

Advice for those moving into Independent School/headship?

leading with clarity, wisdom, and courage

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There are a lot of reasons to move into headship, and you have decided that you are ready. You have administrative experience, and you want to learn more about the process of looking for and starting the job. In this overview, we hope to explore many of the common issues that you will encounter from the perspective of educators who have gone through the search process and successful transition into headship.

The Search Process

NAIS head's survey reports that most heads made at least four attempts before they were hired. In our experience, you should be prepared to be involved in two search cycles. Most candidates are rejected, often several times, before they are hired for the position. We tend to focus on a positive outcome, and for some future heads the prospect of rejection is disconcerting. Everyone moving into headship will be "stretching" their skills. It won't be just you. Your primary job will be to present the best version (most authentic) of yourself, your knowledge, and your unique skill set to the search committee and have enough patience to wait, if needed, for the right school to hire you.

A search often begins formally with the board creating a search committee and hiring a search consultant. The consultant works for the school, not for you. Their job is to collect a large pool of qualified candidates and advise the search committee on how to narrow that list. The search committee makes the final decision.

Your experience with the search consultant will likely begin with an email that describes a leadership position and asks if you could recommend anyone who is qualified/interested. If that person is you, then your search has begun.

You are looking for your first job, so you will be described as a "rising star." Interpreting terms like "rising star," "good fit," "community" and "culture" are very different from school to school. In many ways, the search process for the candidate is an ongoing exercise in reading between the lines. Your ability to advance in the search process depends on how well you are able to interpret this language into meaningful answers in response to questions from the consultant and search committee.

You may also be required to register with the consultant company. The position description will be sent to you and you will be asked to return a cover letter, resume, educational statement (writing sample), and references. Most consultants are former heads. They are trusted by schools and job searchers alike for their past experience. The consultant will set up a time to speak to you (by phone and increasingly by video conference).

This is your first round interview. You will be asked to talk about yourself and your interest in the position. You will be asked about your areas of strength, weakness, communication and leadership style. The consultant will share his/her perceptions about the school and community. You will then have the opportunity to ask questions. Asking questions is important. You can gauge their interest in you and hopefully get valuable information from the consultant that is better explained in person. You need to build rapport with everyone in the search process; send

thank-you emails within 24 hours of a conversation, be prepared for the conversations, ask thoughtful questions. You need to prepare and practice your answers to common questions. Above all, consultants/search committees are looking for you to be thoughtful and confident. Keep your answers short (around 2 minutes).

You will be asked some iteration of these questions and others:

- Tell me about yourself/why are you interested in our school
- Greatest strength/weakness
- Your communication/leadership style
- How quick are you to change things/ are you comfortable with change? The 'right' answer depends on whether they really want change or not. This is always a trick question because the real question is are you going to change us.
- Your perspective on collaboration with staff and families

You should know how you are going to answer these questions before the interview. A template I like to use when answering a question is: Statement, Example, Result. It helps me to focus and not over-answer the question.

Consultant: "Tell us about yourself?" (Here is a brief example of this template)

Statement: One of the strengths I would bring is support of the school mission.

Example: During my time in education, I have had the opportunity to work with many outstanding individuals and have had great experiences leading a school within the context of morals, ethics, and values.

Result: As a result of this philosophy, I have led schools where the joy of discovery encourages students to experiment, try new things, and feel at home on the soccer field and in the STEAM lab, where teachers build close relationships with their students by encouraging them to find and follow their passion. This is one of the reasons I feel I would be a good fit for (school name).

I would recommend that you practice your answers for a sympathetic audience. You will definitely get some useful feedback.

The Interview Process

There is a minimum of three rounds of interviews. The first is with the consultant; your goal is to be among the candidates who are presented to the search committee. If you are successful, the consultant will describe you to the committee based on this conversation.

The second interview is with the search committee; their job is to recommend 3-4 finalists. They will ask you some of the same questions. Often the search committee divvies out the questions so that each member of the committee asks the same questions to each candidate. They will be comparing each of the candidates' answers with one another. More and more, these interviews are done via video conference. If that is the case, you might want to consider having a pen and paper to outline the question. You should also pay attention to how you look on video, your background and practice recording yourself so you can watch and learn from your cadence and mannerisms. Be sure to be neat and professional. Also remember to check lighting and sound and the position of the camera.

