



ASSOCIATION *of* COLORADO  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

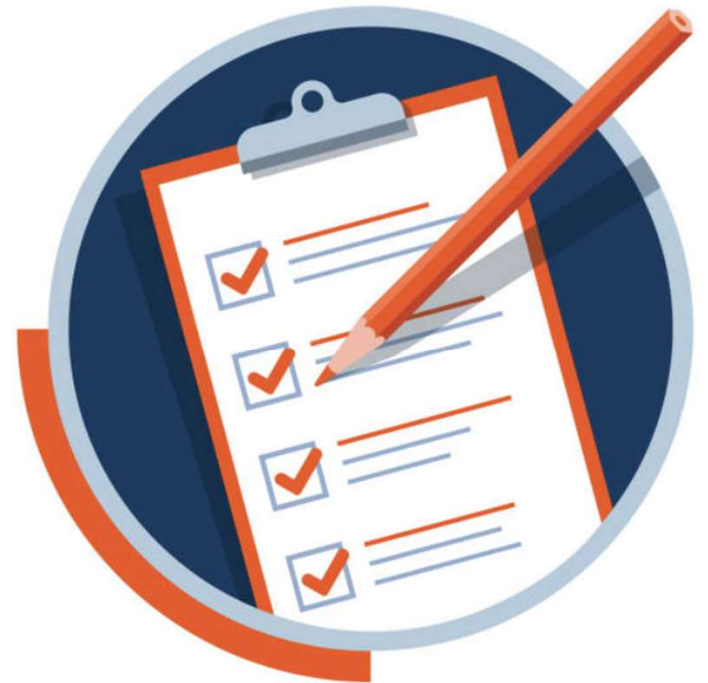
# New Trustee Orientation

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# Today's Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Qualities and Characteristics of High Performing Boards and Trustees
- Supporting a Strong Head-Board Partnership
- Trends and Challenges for Independent Schools and Boards
- Let's Practice – Case Studies!
- Time for Q&A



# How To Be A Good Trustee

## **Roles + Responsibilities:**

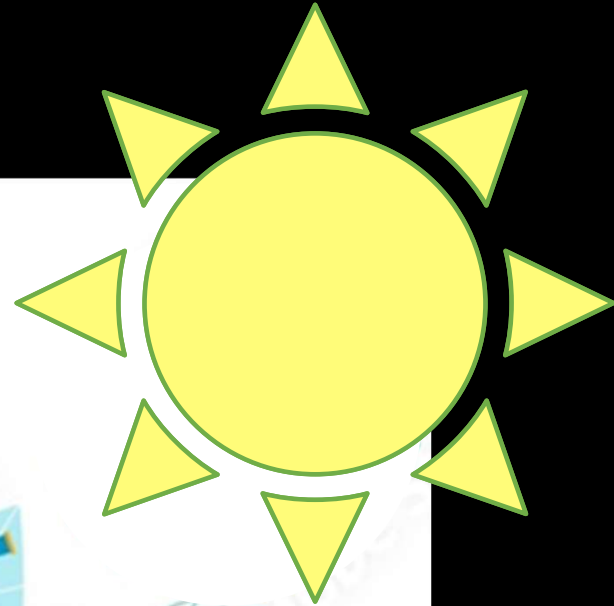
Board

Head of School

Faculty and Administrative Staff

School Community

Donors



# How the Board/Head Relationship Works in Decision Making

## BOARD-HEAD PARTNERSHIP: TIME AND ATTENTION

**Policies**  
**Strategies**  
Mission  
Survival  
Leadership

**BOARD'S DECISIONS**

**HEAD'S ADVICE**

**Partnership**  
Authorizations  
Finance policies  
Enrollment  
Employment Terms

**SHARED DECISIONS:  
BOARD AND HEAD**

**Operational**  
Admissions  
Staffing  
Program  
Systems

**BOARD'S  
ADVICE**

**HEAD'S DECISIONS**

# Qualities of High Performing Boards

- 1.** A Shared Understanding of Roles and Responsibilities
- 2.** A Strong Strategic Orientation
- 3.** A Planned System for Building the Board
- 4.** A Culture of Self-Assessment and Accountability
- 5.** A Structure That Supports Efficiency and Innovation

