reconsider the ways in which we understand and live out our mission. That is the key to being better individuals, better communities. Nowhere is this more evident, or more important, than in how and when we consider what it means to be an Episcopal school.

Just as our schools regularly assess their academic programs and co-curricular offerings, so it is vital that they spend time periodically reviewing the health and vibrancy of those components of Episcopal identity that make us the distinctive, redemptive, and value-based institutions that we are.

The purpose of the *Episcopal Identity and Culture Self-Study* is to assist our school communities in their evaluation of those areas of school life that touch upon their mission as Episcopal schools. In words taken from the original NAES self-study, “A school calling itself Episcopal offers some concrete evidence, some outward sign, of its ‘Episcopal-ness,’ beyond the mere statement that it is.” From chapel and worship to governance, from service-learning to the academic study of religion, this instrument is meant to be an aid for reflection on those outward and tangible expressions that make a school truly Episcopal in identity and character.

### How to Use the Self-Study

While we hope that many schools will decide to take the time and effort involved in doing the entire self-study, it is important to emphasize the basic flexibility of this instrument. Specifically, it can be used in at least three principal ways:

1. **As an aid and supplement to an accreditation self-study.** This instrument can be utilized as part of the normal process that precedes an accreditation visit, allowing a school to take advantage of the opportunity for self-reflection and evaluation that a self-study provides to examine its nature and mission as an Episcopal school.
2. **As a separate review process for specific focus on the Episcopal identity of the school.** Many schools may wish to evaluate the school’s Episcopal identity apart from an accreditation process, be it on its own or in conjunction with a time of leadership transition or planning for the school’s future.
3. **In individual segments, including as a part of a departmental or programmatic review.** The constituent parts of the self-study can serve as an aid for a board retreat, departmental review (internal or external), faculty or board orientation, time of transition in the chaplaincy, or as part of its ongoing commitment to evaluating each part of the school’s program, including such as the school’s chapel or community service programs.

### Guiding Principles

The self-study is organized around three guiding principles:

1. **It is grounded in best practices, not standards.** Questions asked in each section of the self-study are based on the *Principles of Good Practice for Episcopal Schools* series published by NAES. Designed to help guide and

clarify the self-understanding of a wide variety of Episcopal schools in our membership, the self-study asks schools to highlight the ways in which they best demonstrate distinctive understandings of themselves as outgrowths of the Episcopal tradition. The process is not one of being certified as an Episcopal school, nor is it a requirement for membership in NAES. Rather, it seeks to align the evaluative process with what we feel Episcopal schools, in all of their variety, do well.

2. **It seeks to be aspirational.** Each section of the self-study contains questions that go beyond how the school understands and evaluates its current program, to questions about how it wishes to live out its Episcopal mission more fully in the years ahead. The self-study is not a review of how the school measures up, nor how high a mark it has achieved. It is a combination of thorough review and active expression of what it seeks to be.
3. **It is grounded in specific examples.** Throughout the self-study, participants are asked to focus on concrete ways in which the school embodies the values and unique approaches that make it truly Episcopal. We believe this to be the best vehicle through which serious discussion can ensue as well as the scope of the process be best contained.

The *Episcopal Identity and Culture Self-Study* invites schools into an important process of looking at those areas central to its mission that may not routinely be objects of evaluation and reflection, or may not be sufficiently addressed in standard accreditation processes. It seeks broad ownership of the school's mission beyond simply the domain of a school chaplain or head of school.

### **Early Childhood Programs and the Self-Study**

We urge early childhood programs to make use of this self-study instrument, given the many important ways that the various components of Episcopal identity are an essential part of those programs. There may be, in the judgment of some early childhood educators, some components of this self-study that may not have immediate application to their context or approach. In such cases, we would encourage them either to adapt the questions asked or simply determine that the question does not apply. The overall benefits of undertaking this self-study hopefully will outweigh the occasional task of adapting the questions to an early childhood program.

