



Colorado Independent Schools

ACIS Strategic Plan
2026-2029



Dear ACIS Community,

The Association of Colorado Independent Schools has always adapted to meet the evolving needs of its members. This new strategic plan reflects who we are today and where we are headed — shaped by the realities facing Colorado independent schools in 2026 and beyond.

Our members played an essential role in the development of this plan. Through conversations with and feedback from heads, trustees, and senior administrators across Colorado, we listened carefully to what our schools need most: a thorough and meaningful accreditation process, strong governance and leadership support, a robust collegial community, and practical resources to navigate the very real pressures of enrollment, staffing, financial sustainability, and a rapidly shifting educational landscape.

Collective priorities were clear:

- Accreditation should continue to serve as a meaningful engine for reflection, school improvement, and accountability — not just a compliance exercise.
- Heads and trustees need targeted, high-quality support to lead with confidence through increasingly complex governance and financial challenges.
- Our schools are stronger when they can collaborate, share expertise, and find collective solutions to shared problems.
- The long-term sustainability of our member schools — and of ACIS itself — requires disciplined focus, strong partnerships, and forward-looking planning.

This plan is organized around four interconnected goals: **Accreditation for Reflection, School Improvement, and Growth; Leadership, Governance, and Strategic Decision-Making; Community, Collaboration, and Collective Capacity; and Sustainability and the Future of Independent Schools in Colorado.** Together, these goals reflect both the immediate needs of our members and our shared commitment to a thriving independent school community in Colorado for years to come.

This plan is aspirational and grounded — it sets a clear direction while remaining responsive to the diverse and evolving contexts of our member schools. We are excited to move forward together.



Alan Smiley
Executive Director
Association of Colorado Independent Schools

1

Accreditation for Reflection, School Improvement, and Growth

ACIS will steward a comprehensive, mission-centered accreditation process that promotes reflection, continuous improvement, collaboration, and accountability—across Colorado.

- Use accreditation data, school input, and best practices to regularly evaluate and refine ACIS standards, indicators, and review processes—ensuring they remain relevant, mission-centered, and supportive of continuous school improvement.
- Strengthen the integration of financial health, enrollment sustainability, and strategic planning within the accreditation process, including the use of benchmarking tools, interim reporting, and mid-cycle check-ins.
- Maximize the effectiveness of existing accreditation components to promote continuous reflection, progress monitoring, and institutional accountability.
- Clarify and strengthen roles, training, and expectations for accreditation team members and support staff to promote consistency, quality, and confidence in the process.

2

Leadership, Governance, and Strategic Decision-Making

ACIS will strengthen leadership capacity by supporting heads, senior administrators, and trustees in governance, financial sustainability, enrollment strategy, legal and fiduciary responsibility, position-related best practices, and data-informed decision-making—enabling schools to navigate an increasingly complex educational landscape.

- Develop, refine, and deliver high-quality governance education for heads and trustees that deepens understanding of fiduciary responsibility, financial oversight, the head-board partnership, legal risk, and strategic board leadership.
- Support schools in multi-year financial modeling and tracking, enrollment planning, and forecasting capacity to promote long-term sustainability.
- Provide targeted professional learning and curated resources that strengthen strategic thinking, change leadership, and decision-making among heads and senior administrators.
- Clarify and reinforce the Executive Director's consultative role to provide timely, trusted guidance for school leaders navigating complex strategic, financial, and governance challenges.



3

Community, Collaboration, and Collective Capacity

ACIS will cultivate a trusted professional community that reduces isolation, fosters collegiality, and enables schools to collaborate, share resources, and pursue collective solutions to shared challenges across Colorado.

- Design and refine structures that deepen collegial relationships among heads, senior administrators, and other school leaders, including opportunities for peer learning, site visits, and purpose-driven dialogue.
- Facilitate opportunities for schools to share expertise, tools, and services in ways that increase efficiency, strengthen capacity, and support collective responses to shared challenges.
- Create targeted engagement opportunities for boards, school leaders, and staff that reflect the geographic, philosophical, and structural diversity of ACIS member schools.

4

Sustainability and the Future of Independent Schools in Colorado

ACIS will support the long-term sustainability of its members—and the association itself—as they navigate demographic shifts, enrollment pressures, staffing challenges, and evolving expectations through targeted resources, partnerships, and disciplined use of organizational capacity.

- Provide and refine accessible, relevant tools and guidance that address pressing issues such as enrollment, staffing, demographic shifts, emerging technologies, and political and cultural tensions, to support various schools' contexts.
- Strengthen and pursue partnerships with mission-aligned organizations to broaden expertise, share resources, and increase value for member schools.
- Support the development of future independent school leaders while promoting thoughtful succession planning across member schools and within ACIS to ensure long-term stability and continuity.
- Regularly evaluate programs, services, and resource allocation to ensure ACIS focuses its limited capacity on the highest-impact areas for member schools.