

Board Chair Job Description (and Relationship with the Head)

- The chair is the ultimate authority in the school, along with the rest of the trustees.
- The chair takes the lead in all areas of board leadership and governance. The head, serving as the equivalent of a CEO, takes the lead in curriculum, school operations, and all areas of management. Together, they model leadership relationship in action.
- The chair speaks for the board unless the task is delegated to someone for a specific purpose. The chair is wise to let the head speak on behalf of the school on most occasions.
- The chair, with the head, should lay out the goals and work plan for the year for all board and board committee meetings, generally in advance of the first meeting around the opening of school, when the full board should ratify them.
- The chair serves as the leader and manager of the board and ensures that: the board does not overstep its limits; the agendas for the board and executive committee meetings are developed in consultation with the head and sent out in advance of meetings; proper research is done on all issues, when necessary; all issues are considered in a deliberative process; and ample time is allocated for discussion.
- The chair usually leads the process for setting annual goals for the head, which are developed with the head after getting input from the full board and then ratified by the full board. The chair also leads the evaluation of the head, which should be based, at least in part, on these goals. (See also ISACS monograph, Evaluation of the Head of School).
- The chair's job is to facilitate the highest performance of the board and each board member. The chair tries to improve the performance of each trustee, each board committee, and the board as a whole. To this end, the chair makes sure that the annual board self-evaluation assessments take place.
- The chair consults regularly with the head to anticipate and strategize issues, concerns, and priorities. The chair is a ready and willing listener to the head's concerns as they emerge; he or she serves as a major advisor. When all is going well, the chair is a private confidante, critic when necessary, and the head's No. 1 public advocate.
- The chair participates in the process of trustee selection and ensures that the head has an opportunity to participate also and to review potential candidates and officers.
- The chair makes sure that trustee orientation occurs and that the board as a whole devotes periodic attention to boardsmanship and governance.

- The chair organizes the board in the most effective way to conduct its business. The chair sees that the board exercises its fiduciary role but also devotes significant time to strategic planning.
- The chair sees that important discussions take place with the full board present, not in the executive committee. The chair should limit executive committee meetings to acting as a sounding board for the head, agenda setting, emergencies, or acting on behalf of the full board, and at their behest, when the full board is not in session.
- The chair involves his or her successor in discussions to ensure a smooth transition at the conclusion of the current chair's term. Bringing the new chair up to speed is crucial to the health of the board and the school. Use of this job description is recommended.
- The chair accepts the responsibility to be the disciplinarian of the board when necessary. He or she deals personally with board members who have conflicts of interest, breaches of confidentiality, interference with management, speaking for the board without permission, public disagreement with majority decisions, and other violation of best practice. He or she is willing to help counsel unproductive, disruptive, and counterproductive trustees off the board.
- The chair is willing to put in the time it takes to do all these things. For ISACS school chairs, this task averages four to five hours a week over the course of the school year. Because the chair's responsibilities do not take a vacation, the chair will probably have to devote time to these issues during the summer months as well.

Most of the above is excerpted from the NAIS Trustee Handbook, 9th Edition, with revisions and additions by Keith Shahan, ISACS President, March, 2014