

ENHANCING OUR ASSOCIATION

A New Strategic Plan for the National Association of Episcopal Schools

Excellence depends upon association. No important enterprise can flourish without the strength that comes from moral support, from the exchange of ideas, from mutual encouragement and criticism.

—**The Rev. John Crocker, Sr.,**
Second Headmaster of Groton School, MA, 1972



National Association
of Episcopal Schools
Excellence Through Association

What do people look for in an association?

How best does an association look to the future?

For over fifty years, the National Association of Episcopal Schools has distinguished itself through its dedication to serving Episcopal schools—of all sizes, age groups, and types—helping them live into their missions, proclaim their unique identities, and providing resources and services that build up each school's common

life and flourish through their affiliation with one another. Our membership looks to us to support the best in them and to be true to our calling as instruments of God's work in the world, thereby promoting the common good and making a transformational impact on our society.

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THE MISSION OF NAES

NAES' mission allows our schools to achieve their own respective missions. In serving Episcopal schools, we affirm the Episcopal identity of our schools in light of the challenges and opportunities they face. Our new strategic plan reflects the clear commitment to our schools and our capacity to do what we do best: listen and work with our community of schools to further their Episcopal identity, build a just world, and be true to our Christian mission.

Since our last strategic plan, embarked upon in 2012, NAES has successfully accomplished the vast majority of the goals of that plan while responding to new challenges and opportunities. We are proud of the key initiatives accomplished in helping to serve those who serve Episcopal schools:



- ✦ Bringing together schools and offering exceptional professional development opportunities, including our Biennial conference.
- ✦ Continuing our commitment to individual schools or groups of schools through regular visitations, regional programming, and ongoing consultations.
- ✦ Developing new online resources, including the introduction of webinars and the expansion of our social media presence.
- ✦ Publishing new editions in our series, *Principles of Good Practice for Episcopal Schools*, including those dealing with equity, justice and inclusion as well as school ministry.
- ✦ Providing valuable orientations for heads new to Episcopal schools along with those considering positions of leadership in those schools.
- ✦ Responding to the needs of our schools as issues of importance arise, be they related to natural disasters, tragedies, or emerging social issues (ie., transgender students) by providing resources, statements from NAES, or creating forums where the contributions of schools can be shared.
- ✦ Expanding our ministry to school chaplains through the creation of a mentoring program, a biennial chaplains' retreat, and serving as a host for online discussions among chaplains.
- ✦ Enriching our relationships with schools in Haiti and supporting the work of the Episcopal Urban Schools Alliance.
- ✦ Serving as an important interpreter of schools to the church and the church to schools.
- ✦ Exceeding our goal on a 50th anniversary capital campaign, allowing us to expand our services to schools.

A NEW STRATEGIC PLAN

Having assessed both the rich accomplishments as well as unfinished business of the previous strategic plan, NAES now looks to the future. In the winter of 2017, The Governing Board of the National Association of Episcopal Schools approved the most thorough and extensive strategic planning process ever undertaken by the association, encompassing a wide variety of

feedback mechanisms and conversations among our membership, with the goal of assembling the fullest picture of what the association needs to focus on during the upcoming years. To that end, the following steps were taken to hear from our membership about how NAES is both accomplishing its mission and needing to enhance that mission:

- ✚ Following an extensive interview and selection process, NAES was pleased to engage the services of strategic planning consultant, Katherine Whitney, of Warren Whitney and Company in Richmond VA, a professional familiar with the Episcopal school and church world.
- ✚ We established a strategic planning committee, consisting of the current Governance Committee of the NAES Governing Board, with the addition of two other friends of the association.
- ✚ In conjunction with Governing Board meetings, NAES hosted two forums of school heads, rectors, and chaplains in Charleston SC (April 2017) and Nashville TN (September 2017), where board members heard from church and school leadership on the needs of schools and parishes and how NAES can best support them.
- ✚ With our consultant, the NAES staff engaged in a two-day staff retreat to consider strategic priorities from an administrative and operational perspective (October 2017).
- ✚ We held a series of regional focus group forums throughout the autumn of 2017, attended by school heads, rectors, chaplains, and bishops—all from a wide variety of schools and churches—to discuss specific questions regarding NAES' mission: at the annual meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Association of Episcopal Schools (Washington DC, September 2017), the annual meeting of the Episcopal Urban Schools Alliance (Richmond VA, October 2017), and the biennial conference of the Southwest Association of Episcopal Schools (Houston TX, November 2017). Additional regional gatherings took place in South Florida (October 2017), and Los Angeles CA (December 2017).
- ✚ We carried out the most extensive survey NAES has ever completed of its membership in December 2017, yielding responses from over three hundred individuals.
- ✚ At the Governing Board meeting in Dallas TX (January 2018), board members and NAES staff heard the results of the various forums and survey and laid the groundwork for the key strategic goals.
- ✚ A draft of the plan was reviewed at the Governing Board meeting in Atlanta GA (April 2018).
- ✚ A draft of the plan also was vetted with additional focus groups of school heads, rectors, and chaplains in the summer of 2018.
- ✚ The Governing Board approved the plan at its September 2018 meeting in Los Angeles.