The third round is for finalists. This is where you want to be. This is where you interview the school as well to determine if it is a good fit for you. It is a test of endurance. Finalist interviews start with a meal as soon as you arrive and continue often without a break (except for sleep if you are there overnight) until you are finished; a 12-14 hour day, a dozen or more distinct

interviews is common. They can include interviews with the board, students, parents and the admin team.

There are many reasons schools are interested in first time heads. However you should be very cautious of schools with long term enrollment issues, ambiguous information from business offices, impolite or inappropriate board behavior that is excused or tolerated (especially if that includes berating the last head), and finally, a dirty or cluttered campus and if they don't get your reimbursement back to you in a timely manner. If it is your first job, you may not have as much choice as you would like. Be aware! Nobody is going to tell you if you are walking into a terrible school.

When you are offered the position, the call usually comes from the board chair. If it makes sense financially, consider using an attorney to negotiate your contract. If not, at least talk to someone who is familiar with the process. Negotiating starts with you having a clear idea of what you need and want. Depending on your school's affiliation, you can access Data and Analysis for School Leadership (DASL) to give you information about salary and benefits for your region. There are others like Guidestar that do not require affiliation that can give you information as well. There is typically a base salary offered and then a list of benefits. The list of benefits can vary a lot from school to school and is usually based on what the school has done in the past. Also, remember that benefits are taxable. Heads and boards pay very close attention to these issues because they are often public records. Boards also have a duty to protect the school's non-profit status, that is why schools need legal counsel and good schools are in regular contact with their attorney.

Once you have a signed contract, the school will make an official announcement to the community. Ideally, the search committee will appoint a transition committee. The transition committee's goal should be to have the community embrace the new head and ensure their success. They do this by looking after the needs of the head through the first year, setting reasonable goals for the head and showing support for the head in an ongoing public fashion. The transition committee should feel as successful as the head does. As a new head, there will be a number of social and community norms that are unique to this particular school. The search committee helps you navigate these norms. They listen for chatter and help the head be proactive.

And Now It Begins

The transition typically includes three phases:

1. The time from when the announcement is made to your first official day on the job (usually July 1st)

If this is your first headship, it is recommended that you get a mentor or coach, a long term head who you can talk to and who has "seen it all," someone with successful experience with schools like yours. If you have collegial relationships with other heads, you may want to schedule regular times to talk with them as well.

This time is devoted to gathering information and meeting stakeholders. Read everything you can get your hands on from the school. Take a strategic approach, look at each area of the school in turn and be as thorough as possible: board, business office, admissions, development, curriculum, etc. Once you've done that, google them and find anything you can that has been written about the school on a public platform. Articles about successes, transitions, expansions, closures, and so on. Also look critically at the school's social media platforms. What do these

platforms say to you as an outsider about this school? How often are they being updated? Is the content meaningful to a wider object? Also check sites like greatschools.com, where people often write of unpleasant experiences they've had with the school. Go in with your eyes open and curious. Hopefully you will have a few opportunities to visit the school before your start date. Work with your transition committee to make this time productive.

2. July 1st to the first day of school

For new heads, this can be an odd time. The building is often empty, and everyone is on vacation. It is a good time to participate in a new heads orientation program or other professional development. It is also a good time to look for the things unique about that school, meet people 1:1 and hopefully take the time needed for you and your family to settle in. We would encourage you to meet with every member of the staff before the school year began to get a feel for each person before the start of the school year. It always takes more time than you imagine. We have always been told that you should take a vacation if possible, but we haven't found this to be practical. It is a very busy time. It is normal to feel a little overwhelmed and typically many people are anxious to get started. A better suggestion might be to take a really good vacation after year one, a reward of sorts for you and your family after completing what will almost certainly be an exhausting year.

3. The first 90 days

The goal is to know the school and be known by the community. These goals should be in conjunction with the board and transition committee. You are focusing on building relationships. This is a good time to prioritize things like meeting 1 to 1 with faculty if you haven't already. Arrange small group meetings with families; meet with board members individually and by committee. Meet with community leaders, donors, and other heads. Remember to breathe. It's a lot of new people and faces and personalities. Cut yourself some slack—you will eventually know everyone.

4. The second 90 days

You should be able to begin implementing some of the board's priorities. Working with the transition committee and board, settle on two or three deliverables that are reasonable. Look for accomplishments that do not necessarily require a lot of resources but have positive impact. Look to your areas of strength, things that have a clear end date and have some shared responsibility for success between you and the board.

