



SAIS Board Assessment Description

To accompany SAIS governance workshops and other training and as a way to provide useful information to boards of independent schools, SAIS has created an instrument that is aligned with the SAIS conceptual framework of effective governance.

Responses to questions are given on a standard five point Likert scale assessing the level of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

The questions were developed in five major categories: separation, confidentiality, board-head relationship, strategic mindset, and board operations. There are six items in the first four categories and ten items in the fifth category. Items are presented to the respondent in random order.

SAIS reports to the school on each item and on each of the categories. Schools receive an aggregate report of their information; no personal information is recorded.

Within the survey, SAIS is collecting additional demographic information from each board member: length of service, current parent status, alumni status, role on the board. Due to the small number of respondents within a single school, this information cannot be reported on at the individual level, but once there is sufficient data, will be reported on at a benchmark level.

SEPARATION

1. The board does not hear appeals from families dissatisfied by the head of school's decision.
2. The board sets only the salary of the head of school.
3. Offers of admissions and financial aid / scholarship decisions are made without board input.
4. The board provides an open forum for parents and others to address grievances. *(negative prompt)*
5. The board approves candidates for employment. *(negative prompt)*
6. The board spends more time in putting out fires than in planning for the future. *(negative prompt)*

CONFIDENTIALITY

1. Board members maintain confidentiality of all board discussions.
2. Board members support board decisions, even when there is disagreement.
3. Board members encourage each other to express opinions and be heard at board and committee meetings.
4. Board members fully and positively participate in discussions.
5. Outside of the board room, the board speaks with one voice.
6. Board members share conversations with their spouse/partner after board meetings are over. *(negative prompt)*

BOARD-HEAD RELATIONSHIP

1. The board gives the head adequate personal support and guidance.
2. The board feels responsible for the success of the head.
3. The board regularly asks what it can do to help the head.
4. The board trusts the judgement of the head of school.
5. The board asks at least once a year that the head of school articulate his/her vision for the school's future and strategies to realize that vision.
6. The board has communicated the kinds of information and level of detail it requires from the head of school on the latest developments at the school.

STRATEGIC MINDSET

1. The board spends more than half of its meeting time being proactive, discussing issues of importance to the school's long-range future.
2. The board discusses events and trends in the larger environment that may present specific opportunities for the school.
3. The board engages in formal and regular strategic thinking and planning.
4. Board meetings regularly include professional development for board members.
5. The members of the board suspend personal motivation.
6. Board meeting presentations and discussions consistently reference the school's mission statement.

BOARD OPERATIONS

1. Nomination and appointment of board members follow clearly established procedures using known criteria.
2. Newly elected board members receive adequate orientation to their role and what is expected of them.
3. Board meetings are well attended, with near full turnout at each meeting.
4. Each board member has meaningful work to do and is thanked for it.
5. The board follows its policy that defines term limits for board members.
6. Board members follow through on things they say they are going to do.
7. The board regularly reviews and evaluates the performance of the Head of School.
8. The board regularly reviews its own performance and the performance of individual members.
9. Board members support the development needs of the school by making the school a personal giving priority during years of service on the board.
10. Board members support the development needs of the school by soliciting prospective donors on behalf of the school and participating in the ongoing cultivation of donors.

“Too often, according to Chait et al., boards are a collection of high-powered individuals engaged in low-level activities, resulting in less-than-optimal governance for the organizations they serve” (Independent School Leadership: Heads, Boards and Strategic Thinking, 2014, p. 84, citing Katsouros, 2011).