# What's Your Job?

- 1.** Hire, support, and evaluate the HOS (The HOS is your partner)
- 2.** Support mission, vision, and values
- 3.** Understand good governance, specifically the separation between governance and operations
- 4.** Educate yourself
- 5.** Ensure a sustainable future through fiduciary oversight, strategic planning ,and generative thinking
- 6.** Ensure adequate financial resources and protect school assets
- 7.** Build and maintaining an effective board
- 8.** Hold the school "in trust"



# Best Practices For Individual Trustees

- 1.** Actively support the school's mission, vision, goals, and policies
- 2.** Do not become involved directly in management, personnel, or curricular issues
- 3.** Separate the interest of the school from the specific needs of a child or family
- 4.** Support board decisions, HOS, and demonstrate that support publicly
- 5.** Authority is vested in the board as a whole, not in an individual trustee
- 6.** Each trustee has fiduciary responsibility for sound financial management

# Triggers

Leadership changes

Financial pressures

Personal issues

Lack of good governance understanding

Disruptions within the school community

Reputation concerns

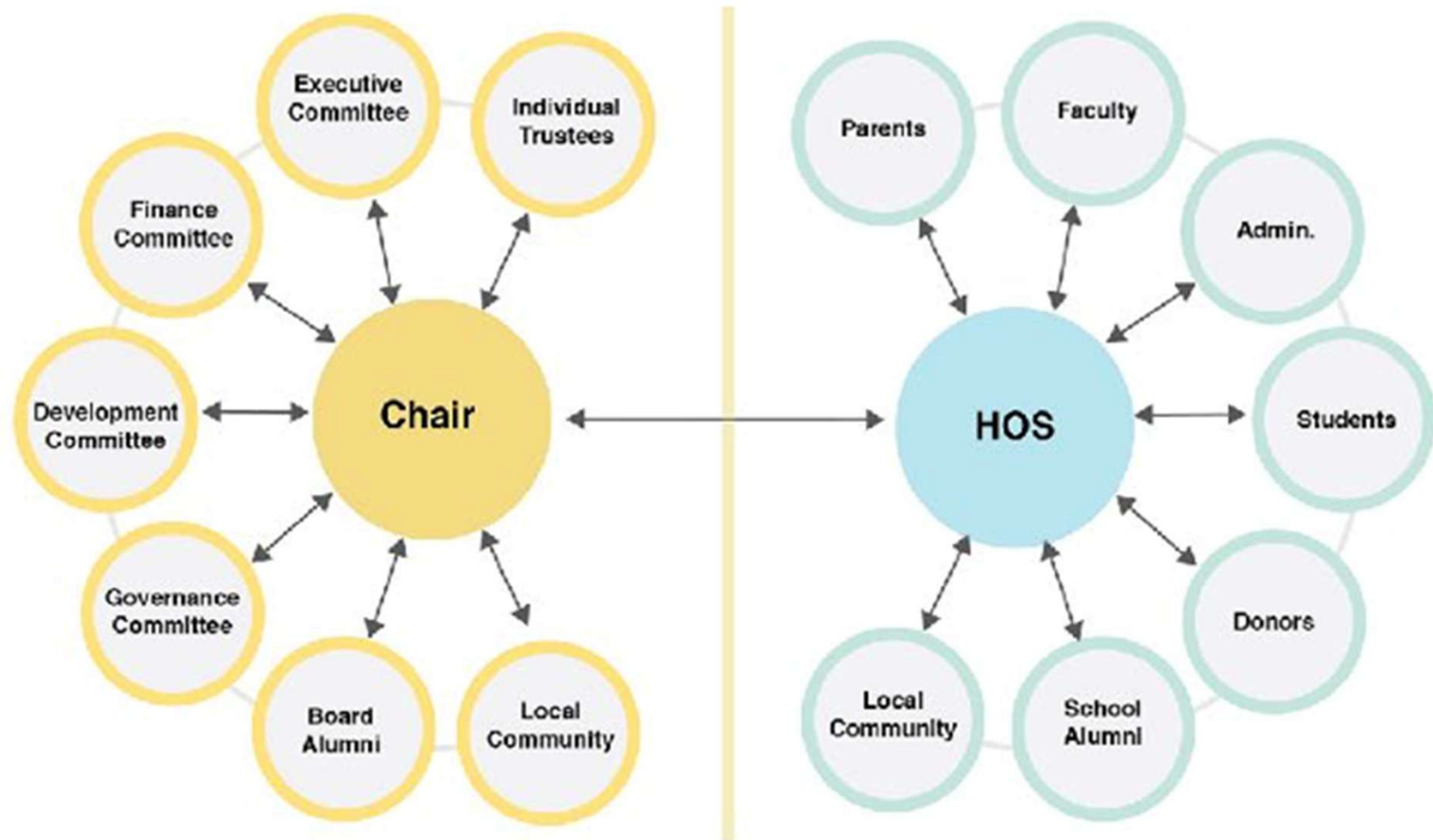
Low admissions

Community polarization

Uncertainty

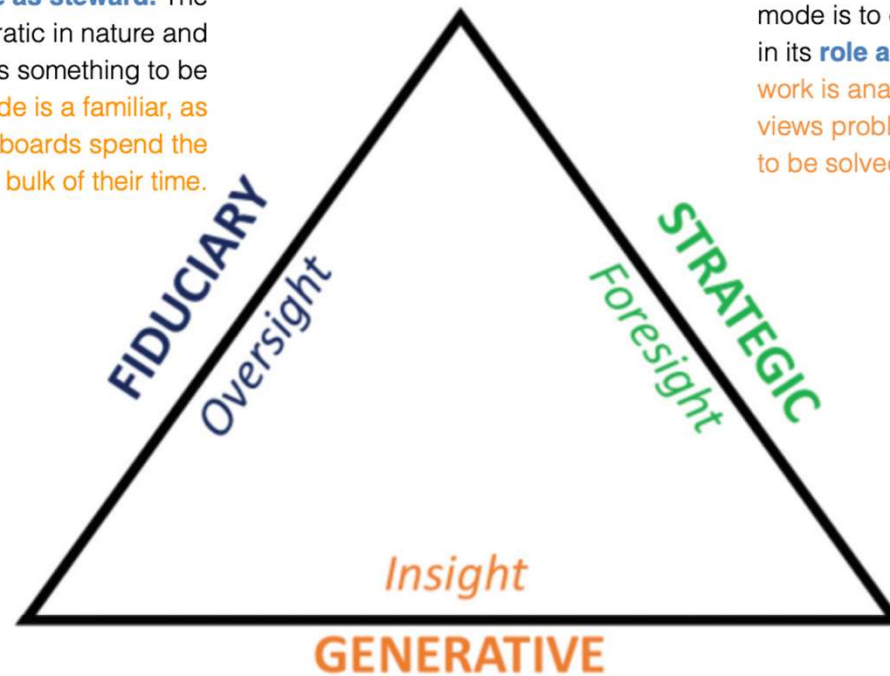


# **Working Together: Committees**



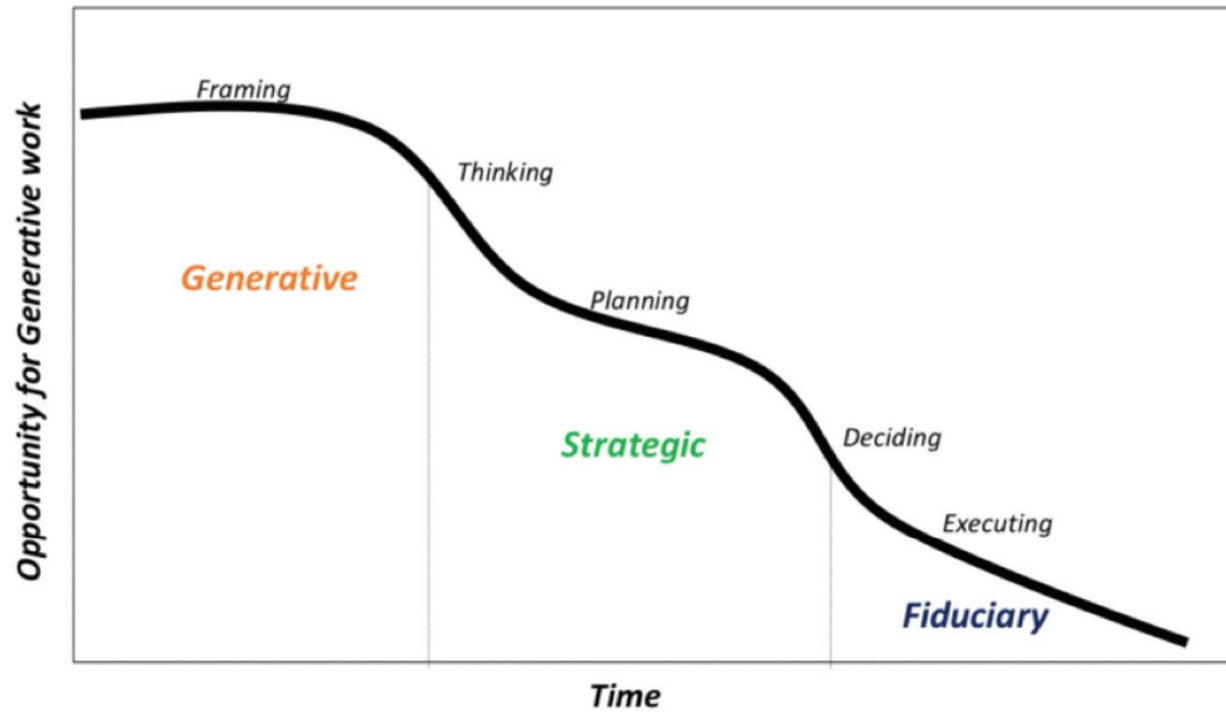
**Generative thinking** reframes a board's work by fostering each trustee's ability to serve as a **thought-leader** who is able to ask catalytic questions, frame problems, and grapple with complexity.

In the **fiduciary mode** the board's primary function is to exercise oversight, in its **role as steward**. The work is bureaucratic in nature and views problems as something to be identified. *This mode is a familiar, as it is where many boards spend the bulk of their time.*



In the **strategic mode** the board's primary function in this mode is to exercise foresight, in its **role as strategist**. *This work is analytical in nature, and views problems as something to be solved.*

In the **generative mode** the board's central purpose in this mode is to develop insight in its **role as a sense-maker**. Generative work is non-linear and non-rational in nature, embraces divergent viewpoints, questions assumptions, and views problems as something to be framed. *When working in this mode, a board functions as a sort of think tank, with conversations that are looser and more free flowing.*



# Culture

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast"

Peter Drucker





School board norms:  
are collectively developed and mutually  
agreed upon expectations that provide  
guidance and directions to board  
members at board meetings.