Most heads have an action plan of this type, which is great until you experience your first "emergency." There is no way to predict when and how this occurs except that it will happen before you are ready and there is no way to know what it will be. Here are the two places you should start..

- Communication starts with a call to your board president. There is a simple rule for board-chair relationships: No surprises! The last thing you want is for your board chair to get an irate phone call and not know what the person is talking about.
- After you have spoken to the board chair, think about who else you need to consult, get permission from, and inform. There are a number of resources that you can call upon in

an emergency; NAIS, a HOS listserv (such as Prizmah's Reshet), Your local independent school association, mentor, administrative team, faculty and parents. Make sure that you take advantage of all of them. This is important. The people you go to will have input you won't think of and perspectives you probably haven't considered. They generally are less emotionally invested and therefore can see your "emergency" from a more neutral perspective. Part of dealing with an emergency is that you don't have sufficient time to make decisions. You will be required to make the best choice you can given the best information you have at the time and your own intuition. You will be expected to have an opinion, make a decision, and act. You should also expect that dealing with an emergency will come with some mistakes. This is another reason why continuous communication with the board president is crucial.

Getting to Know Your School

School size matters in a number of ways. It matters first in terms of the amount of staff, families, your budget and upkeep of your facility. The bigger the school the more you have to oversee and manage.

The question to ask yourself first is not what is the current size of the school, but what is capacity compared to current enrollment?

In other words, if I have a 100-person school and the capacity of the school is 100, that tells me the school is healthy. You can infer that the school has a good reputation in the community and has been generally well run. You might also infer that there is growth potential.

But what should you think/do if the school is not at capacity, say for instance half full? Even though you might know some of these answers, now that you are on the ground, you will have a more realistic idea of what is really happening.

So ask yourself these questions:

Is there a lack of leadership?

Is there a lack of interest for the school in the community, and why?

Are the operations—business office, faculty, board—dysfunctional?

Is what the school offers still of interest to the community?

Have families moved?

You may have other things to consider in addition to these. Some of these may be regional questions and specific to your facility.

After you have considered the previous questions, you need to determine if the issues are realistically fixable. How long will it take, what resources do you need, is there enough strength of will to make the necessary changes in the community and with the board of trustees? For example, If families are moving out of the area, then you are going to have to look at the school's future more broadly and perhaps expand your vision of what it does to meet community needs.

Once you have created your vision, gather your stakeholders together to explain where you want to go.

Building Relationships

Relationships are crucial to success. As a new administrator, you will meet a lot of people who may or may not be able to help you do the work needed. Try as best as you can to listen to the

full body of information people are giving you, and trust your gut impressions. You need to know the difference between those who think they are leaders and influencers vs. those who really are. Who will follow through on their commitments? Who will give their time and treasure, not just their opinions?

Our experience is that those initial impressions are often spot on. Your intuition is probably pretty strong if it has gotten you this far, so continue to trust it. Don't allow these impressions to be manipulated over time, thinking we didn't know enough then. Remember, everyone is trying to put their best foot forward, including you, but we can all only be on best behavior for so long. Who's vying to get in front of you with their agenda? Who is talking about whom? If you are part of a conversation that feels strange or uncomfortable, just make note of that.

Working with your board is crucial in that they are your bosses. Ask your chair why each board member is on the board. What do they bring to the table that the board chair thought was important? Also, we suggest getting to know the longest standing board member or even a couple of previous board members; they have often a wealth of information, and their historical perspective is important.

When you are first starting, sincerely and authentically getting to know your families is vital. Besides being your target audience, they tell you a lot about the values of your school. You want to know why parents picked your school over others. What keeps them there? By listening to the stories, you begin to get the flavor of how the school community sees themselves.

Parents know insincerity when they see it. You are dealing with their most precious commodity and they want to know you genuinely care about their child. Clearly you love kids or you wouldn't have taken the job, so take the time—a lot of time—to get to know the parents and students.

This is a good time to express your communication style to them as well. Be transparent early on and set limits regarding ways you like to interface with people and expectations for communication (e.g., "I can generally get back to you within 24 hours"). This is important for anyone you interface with. For parents, what platform do you respond best to? Are you at car drop off every day and that's where you like to communicate with parents? Is your door really open anytime, or is scheduling an appointment better? Setting those guidelines early will leave everyone clear on how to work together. For example, "I don't respond to calls after 9 pm." "I don't respond to calls during dinner with my family from 6-7 pm." "I don't look at my phone or emails on Shabbat or the Sabbath" (if you are a religious school). Your parameters are yours to make, just be clear up front about what they are.

