



THE SUMMIT
COUNTRY DAY SCHOOL



CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT
INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE
OPPORTUNITY
CARING
Meeting Families' Needs
Highly Trained Faculty
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT
HOLISTIC
Unique Curricula
INNOVATION
DIVERSITY
Nurturing Creativity
Community
ETHICAL FRAMEWORK

**The Independent
School Advantage**

NAIS President Donna Orem: We Need to Look to the Future

In this Q&A, Head of School Rich Wilson poses questions about why parents choose independent schools and Donna Orem, president of the National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS) answers them.

Q: *When parents are considering sending their children to an independent school, what are the top reasons they choose independent schools?*

A: Each independent school is unique, which enables families to choose the type of education environment that works best for each child and for the family as a whole.

Many families who choose independent schools are looking for a caring community that will help their child grow up to be a good person who contributes to the wider world. They also want a school that will challenge their child intellectually, helping them excel academically and succeed in college and career. Many also want a school that is safe, where children can grow and become their best selves. The distinct philosophies and caring teachers at independent schools help them meet families' needs.

Q: *Like many independent schools, The Summit focuses on educating the whole child. Our mission statement calls for us to develop each child spiritually, academically, physically, socially and artistically. Why is this important?*

A: As parents, we all strive to meet our children's needs as best we can. Choosing a school that focuses on the whole child means you can feel confident that your child's development will be viewed holistically and nurtured by experts. Also, as we look to the future, we know that social, emotional and creative skills – those skills that are uniquely human – will be in high demand as we enter the second machine age, in which emerging technologies (like Artificial Intelligence) will be more present in our day-to-day lives.

Q: *Independent schools are known for developing well-rounded students for success in life, yet colleges seem to focus on specific roles they want a prospective student to fill based on their needs that year. How should independent schools reconcile those two perspectives?*

A: Most schools with selective admissions are trying to create a community of students who will challenge one another and expose each other to diverse perspectives. The college may be trying to fill a specific need in a given year (a tuba player for the marching band, say), but overall, they are looking for active and engaged learners who will thrive in that particular community. Independent schools excel because they instill a love of learning and offer students many opportunities to grow their skills. While individual skills are often particularly sought after, the intellectual curiosity and community-mindedness that independent schools foster are universally valued. These skills are the ones that will most benefit students no matter what path they take in life.

Q: *How do you view the tradeoff independent schools are trying to balance between preparing students to do well on standardized tests (ACT/SAT/AP) but also have strong character and polished social skills?*

A: Independent schools typically help students develop character while developing their academic muscles. Independent schools develop unique curricula and experiences for students that enable teachers to address numerous areas at once. It is in this seamless integration of diverse types of work and experiences that independent schools really distinguish themselves.



**Donna Orem, president of
the National Association of
Independent Schools**

Q: *Some say that independent schools have become too expensive – that middle class students can no longer afford them. What do independent schools need to do to still stay ahead of the curve educationally but still be reasonably priced?*

A: High-quality education can be expensive, but most independent schools offer financial aid so that they are accessible to students from a wide range of backgrounds. Having a student body that's diverse in many different ways confers benefits to all students.

Q: *Ohio is one of the most governmentally intrusive states into private education. As the national leader of independent schools, does that concern you? What's the best way to combat that?*

A: Independent schools have the freedom to determine their own mission statements and then design the programs that will best serve students. They are accountable to boards, parents and the agencies that accredit them. This freedom and accountability provides phenomenal opportunities to innovate and better serve the unique needs of students.

For many within the independent school community, federal or state-mandated tests are seen as burdensome and counterproductive to learning. Families are often concerned that public schools spend too much time on tests rather than active learning. School leaders might worry that the desire to do well on the test could pressure teachers to alter their curriculum or approaches, perhaps covering more material, but offering less depth.

NAIS works to protect the independence of independent schools so they can continue to serve students and families well. We also partner with state and regional associations of independent schools to work with local and state governments to preserve that independence. We lose some of those battles, but will continue to make the case. For individual schools, I think

continuing to educate students who do well at the next level of education and who are successful in their chosen career paths is the best response. We hope that gathering and sharing data on our student outcomes will help to influence policy makers at all levels of government in the future.

Q: *NAIS has encouraged private schools to innovate. What areas of independent school education do you think need to be improved and why is that important?*

A: Independent schools are constantly evolving and improving. The world around us is changing so rapidly, it's vitally important that independent schools consider how best to prepare students for the future. Many of our member schools have been around for 50, 100 or even 300 years, but no school looks the same as it did the day it was founded. Successful schools value their history and all of the people who came before them, but also look to the future. Learning is in their DNA and they are curious about what comes next. For example, in the last decade there have been many advances in our understanding of the brain and how children learn. I see many schools innovating around their teaching and learning models to reflect that new learning. There is also much experimentation today around personalized learning. Schools will continually need to push that frontier to ensure that we can reach the goal of every child succeeding.

Q: *Some independent schools are non-sectarian and some are religious. As an educator, what role should an independent school play in the spiritual development of its students?*

A: Spiritual life is very important to many families. Independent schools allow them to choose the community that suits them best. I myself went to Catholic school for K-12 and for my undergraduate education. It was foundational in so many ways. The most important role for any school though is to determine its unique mission and to ensure that its policies and programs align to that mission.

What Makes Independent Schools Special?

Independence in the truest sense of the word. Independent schools are governed by a board of trustees, not a public school board. They are primarily supported by tuition payments, charitable contributions and endowment revenue.

Independent school teachers have the freedom to create educational experiences that meet each child's needs, without state mandates on curriculum, textbooks and testing.

Mission-driven education. Whether co-educational or single-sex, day school or boarding school, each independent school is driven by its own unique philosophy, values and approach to teaching.

The diversity among independent schools allows you to find a school that is a great fit for your student.

High academic standards. Independent schools nurture intellectual curiosity, stimulate personal growth, encourage critical thinking and promote a lifelong love of learning.

More students in independent schools enroll in advanced courses than in public, parochial and other private schools.

Small classes allow for individual attention. Low student-teacher ratios encourage close connections between instructors and students.

In 2015-2016, the median ratio in NAIS schools was 8.6 students to each teacher.

Excellent teachers. Independent school instructors usually teach in their areas of expertise. They strive to develop a full understanding of each student's learning style, interests and motivation

Graduates of independent schools have a greater likelihood of completing a bachelor's degree or graduate degree.

Education for the whole child. In addition to academics, independent schools also nurture students' personal and social growth and civic conscience.

Outside the classroom, students participate in school-sponsored athletic competitions, artistic pursuits and leadership experiences.

Inclusiveness. Independent schools foster diverse and vibrant student communities that welcome and respect every family.

In 2015-2016, students of color were 26 percent of independent school enrollment, while 3.2 percent of students were from other countries.

A community of parents who actively participate in their children's education. Independent schools promote regular communication among students, parents and teachers to ensure everyone is working toward the same goals.

As a parent, you can actively engage in your student's education, because the staff and teachers want and value your participation.

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The Summit is the only Catholic school in Cincinnati which is accredited by the Independent Schools Association of the Central States. This article from the NAIS explains what separates independent schools from other types of schools.