# Norms for Boards

- **Preparedness:**  
Come to the meeting ready to engage with the agenda
- **The 80/20 Rule:**  
Do not hold the group hostage to any personal agenda, and employ an 80/20 decision-making principle—do we have adequate information to proceed?
- **Confidentiality:**  
Create an environment where people can freely share without fear
- **One Voice:**  
Leave with messages that present a united front
- **Culture/Climate:**  
Grapple with tough issues/challenges while assuming good intent and seeking to understand
- **Deliberations:**  
Base decisions on as much information-gathering as possible
- **Development/Philanthropy/Financial Support:**  
Giving and friend-raising
- **Role:**  
Know your “lane”
- **Conflict:**  
Parent v. Trustee

**What Is Your Impact?**



# Resources

1. Chair of the Board
2. Association of Independent Schools (ACIS)
3. National Association of Independent Schools (NAIS)

# Putting the Partnership in Context

- NAIS research shows that a strong head/board partnership is a key variable to support leadership sustainability.
- A key component is both parties **understanding their roles and responsibilities.**



# Understanding Roles and Responsibilities



## The Board

- Articulates the guiding values of the school through policies that put the school's mission into action
- Creates and nurtures the mission, vision, and values of the school and refines as necessary
- Guides long-term strategy in collaboration with the HOS
- Hires, supports, evaluates, and empowers the HOS
- Ensures long-term financial sustainability
- Selects, recruits, and onboards new trustees

## The Head

- Leads the school
- Collaborates with the chair and board
- Brings the mission, vision, and values to life through experience, programs, and school policies
- Implements an operational plan to achieve long-term strategy
- Hires, supervises, evaluates, and motivates staff
- Develops and oversees annual operational budget
- Manages the day-to-day operations of the school

# The Governance Dichotomy: Govern and Support

## The Board as a Whole - GOVERNS

- Determine mission and purpose
- Hire, evaluate, and support the Head of School
- Strategic planning
- Ensure adequate financial resources
- Protect assets and provide proper financial oversight
- Build a competent board, orientation, self evaluation
- Ensure legal and ethical integrity

## Individual Trustees - SUPPORT

- Fully participate in board and committee meetings
- Financial support
- Fiduciary responsibility
- Separate interests of the school from the needs of your child
- Accept and support board decisions
- Support the school and the HOS in the community
- Confidentiality
- Law of no surprises



- Which of these roles and responsibilities are the easiest for me to fulfill?
- Which ones are harder or more ambiguous? Why?



# When You're a Parent and a Trustee



- Remember your role in the boardroom
- Maintain confidentiality out of the boardroom
- Know when to refer to the Head of School
- Acknowledge power imbalance

# Headship Yesterday and Today

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## 2009 Leadership Challenges

- Providing vision
- Managing their school's climate and values
- Working with their boards

