The AAIE-A/OS Good Governance Project

Board of Trustees Self-Evaluation

A thoughtful and candid self-appraisal is the cornerstone of a board's growth and development.

NAIS International Trustees Handbook, 2019

There are no perfect boards, but, according to Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices, boards that regularly assess their performance perform better on their core responsibilities.

BoardSource 2017

Background

The Board self-evaluation is a tool designed to surface a Board's strengths and weaknesses. It provides an opportunity for the Board to learn about itself, celebrate what it does well, and address those areas in need of improvement.

If for no other reason, most international schools conduct periodic self-evaluation because it is required by the major accrediting agencies. But the value of the process extends far beyond just compliance with external standards. Effective Board self-evaluation serves to enhance governance in a variety of ways by enabling the Board to:

- identify ways in which the Board can improve its performance;
- ascertain to what extent the Board met its Board goals for the year;
- affirm the shared understanding of the Board's role and responsibilities;
- remind board members of their individual and collective responsibilities;
- improve communications within the Board and with the Director;
- signal to the rest of the school community the importance of accountability; and
- determine relevant Board goals for the next school year.

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Ingredients of an Effective Board Self-Evaluation

Constructive Board self-evaluations do not "just happen." They need to be planned and conducted thoughtfully, normally by the Governance Committee. Critical to the success (and usefulness) of the exercise is the joint commitment of all Trustees, led by the Chair. Everyone needs to be involved.

Ideally, the process will utilize a governance standards-based instrument, customized as needed to meet the Board's needs. It should look at both the Board's achievement of its goals as well as Board operations benchmarked against effective governance practices and the Board's own agreements regarding operational norms.

Recognizing that Trustees are busy with their regular Board responsibilities and their day lives, the whole process must not overtax the capacity/willingness of Board members to engage fully. Be thorough, but keep it simple. One solution is to use a combination of a rating scale for relevant standard governance responsibilities and an option of providing elaborating comments. Think feasibility - both in the time required by Trustees and in the use of "user-friendly" technology.
The issue of candor is also important. The decision whether to retain anonymity or not depends on the

trust level of the Board culture. While the advantage of being able to delve more deeply into outlier ratings when the author is identified is evident, it might not be worth the risk of Trustees holding back their true thoughts. Whether or not individual Trustees are identified with particular ratings/comments, there should be agreement that the results of the Board self-evaluation *in toto* are not to be shared outside of the Board (Note: the "Board" in this case includes the Head of School and any other 'ex officio members whose perspective should also be considered.)

Finally, the self-evaluation process must result in follow-up. This is not simply a report card for the file; a truly constructive Board self-evaluation will guide the Board to apply what it has learned to enhance its effectiveness.

The Process

The timing of the Board self-evaluation is also critical. The annual process (see below for recommendations about other Board assessment models) should begin at the start of the year. A typical calendar for the annual Board self-evaluation looks like this:

September - designate who is responsible for coordinating the self-evaluation (e.g. Governance Committee, Chair, Secretary, or designated individual or task force)
November - agree on the instrument/process; share with board members
January - brief mid-year review of progress on Board goals
April - conduct self-appraisal
May - discuss results as a board
June - determine next year's goals and develop outcomes for August Board Retreat

Once the instrument is chosen (and customized), it should be shared with all Trustees. Better that they know the rubric with which they'll be evaluating themselves ahead of time than to discovery at the end of the year that they had been negligent in one way or another.

Finally and, frankly the most important aspect of the Board self-evaluation process, is the follow-up. A timely and authentic self-evaluation should prompt discussion and action leading to affirmation and/or improvement of the Board's performance. Major needs unveiled by the process should be addressed immediately or through a goal-setting/action planning process by the Board. But other less weighty but impactful changes might be prompted as well, particularly in regard to the Board's operational norms.

While the focus on Board self-evaluation seems to be on the formal end-of-year process, effective Boards use a variety of other methods of assessing their performance along the way: placing on the agenda a mid-year check-up as a discussion item; building in a brief end-of-meeting appraisal (APPENDIX II *International School Board Self-Evaluation: How Was Our Meeting?*); and an individual Trustee reflection (APPENDIX III *International School Board of Trustees Self -Evaluation Individual Trustee Reflection*).

The Instrument

The quality of the Board self-evaluation instrument will in large measure determine the quality of the result. Boards should choose carefully. The AAIE Board Evaluation Instrument (APPENDIX I *The AAIE International School Board Evaluation Instrument*), is derived from the AAIE International School Board Governance Curriculum, August, 2020 and as such, provides a comprehensive, validated, widely used instrument.

Conclusion

Board self-evaluation is clearly a significant tool in an International School Board's toolbox for sustaining effective governance and building the Board's capacity. Done right, the process will serve the School and its community well.

February 22, 2021

APPENDIX I

ASSOCIATION for the ADVANCEMENT of INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

THE AAIE INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL BOARD EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

v. 2.0
September 1, 2020

The AAIE International School Board Evaluation Instrument is a component of the AAIE Governance Suite by David Chojnacki and Rick Detwiler, licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

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Part I. Rate the degree to which the Board performs each element of the seven indicators of an effective Board of Trustees.

4 = Fully, 3 = To a great degree, 2 = Partially, 1 = Inadequately

1. PERFORMING ROLES & FULFILLING RESPONSIBILITIES	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. The Board governs in a way that balances taking care of routine matters, (including fiduciary oversight) with long-term thinking and strategic decision making.						
b. The Board focuses on strategic policy issues, leaving the operational matters to the Head.						
c. Board Policies are current, clearly express the Board's intent, reflect the school's mission, vision and values, and are consistent with the foundational documents (Bylaws, etc.). Administrative procedures are aligned with Board policies.						
d. Trustees, especially the chair/president, understand and fulfill their roles.						