I never checked emails over the weekend. It was my family's time and I needed it to reset. If something was of dire importance (happened 1-2x a year), a colleague would tell me to check my email, and then I would. If people know the rules of engagement, they are ok with living within them. It's when they don't know them that they begin to draw their own conclusions: They're ignoring me. They're mad at me, they don't think my problem is important, and so on. Set clear expectations.

When it's time to start working with your admin team, you may want to do that in advance of actually starting the job if possible. Seeing people work with the person you are replacing is insightful and getting the former director's position might be interesting. Just remember, you aren't them. Hear the info, file it away and form your own opinions. When meeting with each

department, division head, the advancement team and the business office, start with what they feel works and what doesn't. It doesn't have to be true, but it is their perception and that's important regardless. What will they miss most about the former head of school, and what things are they hopeful for in you?

Ask the advancement team why they run each event the way they do, how they do it and for how long will be interesting information to have. What is your school's fundraising philosophy, and how do they conduct their ask? Whom do they ask? Whom would they like to ask but aren't? Is there a reason they aren't asking that party? Pay attention to any underlying politics as you learn these answers.

Also look at other major fundraising events in your community and when they take place. I am amazed at how often schools live in a silo. They don't know when other big fundraisers are happening, big social events and so on. You may not be going to them or paying into them, but your donors might be. It's also important to know which community events you should be at. Asking for money is about timing, so it's important to know what your community looks like.

Lastly, your office staff—often the first impression families get of your school. Do they look happy, and are they? How long have they worked at your school? When do they think the best years of your school were/are and what makes them think that? They have a different lens from others and oftentimes are the most accurate. At the same time, what are parents' and staff's opinion of them? Are they friendly, efficient and sincere? It's a huge file drawer of mental information you are collecting; try to be as nonjudgmental as you can and just listen. It's hard but do your best!

We had no idea how much time we would spend on working with teachers and staff when we first started our jobs. Yes, we had both hired, fired and interviewed people. We had helped people navigate getting supplies and participated in many a staff happy hour and holiday party—but there's so much more. In fact, it is where you will spend the majority of your time.

Let's start with the good part: If staff are happy, kids are happy, if kids are happy, parents are happy. In that order. Making sure my staff is happy takes a lot of time. It also takes genuine interest. The bigger the staff, the more time it takes. If you have the ability to do so, before you even begin your job, allot significant time to meet your staff in small groupings and get to know them. Ask questions about them personally, their interests and goals, their families, how long they've been at the school, what brings them back every year, what works for them and what doesn't. Do more listening than talking.

Once everyone has met you and you've had a chance to get to know them a bit, you might want to look at what the current staff culture is like. Do they do much together socially—do they recognize birthdays, work anniversaries? How are they divided up by age? My staff had two main groups, under 30 and over 50. Please don't forget your custodial staff and other support staff. Feeling you are part of something special makes us all happier and more committed to its success. We all want to feel important and committed.

This also goes for your early childhood folks. I am horrified how many schools are financially carried by their Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs, and yet they are seen as a second-class group of semi-professionals and often excluded from events, big picture projects and staff building. They are feeding your older program! They set your tone as a school, they are your first base of parent and child trust. They are very important to your school's success.

Here's the not-fun part of staff: drama. There can be lots of drama. You probably already know this from your previous jobs, but it can be very time-consuming. I try to ask people, when they are really upset about something with a colleague, if they want me to listen or to provide help. I have found this helps me know my role in this situation. When possible, people working out problems on their own is best. When you involve people's boss, it gets serious fast. Trying to give suggestions on how to handle the situation themselves, it's more empowering and for the employee and usually less volatile.

At every weekly meeting with my office staff of two, I asked how the staff climate seemed. We could usually feel when it was off, and we'd attempt to figure out why or try to do some extra nice things to pamper the staff: bring lunch in, 10 min. massages by the massage school (cost ~\$100), ice cream sundaes, etc. There are also those times we knew everyone was stressed out: right before spring break, slumps right after winter break, the stretch between Jan and April. We anticipated those times before they happened. Staff are incredibly appreciative. It doesn't take much, just letting people know that you are paying attention and that you care.