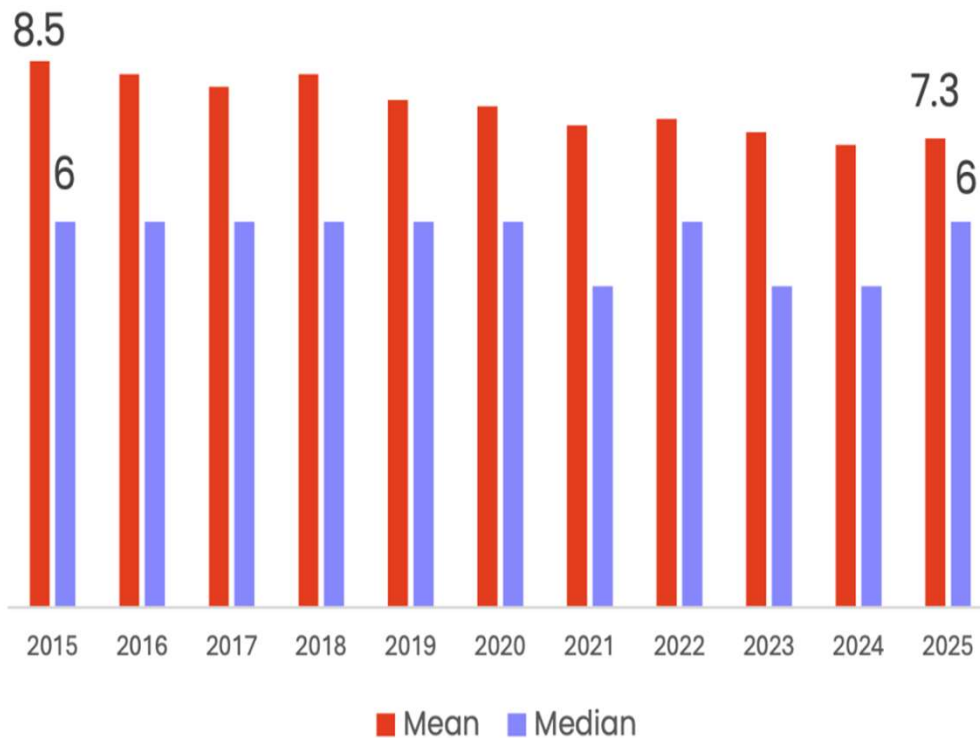
## 2021 Leadership Challenges

- Increased pressure and stress
- Isolation
- Helping their school communities address the pandemic, racial injustice, and economic insecurity and overall uncertainty

Source: NAIS Leadership Study

# A fragile head-board relationship can impact head tenure.

## Head Tenure-NAIS



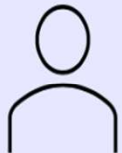

## Head Turnover-NAIS

	2023	2024	2025
% schools with turnover	11.2%	11.4%	10.6%
% turnover that was unexpected*	17.9%	21.4%	24.0%

\*within 3 years.

Source: NAIS Data & Research Dashboard: Head of School Demographics and Turnover

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the head of school receives adequate support from the board around the following key partnership goals?  
(Somewhat/Strongly Agree)**

		Establishing school strategy	Fundraising for the school	Planning for long-term financial sustainability	Creating needed policies
	Head	82%	61%	82%	65%
	Board Chair	96%	81%	96%	86%

# The Question of Support



# The Conversation: How the Board Can Best Support the Head of School

*It's hard to express **vulnerability** in a professional context. You have a helpful board, and the opportunities to continue to work together in a supportive way and for the best interest of our school and our community. There's no one right answer to the question, and there is **no specific road map**.*

Source: NAIS

# What Does HOS Support Look Like?

- *What can I do? vs This is what I can do.*
- Support looks and feels different for different heads of school.
- Communication is key!



# What do HOS Need from Their Boards?

- Sustained engagement and trust
- Safe sounding board for ideas
- Active care and concern
- Allowing for vulnerability
- Succession planning
- Willingness to call out bad board behavior
- Be on top of effective governance practices
- Save us from ourselves (time off)
- Fundraising support





# Good Governance Makes Navigating Complex Challenges Easier

*Effective governance is a dynamic, collective activity in which well-informed trustees engage actively, and ask meaningful questions, on consequential issues with important outcomes for which they hold themselves (and not just the Head) accountable.*

Source - Cathy A. Trower

# Challenges: The HOS and BC Perspective

	Head 2024	Chair 2024	Head 2018	Chair 2018
Developing a sound 5-year financial plan	41%	37%	32%	36%
Identifying effective sources of non-tuition revenue	34%	38%	22%	27%
Creating a diverse and Inclusive school community	29%	26%	36%	34%
Increasing availability of financial aid	29%	24%	33%	32%
Dealing with increased competition from other school options	24%	24%	37%	34%