### **Organizing Your Self-Study Process**

Whether used as a complete instrument or in its constituent parts, NAES recommends that the self-study be undertaken by a committee that is widely representative of the school community—trustees, administrators, faculty, students, and parents—and chaired by a highly respected member of the school community. This committee can contain both those who are strong supporters of the Episcopal identity of the school and those who may be skeptical of it. At the same time, all members of the community should possess a clear understanding of why such a process is being undertaken. As the committee's representation is broad, so should its outreach be to extensive segments of the school community. Likewise, it is important that all segments of the school community be aware that such a process is going on, told of its potential value for the school, and how the reflective nature of the process is an outgrowth of what the school has always sought to be as an Episcopal school.

In a world where religious focus or discussion can easily generate suspicion and worry, it is important how the school explains the reasons behind this process. For example, the school is seeking to be better at what it is already, as opposed to taking a new direction as a school. Similarly, we recommend care be taken in explaining to various segments of the school community why they are being asked the questions they are.

Each of the sections of the self-study may be taken up by the committee as a whole, or may be assigned to separate working groups whose members may include individuals from the school community that are not on the committee. The committee chair assists the members of the committee or working groups in keeping on schedule and on task in order to meet the project's timetable.

An editor is designated to work with the committee chair in receiving and compiling the various segments of the self-study into a final report, one which refers back to but also draws larger conclusions on the individual questions asked. Each school should produce the report in printed and/or electronic formats that best suit its needs and anticipated distribution. Should the self-study be used as a whole, the head of school and school board chair, along with the rector and wardens in a parish day school, should acknowledge their approval of the completed self-study by signing it.

If components of the self-study are used on their own, the final document could reflect the manner in which any particular department or program at the school issues such a report.

### **Using the Results**

The school's greatest benefit in using this self-study comes from the process of deliberation and discussion that goes into answering the questions posed. At the same time, there is also great benefit in the discussion that can follow distribution of the completed report, particularly as the school community considers the answers to the questions of how the school seeks more fully to live out its mission as an Episcopal school.

NAES recommends that a context and process be arranged in which the findings of the report be discussed and consideration given to how best to implement its findings. Members of the NAES staff are available to serve as facilitators of these discussions or to recommend current or retired Episcopal school leaders that can be of help in this process.

We suggest that a copy of the completed self-study be sent to the NAES office. We also suggest that a copy be sent to the diocesan bishop and/or his or her representative for schools. This can help heighten awareness on a diocesan level of what you are doing to fulfill your mission as an Episcopal school.

As reflective institutions that seek to embody their missions in as effective and distinctive ways as possible, we hope that the *Episcopal Identity and Culture Self-Study* can provide an opportunity for taking pride in what is already being done, as well as help to clarify how the school wishes to advance its self-understanding and efforts at being true to its mission. We are confident that the hard work which such an instrument demands will pay off in a more thorough awareness of, a greater confidence in talking about, and an energized resolve to improve upon what it means to be an Episcopal school.

NAES stands ready to assist schools and answer any questions about the self-study, including how best to use or implement a given question, section, or complete document. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

## MISSION

The Episcopal ethos of the school makes a difference in the daily life of the community: students, families, faculty, staff, and board.

— *Principles of Good Practice for Furthering Episcopal Identity in Episcopal Schools*

The board reviews the Episcopal identity of the school and reaffirms the Episcopal ethos as central to its mission.

— *Principles of Good Practice for Leadership Transitions in Episcopal Schools*

1. State the mission of your school.
2. List the three principal ways the school lives out its identity as an Episcopal school.
3. In what way(s) does the mission of the school least reflect its Episcopal identity?
4. How does the school board ensure that “the school’s Episcopal identity remains a principal focus?”
5. Recognizing the head of school as the “primary ambassador of and advocate for Episcopal identity and as spiritual leader of the school,” what are the principal ways the head of school best exercises this role?
6. Give an example of the way that other key administrators in the school—admissions and development officers, division heads, and other key leaders in the school community—understand their responsibility for maintaining the Episcopal identity of their part of the school program and fulfill that responsibility in the course of their work.
7. What are one or two ways that the school’s religious mission is articulated in the key publications of the school?
8. What would be the principal way that the school’s mission as an Episcopal school is reflected in major school events and public occasions (i.e., graduation, convocations)?
9. Given how you have responded to the questions above, what are some of the ways that the school might enhance its religious and spiritual mission?
10. How will you strengthen the understanding and practice of the mission of the school?