WHAT WE HEARD

In carrying out such an extensive process of listening and analyzing, we were gratified by the number and variety of people interested in helping NAES to refine its mission, and by the overwhelming support and affirmation we heard for the work of NAES. Overall, our members are extremely satisfied with the value they feel they receive from NAES. Over half of those surveyed indicated they were “very satisfied” and another third reported feeling “satisfied.” This was particularly evident from school heads and chaplains. Likewise, an overwhelming number of respondents indicated that the frequency of communications from NAES was “just about right.”

The NAES staff received consistently high praise for the manner in which they do a “gracious, graceful, and professional job,” described by one respondent as “accessible, highly competent, and committed to the mission of NAES.” Particular

mention was made of the value of NAES’ “on-the-ground interaction” with schools, and NAES is widely seen as the one association best equipped to foster healthy relationships between the worlds of Episcopal schools and the Episcopal Church.

At the same time, we also learned that many members are not fully aware of the wide variety of programs and services NAES offers to our schools. Many schools expressed the conviction that they were not making full use of what the association has to offer, as well as the fact that some segments of the school community were not fully versed in the benefits of membership, or even the very nature of the association, as others were. Furthermore, as schools strive to be more discerning about the variety of the memberships they support, some members (as well as non-members) were led to question how they can justify the cost of membership as budgets tighten.

“We look to NAES for best practices, for advice when issues arise, and for connecting us with other Episcopal leaders. It is an invaluable resource that provides unique services to us.”

“NAES is one of the best organizations that I am aware of. Its high quality programming, thoughtfulness, relevance, and support of its member schools far surpass other organizations.”



BUILDING A FUTURE FOR NAES

Gratified by this strong expression of support, NAES has identified key pathways for the future, based on what our membership has indicated to be of central importance to our school communities and what, in turn, they hope to gain in their association with NAES:



- ✦ Articulate Episcopal identity in accessible and creative ways. Never has there been a greater and more compelling need for our schools to embrace and boldly proclaim their Episcopal identity. As our schools are pressed to focus more on enrollment issues, there is a concurrent need to be able to talk about the special opportunity and culture of Episcopal schools—in admissions contexts, orienting new faculty and trustees, and generating philanthropy—that both instills a sense of value and can be communicated in a clear, positive and forthright manner.

- ✦ Continue to tell the story of how our schools embody Episcopal identity, accompanied by a concern that the larger church world is not fully aware of or responsive to the unique, even exemplary ways that schools “do church.”
- ✦ Clearly communicate the value of NAES membership,