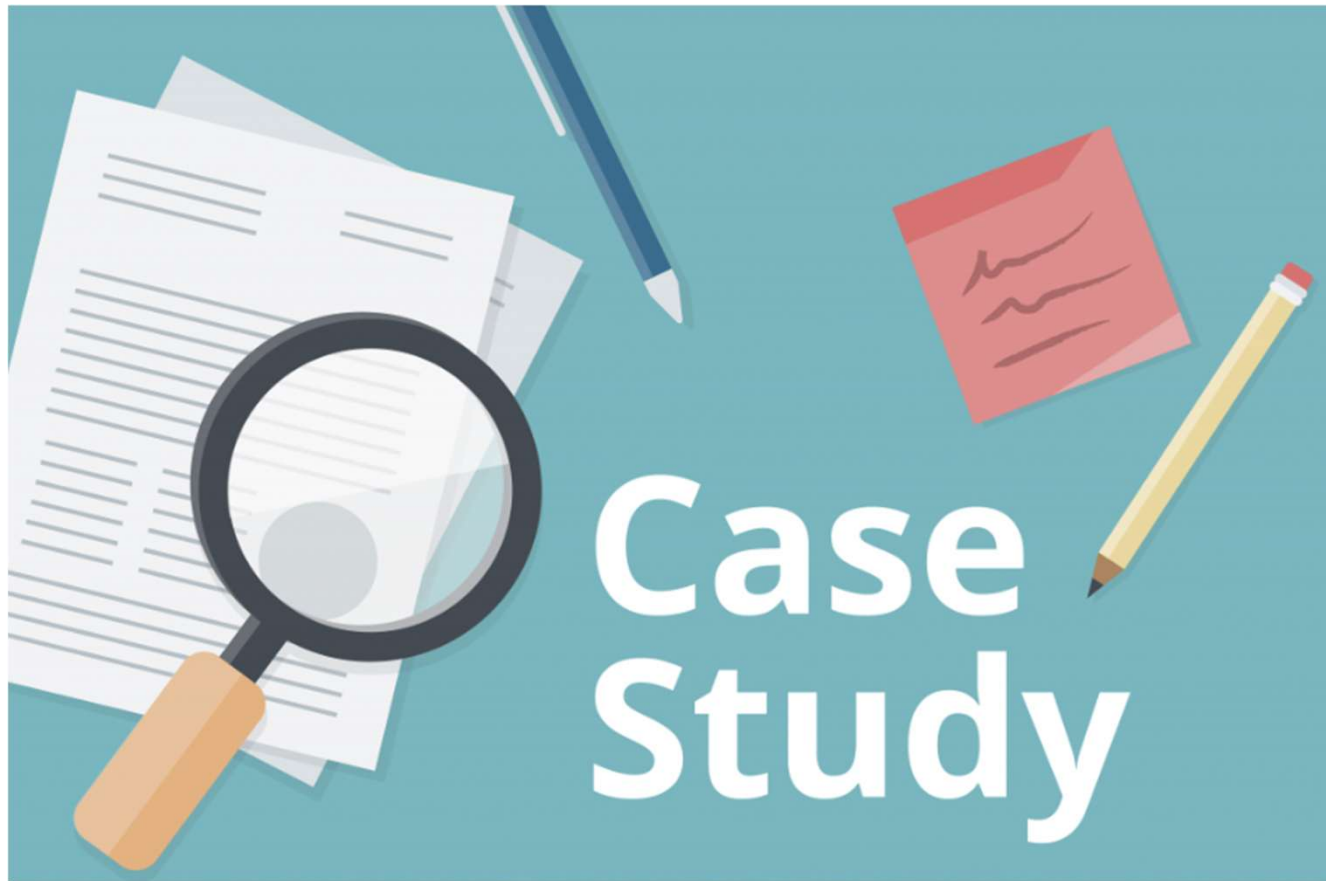
# Challenges Facing Independent Schools Today

- Employee recruitment and retention
- Shifting demographics
- Measuring and communicating impact/value add
- Community polarization
- Economic uncertainty
- Enrollment and retention
- Financial sustainability
- Affordability
- Student and employee health and well-being
- Parent expectations
- Security and safety
- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging

# Strategic Questions for Boards to Consider

- 1) What are the financial implications for becoming the “employer of choice” in your market?
- 2) How do you support a culture of philanthropy on your board? In your school community?
- 3) How might you use tools like Market View to better understand shifting demographics in your area and how it impacts enrollment strategy?
- 4) How does your board leverage data to determine progress towards strategic goals? The impact of your school’s mission?





**Let's  
Practice!**



**Time for  
Q&A**

# Time to Reflect



- What was one “A-HA” moment I had during our workshop?
- What information do I still need to better understand my role as a trustee?



**Let's Stay  
in Touch!**

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