## GOVERNANCE

As role models for the children and families served in Episcopal schools, these leaders are called to uphold the values that underlie and inform these principles:

- † The importance of healthy, trusting, supportive relationships;
- † The need for an awareness of and respect for boundaries and appropriate roles;
- † The responsibility and commitment to continually educate members of the community about effective governance practices;
- † The partnership model that unites school with church.

*— Principles of Good Practice for Governance in Episcopal Parish Day Schools*

All board members, regardless of religious affiliation, share the responsibility to support and articulate the school's Episcopal mission.

*— Principles of Good Practice for Furthering Episcopal Identity in Episcopal Schools*

### For independent and diocesan Episcopal schools:

1. What is the most effective way in which the school board works to safeguard the mission of the school and its continuing Episcopal identity?
2. How does the school board best demonstrate its knowledge of and appreciation for the school's relationship to the church and/or diocese?
3. In what ways does board representation reflect the relationship the school has to the church and/or diocese?
4. How are new board members oriented to the importance of the school's Episcopal identity? How does the school board's process of self-evaluation address the matter of Episcopal identity?
5. Identify/describe the manner in which the school communicates with the Episcopal Church and/or diocese. How would you characterize the value and effectiveness of this communication?
6. Give one or two examples of the ways in which the school board reviews its governance procedures and educates itself on matters of good governance.
7. Identify the principal way in which the school board has attempted to become a more inclusive and broadly representative governing body. How effective has this effort been? If it has been limited in its effectiveness, what additional strategy/strategies might be considered?
8. How effective are members of the school board at articulating the Episcopal character and identity of the school?
9. What ways might members of the school board better serve as ambassadors of the Episcopal identity of the school?

**For parish day schools:**

1. Give examples of how the school's bylaws describe the mission of the school, the relationship between the church and school, and the role of the vestry and the board.
2. What provisions are in place for periodic review, by a joint board/vestry committee, of the bylaws?
3. Describe the principal way in which the parish views the school as a significant outreach program to the community.
4. How does the school exercise the role of being an outreach program of the parish?
5. Give one or two examples of the vestry and school board's collegiality, joint planning, collaborative efforts, and/or positive relationship.
6. What is the most visible way that members of the vestry serve as a presence in the school, and that school board members serve as a presence in the parish?
7. What is the most visible way that the rector serves as a presence in the school? What is the most important way? What is the most visible way that the head of school serves as a presence in the parish? What is the most important way?
8. Explain the principal way in which the vestry and school stay informed of the programs and priorities of each other.
9. How are new members of in each governing group oriented to the role and responsibility of the other?
10. Give an example of how the parish delegates important areas of authority and autonomy to the school board. How does the vestry insure its fiduciary responsibility in this area?
11. Summarize the official agreements between parish and school, including the cost sharing and space agreements.
12. As the school board and vestry review the answers to the above questions, what are some steps that both governing groups could take to enhance the relationship between parish and school?
13. What are some benchmarks that both vestry and school could point to as indicators that the above has been accomplished?

## SCHOOL MINISTRY

The ministry of chaplains, lay or ordained, is itself a vital manifestation of the school's Episcopal identity. [They] are custodians, models, and teachers of the school's Episcopal identity, and encourage and support the head of school's ministry

— *Principles of Good Practice for Furthering Episcopal Identity in Episcopal Schools*

1. What are the most important ways that the chaplain(s) function(s) in the life of the school? In what specific ways does(do) the chaplain(s) seek to be more central to the life of the school?
2. How is the chaplain/school minister evaluated? Does the existing job description fully capture the chaplain's role? If not, what changes are necessary?
3. If the school chaplain is ordained, what is the current correlation between compensation levels for the chaplain(s) and diocesan guidelines on compensation?
4. Describe the qualifications of those involved in school ministry. How do these qualifications reflect their readiness for and ability to lead the school in these critical areas?
5. Give one or two examples of the professional development opportunities in which the school chaplain has participated in recent years.
6. If the school chaplain is ordained, what is the relationship of the chaplain(s) to other clergy in the diocese?
7. Is the chaplain a member of the administrative team of the school? If not, has the school made a decision not to include the chaplain on that team? Describe the relationship the chaplain has to other leadership teams in school, such as a crisis response team or counseling team.
8. Describe the principal ways that the school seeks to meet the spiritual needs of other religious groups in the school.
9. Describe the current status of the interaction of the bishop and the diocese in the ongoing understanding and support of school ministry.
10. Given your answers to the above questions, what are the most important ways that the school could enhance the ministry of the chaplain(s) and their place in the school community?
11. How can the place of and understanding of school ministry be enhanced in the overall life of the school?