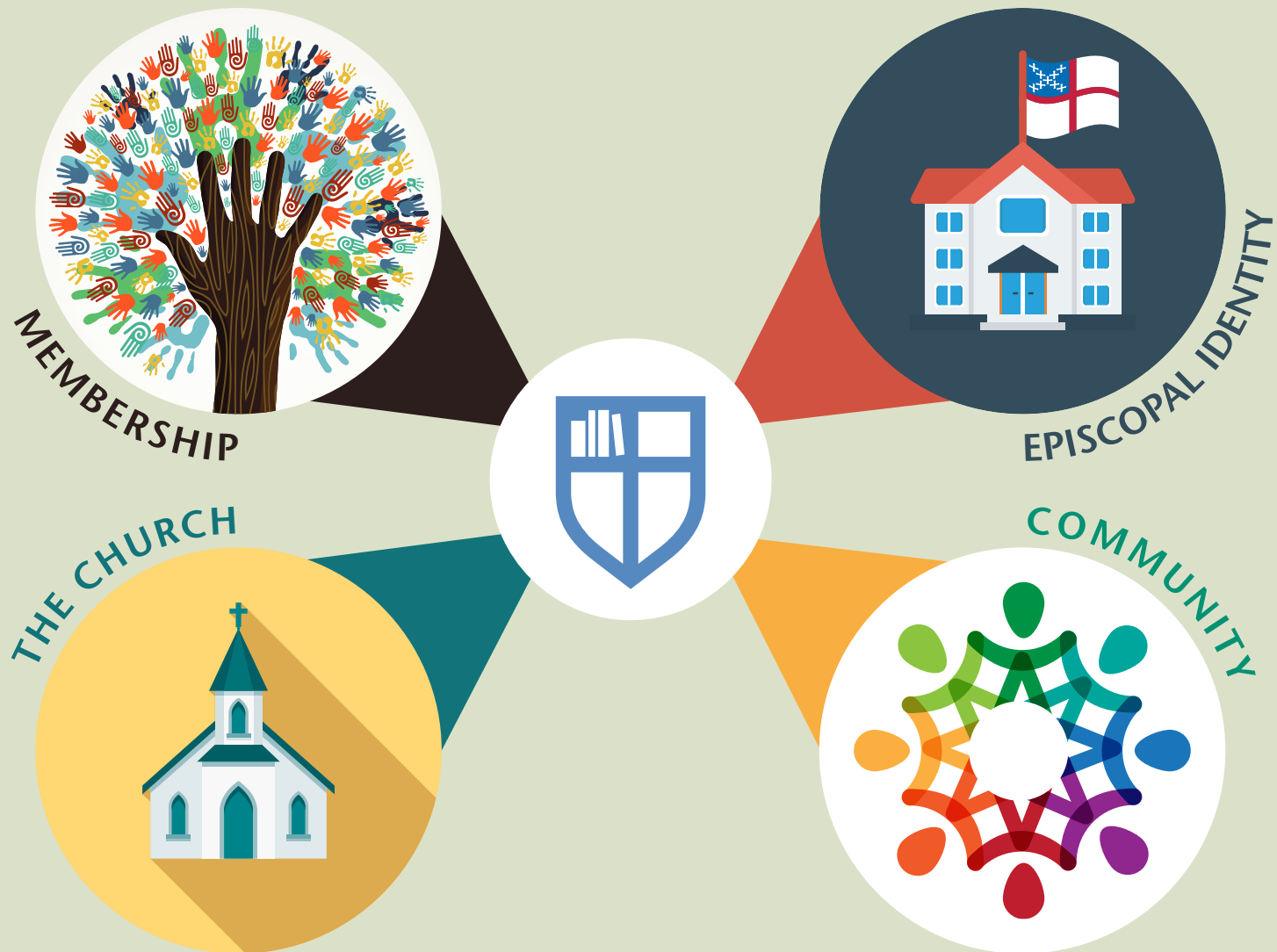
providing a fuller picture of what it has to offer to a wider variety of members of the school community.

- ✦ Be a key mover in bringing people together in the midst of a highly polarized and complex culture, in the interests of embracing pluralism and building inclusion. As one individual surveyed posed the challenge, “What could NAES do to lead the conversation around interfaith opportunities and bridge building so that it could be the much needed arm of this ministry in the church and to the world?”

- ✦ Implicit in all of the above pathways is the need for NAES to strive for excellence in its own administration and operations, exemplifying prudent oversight over how the association does business, and being mindful of the financial pressures our schools and families face.

Given the confidence our membership has in NAES, with their high expectations of what we can do for them and the Episcopal school world, we now turn to the opportunity the future presents to us, ever mindful of our Christian responsibility to serve as models of grace and hope for the well-being of the world, and to further our unique role in providing “excellence through association.”

2018 NAES STRATEGIC PLAN





GOAL ONE:

Serving Our Membership

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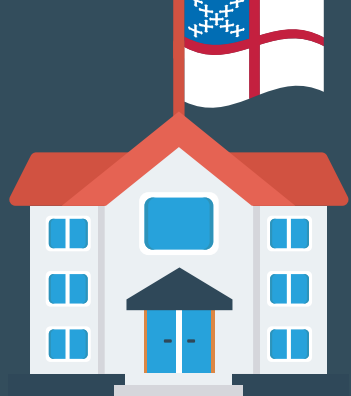
People look to associations for many things—a broader perspective, a hub of best practices, a listening ear, a guide through complex issues, and a place where one can be reminded of what is truly important in educating young people. Our NAES members look to us for all of these things and more, including a sense that what they derive from NAES is of genuine value. That value comes in the form of what the association can offer to schools directly, and what member-to-member experiences can provide.

We begin, in this new strategic plan, with the core reason we exist and a renewed commitment to our highest priority, serving our membership, building upon the strong reputation and trust that Episcopal schools around the country have placed in us.

Suggested Steps:

- 1 Increase the value, scope, and benefits of membership for all Episcopal schools, and communicate that value effectively.
- 2 Achieve greater participation of Episcopal schools in annual data collection, and determine important points of data that our schools need.
- 3 Broaden our offerings of virtual and online programming while maintaining our commitment to the balance between “in person” experiences and virtual gatherings.
- 4 Affirm the vital role in Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs, by providing and promoting additional resources for them.
- 5 Expand our efforts to promote what schools are doing well, particularly in the areas of Episcopal identity, inclusion, and church-school relations.
- 6 Continue to review and revise content and resources on the NAES website, and undertake a comprehensive redesign of the NAES website.
- 7 Refine our current efforts and resources to address crises in our school communities, such as natural disasters, tragedies, and/or alleged misconduct.
- 8 Retain our commitment to affordable and accessible conferences, and re-evaluate our current outreach grants program to determine the best use of those funds.