I also had meetings for 15 minutes once a month with every single employee. We could talk about anything they wanted: home, their students, new ideas, time off, anything. Some people were more open than others, but everyone got uninterrupted undivided time for them. Any feedback we got about this was always good. I blocked off Friday mornings from 9-12 to meet with staff of 30. Otherwise, my office door was almost never closed, and I actually encouraged staff to come in and say hi. A staff that feels valued and cared for will be committed to you and your work. Spending time with them is the best investment you can make.

Let's Talk Hiring and Firing

Hiring can be very fun. We have learned over the years to ask the traditional questions- what management style do you like, your strengths /weaknesses, best job you ever had and why. We also love to ask instructional staff, for example, "If money were no object what would your classroom look like when I walked in it?" "What would I see going on?" I want to get an idea, with any constraints taken away, how creative someone is, do their eyes light up as they envision this classroom, can they articulate their vision? This gives me an idea how quickly they think on their feet, how open they are, how out of the box, how well they communicate. I'm always interested in the answers people come up with. Understanding the hiring culture of your school is another area to look at. How has it been traditionally done? Who is involved with that process? Is there a systemized way they navigate this process?

Firing is not fun. Even when it is necessary, it is stressful and unpleasant. When you have to fire someone, try to focus on how they aren't a good fit for our organization; in another organization, their skill set might work better. Talk about what skills they have that are strong and which ones didn't work well here. Check with your HR dept. If you have one about restrictions of what you can and cannot say about a former employee. If you can, tell people you are happy to reference their strengths if you get reference calls about them. In the end, few people are bad people; they just aren't good fits for the organization, and attacking someone's dignity isn't helpful. They are losing their job—that's bad enough.

Here's the part we all took the job for—these great kids! I think we often discount kids' opinions on staff and how schools run. Of course, most kids want more outside time and lunch time and less homework, but they are often very insightful about which staff are the strongest and why. They can flock to a teacher whom other staff find off-putting. They know which staff are lazy and which ones have the most with-it-ness and relatability. These are important perspectives to have.

When I was hiring a K-1 teacher midyear, I asked all the students what they wanted in a teacher. Then, I solicited their opinions of the three candidates. Every child did in fact have an opinion. Eight out of the 10 liked the same teacher as the adults, and the other two liked her but preferred a different candidate. I was happy to include students, since the choice affects them most of all, and their parents were thrilled I asked for their child's input. They saw that as a real investment in my interest in their child's happiness. Taking the time to get to know your students up front shows your commitment to them as stakeholders in your school.

School Identity and Culture

Culture literally defines you and our school. Every member of your staff should be able to recite your mission statement and articulate how they apply it. Your mission statement states succinctly why you exist. It gives a strong sense of what distinguishes your school from its competitors. Why do people pick your school over others: is it your spirit, curriculum, pedagogy, philosophy? Every private school is offering outstanding academics and small individualized learning environments, so don't bother with those. What really makes your school unique? When you know the answer, you can expand on that concept or you can look to move the school in a new direction and with the help of your staff and board, shift its mission statement. There are lots of great resources on this topic if you want to dive more into this topic.

Once you understand the most significant cultural norms at your school, you will need to look more deeply. There are often other layers to your school that need to be addressed. If you are a parochial school, what are the beliefs of your community? Long meaningful conversations with your clergy, ritual committee and religious studies teachers might be in order. Are you aligned with a specific philosophical philosophy? For example, many schools bill themselves as "Montessori" or "Reggio" that don't truly meet the qualifications required. When you have a clear idea of what you believe and who you are as a school, your curriculum and hiring decisions all fall into line from that. You know the type of teachers you need, the lens through which you pick curriculum and how you structure your schedule and events to reinforce that ideal. You absolutely have to know who your school really is, who the school says they are and who they want to be.

Is your school currently accredited? Do you want to be? Do you like your accrediting agency? The two authors approach this one differently. In one of our communities, almost no schools are accredited. In over 15 years, she's had three people ask me about it and none of them understood it; they just read in a book that they should ask that. We were never accredited and had long waiting lists and very healthy enrollment for over 40 years. In the other author's communities, more elem./ middle school, everyone was accredited. In the end, we both agree it is tedious and a lot of work. Keep in mind your school's needs and local norms will influence what type of accreditations are necessary.