2. MEETING FIDUCIARY RESPONSIBILITIES	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. The Board exercises oversight regarding the school's finances and assets to ensure sustainability for the future						
b. The Board effectively manages risks that may impact the school through good strategic decisions and fiduciary oversight.						
c. Trustees understand and abide by the Board's Conflict of Interest Policy and its statement of ethics, including maintaining confidentiality.						
d. The Board annually reviews the school's crisis preparedness, including clarification of the Board's role during a crisis.						
e. Relations with the community are healthy.						
f. The Board employs protocols that ensure it fulfills its responsibilities as the school's fiduciaries.						

3. BUILDING AND SUSTAINING THE BOARD	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. The current Board structure (size; how constituted; how selected) promotes effectiveness, efficiency and organizational sustainability.						
b. Board members are identified, recruited, selected, and inducted (with effective orientation) in light of the current needs of the school and with conscious reference to the school's mission, vision, and values.						
c. The Board appraisal process is effective in enhancing the Board's performance.						
d. The Board participates in high quality professional development that enhances its ability to work together effectively and efficiently.						
e. Trustees abide by policies ~~and~~ operating norms. If a Trustee consistently or egregiously deviates from these norms, the situation is addressed by the Board chair/Board and resolved effectively.						

4. HIRING AND SUSTAINING THE HEAD	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. The Board supports the Head through demonstrating respect for his/her role, encouraging and funding his/her professional development, and publicly demonstrating its confidence in him/her.						
b. The Board conducts a formal and growth-focused evaluation of the Head's performance annually based on his/her job description and board-approved goals.						
c. The Chair maintains a close, supportive and positive relationship with the Head						

5. OPTIMIZING BOARD OPERATIONS	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. Board meetings are productive and collaborative, as evident in meeting artifacts (agendas, reports, minutes, etc.) and a positive "atmosphere" at meetings.						
b. The Board utilizes standing committees and task forces effectively and efficiently to support the work of the Board.						
c. Guidelines for between-meeting Board member behavior are clear and adhered to, particularly observing established communication protocols.						
d. Decision making by the Board is done carefully, thoroughly, collaboratively and in a timely manner. Decisions are aligned with the school's mission, vision, and values.						
e. Provisions are in place for virtual meetings and decision making in the event of emergencies.						

6. BEING STRATEGIC	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. The Board formally affirms the school's guiding documents (e.g. mission, vision, values) annually and consistently demonstrates a commitment to them in its discussions and decision making.						
b. The Board has and references relevant mid- to long-term financial, strategic, and facilities plans in its discussions and decision-making.						
c. The Board consistently maintains a strategic focus.						

7. BEING ACCOUNTABLE	4	3	2	1	I don't know	Comments
a. The Board monitors the School’s performance based on indicators grounded in the school’s mission, vision, and values.						
b. The Board utilizes relevant performance indicators, measured over time, to inform its decision making.						

Part II. Fill-in the first column with specific Board Goals for the year and then rate the degree to which the Board achieved those goals.

4 = Fully, 3 = To a great degree, 2 = Partially, 1 = Inadequately

Board Goal for the Year	4	3	2	1	Comments
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					

APPENDIX II
International School Board Self-Evaluation

How Was Our Meeting?

Meeting Date:_____
Trustee (optional):_____

Use this questionnaire to take a real-time quick reading of members' views about the quality of the meetings of the governing body. The results can help guide the Chair and/or be used for a general discussion about improving meeting effectiveness.

Item	***We did a good job***	***We could improve***	***Specific praise, concerns, questions, or suggestions***
Development of Agenda			
Content of the Agenda			
Distributing materials			
Attendance/punctuality			
Discussion			
Decision-making			
Atmospherics (e.g. tone and behavior)			
Clarification of follow-up on action items			
Logistics			
Application of our Mission and Vision			
External communication			

APPENDIX III

International School Board of Trustees Self -Evaluation

Individual Trustee Reflection

1 - *strongly disagree* 2 - *disagree* 3 - *neutral* 4 - *agree* 5 - *strongly agree*

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I fully understand and promote the Mission of the school					
2. I was well-briefed and oriented as a new Trustee					
3. I have a good working relationship with the other Trustees					
4. I have a good working relationship with the Head of School					
5. I receive adequate information about the school's major programs					
6. I read the materials sent to me prior to Board and committee meetings					
7. I attend and participate fully in Board meetings and my committee meetings					
8. I complete all Board work assignments in a responsible and timely way					
9. I respect the confidentiality of the Board's executive session and related work					
10. I contribute fully to the development of Board goals and strategies					
11. I ensure any communication I have with staff does not undermine the role of the Head of School or her/his relationship with her/his staff					
12. I avoid, in fact and perception, conflicts of interest that might embarrass me, the Board, or the school, and disclose in a timely manner all possible conflicts					
13. I contribute to focusing the Board's work on strategic issues rather than operational matters					
13. I offer, am heard, and have considered opinions during Board deliberations					
14. I support board decisions, even those I disagree with, outside the boardroom					
15. When a parent approaches me with a concern, I empathize, explain, redirect, and inform					
16. I am confident that the Board's level of fiduciary oversight is sufficient					
17. I find my service on the Board to be productive and rewarding					

Based on NAIS Individual Trustee Questionnaire
Spring, 1997