GOAL TWO:

Celebrate and promote the value of Episcopal schools.

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Our members look to NAES for language—how to talk about, promote, and capture the essence of Episcopal identity. Today, in the midst of an increasingly secular culture, where religious and moral terminology is increasingly not understood, our schools seek to articulate the magic and mystery of an Episcopal school in ways that attract prospective families, boldly proclaim the distinctive fashion in which we go about educating young people, and underscore the school's key influence in society at large. At the same time, with an increasing number of our schools facing enrollment challenges, NAES is eager to provide clear and moving language, data, images, and stories that highlight the unparalleled value and impact of Episcopal schools.

Suggested Steps:

- 1 Provide new resources for internal audiences in schools to promote a deeper understanding of what it means to be an Episcopal school, with particular attention to faculty/staff, trustees, rectors, and vestries.
- 2 Create new resources that serve to make the case for Episcopal schools and help facilitate stronger relationships between schools and parishes/dioceses.
- 3 Collaborate with enrollment management and admissions officers to provide the best materials for introducing new families to the nature and value of Episcopal schools and offer opportunities for them to work together.
- 4 Find common ground and fresh ways of expressing Episcopal identity with Anglican schools around the world.
- 5 Highlight the voices of students and alumni/ae, including the work of student leaders active in worship and service.
- 6 Equip advancement officers with resources that help incorporate Episcopal identity into the work of philanthropy.





GOAL THREE:

Strengthening our partnership with the church.

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Episcopal schools offer a dynamic ministry within the Episcopal Church. We represent the human face of the church, on an ongoing basis, to a larger group of young people, and families, than any other branch of the church's outreach to the greater society. In compelling and redemptive ways, Episcopal schools are a vibrant mission field poised to nurture, support, and connect with young people who, in the future, will respond to the challenges not only in the broader church but in a changing world. NAES members look to this association to be the all-important bridge between the Church's wider mission and the world of Episcopal schools. We recommit ourselves to this effort, with a renewed sense of just how much Episcopal schools have to offer to a church that is seeking to incorporate new ways of doing its ministry.

Suggested Steps:

- 1 Build upon the work already begun with members of the House of Bishops in creating a vision of what a good relationship between schools and churches, in all of its variety, could be, and partner with them in orienting new bishops to the ministry of Episcopal schools.
- 2 Reach out to diocesan Officers of Transitional Ministry to emphasize the opportunities found in and the value of school ministry.
- 3 Develop stories from our schools on the theme, "This is how we are the church," to be used in our outreach to the Episcopal Church.
- 4 Partner with affiliated organizations of the Episcopal Church to promote the exemplary models of ministry in schools.
- 5 Collaborate with seminaries and other institutions in preparing for the next generation of chaplains, teachers, and educational leaders.





GOAL FOUR:

Building a pluralistic, inclusive and just community

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People look to associations to be meeting grounds, places where a variety of viewpoints, geographic areas, and differences of expression can find space to engage in safe but challenging conversations. As our schools experience symptoms of increasing polarization, contentiousness, and the erosion of civility—all reflective of our larger social and political climate—they seek ways to do what Episcopalians have traditionally done so well: bring diverse people together and seek common ground, all the while honoring the strength in our differences.

NAES acknowledges the strides our schools have made in being increasingly diverse communities, while challenging them to take the next steps in being even more inclusive of our developing national mosaic. We seek to assist schools in repairing what has been breached and finding a home for a rich variety of voices, thereby reflecting our commitment to healing, reconciliation, and respecting the dignity of every human being.

Suggested Steps:

- 1 Pursue avenues through which NAES can best support schools in entering into honest and respectful conversations about difference, including the development of relevant resources.
- 2 Activate the network of diversity practitioners in Episcopal schools, recently supported by a grant from the Edward E. Ford Foundation and our matching funds campaign.
- 3 Connect and support persons of color who hold leadership positions in Episcopal schools and work to develop and grow the pool of future leaders.
- 4 Communicate the value of religious pluralism in Episcopal schools.
- 5 Commend liturgical resources for school chapels that are both tradition-based and inclusive of a variety of faith traditions.
- 6 Continue to work toward greater diversity on our Governing Board and NAES staff.



True to our passion and mindful of our calling, we commit ourselves to the undertaking of this bold and ambitious plan. We ask you to join us in this effort, building upon our tradition of excellence as an association and creating new avenues of service and faithfulness.

LOVING GOD, we thank you for the blessings you have bestowed upon this association, and upon all Episcopal schools, having brought us to this place and time, and having equipped us with humility and courage to face the challenges now before us. As we embark upon a new era of service to our members, our church, our culture, and our compelling mission, we ask for your grace to accompany us, and your love to enfold us. All of this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. **AMEN.**





National Association
of Episcopal Schools
Excellence Through Association

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