

The Board Chair-Head of School Communication Clarity Worksheet

The relationship between the board chair and the head of an independent school is one of the most important relationships in the organization. These two individuals, who are responsible for overseeing the health, stability, and viability of the entire school now, and well into the future, need to support one another as well as hold each other accountable. Engaging in structured conversations very early in the relationship to develop shared understandings, and then revisiting these discussions regularly will help to provide the basis for an open, honest, and productive relationship.

1. Enhance Connections

There are always ways to deepen your connection. As you create time to discuss the following, consider going off-campus, perhaps over a meal, where you will be uninterrupted and not rushed.

Share:

1. Your life's journey leading to this current role.
2. Your favorite place to be/thing to do outside of work.
3. The strengths that make you a good match for this role.
4. Characteristics, perspectives, attributes, or other aspects or that personally and/or professionally challenge you.
5. How this partner can support you in overcoming or addressing these challenges.
6. Your vision of an outstanding head-board chair partnership.

2. Establish Preferred Communication Channels

Establish how, where, and when each person prefers to communicate. Take notes for future reference.

- How do you prefer to communicate for regular conversations- phone, text, email, walk-in?
- When do you prefer to communicate- in the morning, over lunch, after school, in the evening?
- How often should we be communicating on a regular basis?
- How do you prefer to hear about problems or emergencies- phone, text, email, walk-in?
- How do you prefer to engage in difficult conversations that may have an emotional impact- in person, on the phone, in your office, outside of school?
- How you prefer to communicate and interact with the board as a whole; with individual board members?

3. Develop a shared understand of the mission

The school's mission should guide all discussions and decisions. Developing a shared understanding of the mission, that goes beyond the words of the mission statement, is critical for the head and board chair.

- Beyond the mission statement, what is our shared understanding of the school's mission?
- Where is the mission most evident in our school? Least evident?
- How well do our constituents understand the mission of the school? How do we know?

4. Develop a shared understanding of the vision and strategic goals

Developing a deep, shared understanding of where the school is headed both aligns you, and establishes the basis for goal-setting.

- Beyond any statements, what is our shared understanding of the vision, and short and long-term goals for the school?
- Where do we see evidence of progress towards goals and vision? Where are we lacking progress?
- What are the barriers to progress towards our goals? What can we do to address those barriers?
- What are the head's specific goals relative to the school's overall vision and goals?

5. Discuss the process the board will use to make decisions.

Few boards discuss the process for effective decision-making. The head and board chair can agree upon their preferences for making decisions and share these with the board.

- What is our understanding of the entire process of decision-making- from issue identification to final decision, vote, etc.?
- How will we handle final decisions (vote, consensus)?
- What steps will we take to ensure our decisions are data-informed?
- How will we ensure a diversity of thought and perspective?
- How will we protect against racial and cognitive biases?

6. Understand Power Dynamics

Power is both assigned and assumed in organizations. Power that is held and wielded in ways that are out of alignment with the school's leadership can be destructive. It is important for heads and board chairs to recognize and manage powerful community members.

- Who holds power in the school (in the parent body, student body, faculty & staff, board, in the community)?
- Is power wielded effectively and positively in these groups?
- Does power need to be managed? If so, how?
- Are there ways to effectively use powerful community members to better support the school?

7. Direct Support of the Head

Boards need to actively and regularly provide meaningful support to the head. Board chairs will only fully understand what support is needed if they ask.

- What are your professional goals and how can we support you in achieving them?
- What professional challenges are you experiencing and how can we help you overcome them?
- How can we support your personal time, stress, energy, and emotional management so that you can be at your professional best?

8. Other

What other conversations would be helpful for the two of you to have in order to build a productive partnership?