## CHAPEL AND WORSHIP

Regardless of school size or the constellation of students served, Episcopal schools are worshipping communities that gather regularly for prayer, reflection, and celebration. Indeed, chapel is at the heart of each school's Episcopal identity.

— *Principles of Good Practice for Chapel and Worship in Episcopal Schools*

1. Briefly describe the purpose of chapel at your school.
2. What would be the one or two principal ways that the school fulfills “two simultaneous commitments: to provide students an authentic experience of Christian worship that is unapologetically and identifiably Anglican, and to welcome, affirm, and support the spiritual development of all students of all faiths or no faiths at all”?
3. How often do students go to chapel each week, and at what point in the daily schedule? Does this schedule adequately reflect the central role of chapel in the life of the school, and does this schedule help to carry out the religious mission of the school?
4. Describe how chapel attends to the specific developmental needs and stages of the students served. Give one or two principal examples of chapel activities, resources, or structures that engage students at their own level(s).
5. In what ways are provisions made for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist—be it compulsory or voluntary—in the life of the school?
6. How is chapel distinguished from other school gatherings, such as assemblies or school/grade meetings?
  - If chapel takes place in a consecrated space, what guidelines are in place for how consecrated spaces in the school are used in appropriate ways?
  - If the school utilizes a non-consecrated space for chapel worship, what means are utilized to make the space “sacred?”
7. Describe specific ways in which chapel worship reflects the school's Anglican heritage.
8. How would you describe the role of the following in the chapel program?
  - Head of school
  - Technology
  - School traditions and practices
9. What mechanism is in place for the periodic review and evaluation of the chapel program?

10. How is chapel explained to members of the faculty and staff, and what is their role in supporting it?
11. How and where do key publications (i.e. admissions brochures, student and faculty handbooks) explain the place of chapel in the life of the school? How is chapel described and featured on the school's website?
12. In reviewing the responses to the above questions, what specific steps could be taken to enhance the place of chapel in the daily life and culture of the school?
13. What signs could the school point to that it had enhanced the place of chapel in the overall life of the school?

## STUDY OF RELIGION

Be it called religion, religious studies, religious education, Christian education, or sacred studies, the growth and development of this area of academic study goes hand in hand with the establishment and enhancement of an excellent academic program. It is also a reflection of a balanced expression of Episcopal identity.

— *Principles of Good Practice for the Study of Religion in Episcopal Schools*

1. Briefly describe the place of the study of religion in the overall curriculum of the school.
2. How would you describe it in terms of:
  - Comprehensiveness
  - Seriousness
  - Age-appropriate approach
3. In early childhood programs: describe the primary ways that Christianity and Christian values, as well as the traditions and beliefs of other religions, are incorporated into learning activities, such as stories and storytelling, the creative arts, classroom themes or units of study, and classroom or school wide traditions.
4. In elementary, middle, and secondary schools: what is the relationship of the study of religion to other academic disciplines in the various divisions of the school? What is its relationship to the chapel program?
5. Describe how the study of religion reflects the school's commitment to global citizenship and being a well-educated person.
6. Describe the scope and sequence of the study of religion.
7. Where are the following components of religious study in schools at play in the school's curriculum?
  - Bible
  - World Religions
  - Ethics
8. What mechanisms are in place for the periodic review and evaluation of the religion curriculum?
9. Describe the qualifications of those who are responsible for teaching religion in the school.
10. If you are a parish day school, what is the relationship of the rector to the study of religion?

