Privilege and Responsibility

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Woody Allen once began a commencement speech with the following remark, “More than at any other time in history, mankind faces a crossroads. One path leads to despair and utter hopelessness. The other, to total extinction. Let us pray we have the wisdom to choose correctly.”

I applaud the SAIS theme of privilege and responsibility. I personally feel privileged to have worked in and for independent schools for 32 years, all my adult working life, and especially privileged to represent independent schools as the president of NAIS. I feel responsible accordingly, to ensure that NAIS is the champion and a model of the core values I hope we all stand for independence, innovation, and inclusivity.

What the Data Tells Us…

10 year trends, Core Sample (500-600 schools):
   Tuition/Admissions/Enrollment
   -Tuition: K-3= $11,000, Gr 6-8= $12,500, Gr 9-12= $13,800.
   Tuitions adjusted for inflation, up .30% in 10 years, boarding and day (CPI+3%)
   Is there any limit to what people pay for a quality education?
   -Enrollments: Up 20% “Elasticity” of pricing--- so far we have not hit the breakpoint where increased price dampens demand.
   -Student Attrition: (avg. 9% day and 17% boarding) is down overall by 7.7% (up for boarding but significantly down for day)
   -Staffing: What is driving up tuitions? Overall staff up 38% and faculty student ratio down 7% (9:1 in day and 7:1 in boarding)

Privilege: To represent and lead schools where quality is so apparent and the school competition is often poor, that demand remains essentially constant, whatever the cost.

Responsibility:
1- To define the context of your individual missions, what quality and excellence mean – and to demonstrate by profiling your students, teachers, and alumni how you manifest that quality.
2- To address the issue of “mission –creep” and program/staffing expansion. We should be examining our staff ratios to explore economies that could take the pressure off accelerating tuition increases.
3- In tenuous economic times, responsible leadership will only ad program and staff as it retires other program and staff.
Diversity
-20% increase of Students of Color as a percentage of total student body to an average of 17%. 47% increase in staff of color (avg. 10% faculty of color and 8% administrators of color.)
- Financial Aid: Grants up 38% but number of recipients up on 1.8%. 20% of student body receiving aid (33% boarding schools) (day school 20% = 16% need based, 4% faculty kids on tuition remission)

Privilege: We are less elitist than the public assumes (more diversity than most neighborhood schools), but less representative than the colleges our kids attend (70% receive aid).

Responsibility:
1- To set goals for increasing the commitment to financial aid, to raising the percentage of families receiving aid, to increasing the socio-economic and racial mix at our schools to be more reflective of the culture at large.
2- To find ways to do so (ratio adjustment) without increasing tuition and staff.

Compensating Faculty
Faculty compensation: Median Salaries= $27,000 (start), $40,250 (median), $57,200 (top); Attrition: 10.1% NAIS; 11% Business; 13.2% US Teachers; 22.8% small privates

Privilege: To attract and talented and loyal teachers who see work in our schools as a calling and who stick with us tenaciously even when they could move elsewhere for more lucrative employment.

Responsibility: To reward them more competitively, so that they can live a standard of “middle class dignity.”

Giving
- Annual Giving: Up 22% : Avg.Gift%= $719 parent (53.3%); $3218 Trustee (82.4%); $505 Grandparent (.1%)

Privilege: Our constituents are generous with us. (Plurality of our parents over $200 K new theme for annual giving; “We know you have the money and we want it!”)

Responsibility: To invest in development and to build endowment to preserve what others who have come before us have built.
1- Invest more (3-5 multiple return)
2- Set endowment building policies
What the Culture Presents to us…

Why Good Schools are Counter Cultural:

Values of the Popular Culture

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Note: Fifth grade boy at Athens Academy (GA) checking out a book on his own with no adults in sight, “You mean, no adult oversees this?” “No sir.”
“But you could just walk out with the book,”
“No sir.”
“Why not since no one is here to see you?”
(Here the head is hoping the boy will cite the strength of the honor system).
“Wouldn’t do it.”
“Why not?”
“I would be killed.”

Privilege: We create salutary and salubrious environments for kids and adults—ethical biospheres that are highly controlled and that serve, when we are at our best, as antidotes to the morally toxic popular culture.

Responsibility: To walk the talk. Kids are the “hypocrisy police.” I find it awkward that we often expect children to be more honest than adults, to confront their peers when we won’t confront ours, to behave as exemplars when we do not do it ourselves. The privilege of working in our schools should demand the example of being beyond reproach in one’s personal and professional life.

To educate parents read Wendy Mogel’s *Blessings of a Skinned Knee*. It addresses “helicopter parents.” Green house effect of independent schools: ideal growing conditions but also necessary stresses before transplanting to the outdoor world.

Talk with parents about what”goodness” means. Professor Anthony Campolo, sociologist at Eastern College (PA): Ask Japanese mothers to fill in the blank, “I want my child to be …successful.” Ask American mothers, “I want my child to be …happy.” Right answer I want my child to be …good.” Douglas Hearth (Haverford) research (Lives of Hope, Schools of Hope) shows that people who turn out to be good, also turn out to be successful and happy.
Accreditation and Accountability

Context for the work of the NAIS Commission on Accreditation:
a. We face an increasingly skeptical world regarding the legitimacy of our schools and the way we evaluate them (Washington Post).
b. The public accrediting bodies (the six regionals) have largely abandoned the”input factor” approach to accreditation in favor of the “output factor” or school performance approach measuring improvement in student achievement, an approach to accountability that passes the public scrutiny test of objectivity, but fails the independent school test of practicality: how do kids scoring in the 90%ile plus show annual improvement?
c. The entire thrust of public school reform and the political and media calls for standards, testing, and accountability aligns with the student and school performance assessment model and not at all with our mission and congruence or “mission audit” model.
d. Emergence of competing accreditation models for private schools undermines the independent school industry’s credibility (for example, accreditation and teacher certification for sale by a Florida outfit, if you buy insurance from them.)
e. Within our own ranks and those of our colleagues in the university world, some significant skepticism exists about the validity of our approach to accreditation: NB 12/96 ISM’s I&P debunking of accreditation, “Accreditation :Yea or Nay?” , Columbia University’s president parody of an accreditation report:

“For considerable periods the four oboe players have nothing to do . Their number should be reduced and the work spread more evenly over the whole of the concert, thus eliminating peaks of activity.
All twelve first violins were playing identical notes. This seems unnecessary duplication …Much effort was absorbed in the playing of semiquavers. This seems an excessive refinement. It is recommended that all notes be rounded up to the next quaver…It is estimated that if all redundant passages were eliminated, the whole concert time of two hours could be reduced to twenty minutes, and there would be no need for an intermission.”

Privilege: To have the freedom to choose an appropriate accreditation process.

Responsibility: To Raise the Bar- to create an improved model where we supplement the congruence approach of matching mission and practice with an “accountability” approach where we track our graduates to demonstrate how well they do at the next level of schooling.
In short: we are blessed to live in a country with guaranteed freedoms, but cursed by the lack of a balance between freedom and community responsibility. At the very least, we should model what might be for the country, privileged as we are, to show that we champion many values, including the public purpose of private education, to model quality schooling and commitment to the larger purpose of the democracy and culture.