



SEARCH READINESS MATTERS

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Preparing Your School for a Successful Leadership Transition

A Strategic Webinar for Independent School Leaders

The Independent School Leadership Hiring Market in 2026



Selective Candidate Market

Top candidates have multiple options and are choosing carefully



Reduced Leadership Mobility

Fewer leaders willing to move without compelling institutional clarity



July 1 Compressed Hiring

Compressed timelines create urgency and reduce negotiation windows



Increased Candidate Scrutiny

Candidates deeply evaluate governance, culture, and stability

What Top Candidates Are Evaluating



Governance health



Leadership sustainability



Board alignment



Financial stability



Institutional clarity

Why Leadership Searches Fail Before They Begin

Common failure point in school searches

1



**Internal
Misalignment**

2



**Hiring for
the Past**

3



**Unrealistic
Timelines**

4



**Poor Role
Definition**

5



**Lack of
Internal
Capacity**

What Happens When a Search Launches Too Soon



Every step compounds risk.

The cost of launching too early far exceeds the cost of preparing properly.

The 5 Core Readiness Questions



Governance

- Is the board aligned on leadership priorities?
- Are governance structures clear and healthy?



Role Clarity

- Is the position profile well-defined?
- Does compensation match market reality?



Stakeholder Alignment

- Are key constituencies aligned?
- Is there a shared vision for the role?



Timeline Realism

- Is the timeline achievable?
- Are milestones realistic and sequenced?



Internal Capacity

- Who owns the process day-to-day?
- Is there bandwidth for a rigorous search?

Pressure-Test Your Search



Where could alignment break down in your current or upcoming search?



What assumptions are we making about the market that may not hold?



Why might a top candidate walk away from your school?

ISC's 30-Day Search Readiness Framework

Week 1

Alignment & Governance



- Board alignment sessions
- Governance health check
- Stakeholder mapping

Week 2

Role Definition & Compensation



- Position profiling
- Market compensation analysis
- Reporting structure clarity

Week 3

Process Architecture



- Search committee formation
- Communication plan
- Evaluation criteria

Week 4

Launch Readiness



- Final readiness review
- Go/no-go assessment
- Search launch briefing

How Searches Break Down in Real Time

CASE STUDY | Independent Day School — CFO Search

- April** School launches CFO search without clear role definition or board consensus on priorities
- May** Candidates receive conflicting messages from search committee members about scope and reporting
- June** Two strong finalists withdraw, citing concerns about governance clarity and institutional direction

Result: Smaller candidate pool + Delayed hire by 4 months + Increased institutional risk

What Strong Searches Have in Common

01

Clarity

A well-defined role and institutional vision that candidates can see themselves within

02

Alignment

Board, administration, and stakeholders sharing a unified set of priorities and expectations

03

Discipline

A rigorous process with realistic timelines, clear milestones, and committed participants

04

Readiness

The institutional confidence that comes from thorough preparation before going to market

Next Steps for Your School



Complimentary Readiness Consultation

A confidential, no-obligation conversation about your school's search readiness and timeline



Search Readiness Scorecard

A structured diagnostic tool to evaluate your institution's preparedness across all five framework dimensions



Cost of Doing It Ourselves Report

An executive brief on the hidden costs, risks, and institutional impact of unmanaged leadership searches