11. Describe the place of the following in the study of religion:
  - Technology
  - Interdisciplinary study
  - Assessment
  
12. Given the responses to the above questions, what are some of the most important ways that the study of religion could better reflect the school's mission and Episcopal identity?

## EQUITY, JUSTICE, SERVICE, AND SERVICE-LEARNING

An Episcopal school should make a concern for society a part of its program. The school will help students to understand that they do not exist apart from society, that society's issues are their issues, and that they are called to respond to the needs of others.

— *The Idea of an Episcopal School*

Episcopal schools of all sizes, constellations, and educational philosophies commit themselves to providing qualified faculty and staff, appropriate training, and adequate budgetary support.

— *Principles of Good Practice for Justice and Equity in Episcopal Schools*

### Equity and Justice

1. How does the school's mission statement reflect the school's commitment to equity, inclusiveness, and building a just society?
2. What are one or two ways that the school's strategic plan, institutional policy, and core documents each reflect the values of justice and equity?
3. Briefly describe the school's efforts to attract and retain faculty and staff of diverse backgrounds. How would you characterize the effectiveness of those efforts? What specific examples could you point to, over time, to support your response?
4. What progress has been made by the school in attracting and retaining families from diverse backgrounds and various socioeconomic levels?
5. What is the best way that commitments to inclusiveness are reflected in the school's budgetary planning and implementation?
6. How would you evaluate the relationship of the school's commitment to justice and equity to the following components of the school's program?
  - Social cruelty, harassment, hazing, and bullying policies
  - The school's published non-discriminatory statement
  - The school's curriculum
  - Personnel policies
7. Name one or two ways that issues of justice and equity blend in with the religious life of the school.
8. Describe one or two principal ways in which the school has attempted to "look for the values that unite people rather than divide, and not allow factionalism to undermine the life of the whole."

9. Give one or two examples of how those who might be viewed as marginal to the school community have been welcomed into the fuller life of the school.
10. What are one or two areas of substantive growth and opportunity for the school as it seeks to become a more inclusive and socially aware community?
11. In the long run, what could the school do to enhance its place as a hospitable and inclusive community?

### **Service and Service-Learning**

1. Please describe the school's philosophy and rationale for community service.
2. Does the current program of community service adequately reflect the school's commitment to it? Why or why not?
3. How is service-learning incorporated into this program?
4. Describe how opportunities for service and service-learning are given adequate time in the school schedule.
5. Describe how the community service program of the school is evaluated on a regular basis.
6. Give a recent example of training and/or professional development for the leadership of the service program.
7. What are the important next steps that the school needs to take to ensure its commitment to service and service-learning?
8. What are some of the long-range ways in which the school can enhance the place of service and service-learning in the life of the school?

## SUMMARY AND REVIEW

James Russell Lowell once said, “New occasions teach new duties; Time makes ancient good uncouth; They must upward still, and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth ....” We believe that the truth will make us free and that God has given us the freedom to seek truth without fearing where it may lead. This suggests our understanding of truth may grow and change, that God welcomes questions, and that we may subject all our ideas and beliefs to our critical faculties.

— *The Idea of an Episcopal School*

1. As a result of completing this self-study—in its complete form, or in utilizing parts of the self-study—what has the school learned about its Episcopal identity and culture?
2. Identify the school’s top priorities for addressing and enhancing its Episcopal identity and culture.
3. Having completed this self-study—in its complete form, or utilizing parts of the self-study—what would the school identify as its particular strengths with respect to Episcopal identity and culture? What are the areas of growth and improvement?

© 2014 by the National Association of Episcopal Schools. All rights reserved. Members may distribute, reprint, or quote this work, in part or in whole, provided attribution to NAES and acknowledgement of its copyright accompanies said use.



**National Association  
of Episcopal Schools**  
*Excellence Through Association*

**National Association  
of Episcopal Schools**  
815 Second Avenue  
Third Floor  
New York NY 10017

Toll free (800) 334-7626, ext. 6134  
Direct dial (212) 716-6134  
Fax (212) 286-9366  
Email [info@episcopalschools.org](mailto:info@episcopalschools.org)  
Web [www.episcopalschools.org](http://www.episcopalschools.org)