Affiliation

Now you have the job, got your staff together, rallied your board and parents. How do you stay afloat? This is very important. We watch more people be islands unto themselves; it is unnecessary and makes your job more isolating and difficult. There are all sorts of educational listservs out there and Facebook groups. Join them! Participate!

Reach out to a friend or colleague and get a mentor. Simon Sinek says that mentors should not be strangers but people you have a positive relationship with, people that you trust and believe have your best interests at heart. A mentor will help you discover how to become a better leader. Having someone to reach out to any time of day or evening, crisis or accomplishment,

has been invaluable. Having someone I value so much gives me different perspectives or ways to look at something has opened my eyes to viewing situations I would have never looked at through that lens otherwise.

Learn from your peers. They have no skin in the game, so they have a perspective that is totally neutral. They can view your story much more objectively but with an understanding of your world and how the players in it work. Try not to isolate yourself. You need to learn from others and they need to learn from you. Even if you just schedule once a week for an hour to reach out to someone or address a FB group or listserv, you will not regret making the time to do it.

National/regional affiliation can be highly valuable, giving you access to peers and resources. Often, membership includes connection with a local representative whose sole job is to assist you. They usually offer courses for new directors and training for enhancing certain skills: HR, religious skills if you are new to a parochial school, and more.

Yes, membership fees can be expensive, but we would recommend affiliating with 1-2 organizations, including NAIS and one more specific to your type of school. I met all of my closest colleagues through these organizations, and they have given great advice and walked me off a ledge on more than one (or ten) occasions. I have also learned about the larger world of private schools and in our case, parochial schools, from these affiliations as well. This will be helpful when you are ready to possibly leave this school for your next school or opportunity down the line.

Professional Development

Professional development is important to the growth of you, your team and your school. The great thing about professional development is the possibilities are endless. I remember once going to a Wisdom 2.0 conference in San Francisco. It is a conference on mindfulness targeted largely to the tech community. I didn't know a soul, I am not sure what exactly spoke to me about even going, but I convinced my committee chair to let me go.

The first day, I hated it. I did not know what I was doing. I took a yoga class with the coordinator of yoga classes at Google, I did meditation with designer Eileen Fisher, and did other workshops. It wasn't until I was standing in line getting a muffin and a drink that the person behind me asked me how I liked the conference. I responded I liked it, but I wasn't sure I was getting out of it what I had hoped.

Somehow or another, this man said, "Well tell me about that," and we ended up skipping the next section, having coffee and discussing emotional intelligence. It was life changing. He turned out to be a nationally known speaker who has an office in Australia, and his insights into how to interact with staff and how to trust my instincts were profound. He also introduced me to emotional intelligence development that propelled me to the next level of my career. Think outside the box with professional development.

Professional development does not have to be expensive. Every year, we took our new teachers for the day to another similar school out of town an hour and a half away. The staff loved it. While they learned a lot at the school, the drive to and from was the most special part of the day, and they loved that I treated them to lunch. Simple things.

Another popular workshop was one where six staff were invited to teach a workshop on something they felt they were exceptionally strong at: art, music, STEM, creating foldables and

so on. The other staff signed up to take 3 of the 6 workshops. They loved learning from their peers, and it gave them great ideas.

Area speakers, conferences out of town, they are all wonderful experiences for you and your staff. Don't get so buried in your work that you put aside these opportunities. They will inspire and refresh you.

Community Relationships

Community partnerships are underutilized and have big payoffs. Traditionally, schools focus on a certain demographic to draw students from: specific areas, certain income groups, and so on. Partnerships create another potential streamlining the larger community.

One of the schools we worked at had a partnership with a local Ronald McDonald House. The students made birthday cakes for any sick child at RMH. Every tour RMH gives they mention the school. Every tour the school gives, they mention RMH. It is a great organization. It fits with beliefs they are passionate about. RMH gets donated items and funds from the school's families. The school did not anticipate that families from the board of directors, the board of associates, and the employees at RMH would join the school. They are now known in the community for having these kinds of partnerships.

We suggest that you consider exploring what organizations are meaningful to you and your staff and school and reach out to them to see how you could work together. A word of warning: Be prepared to have organizations not call you back. I was shocked that I had to reach out to three organizations before one called me back. At this school, we had three ongoing partnerships and are now known by the larger community as the school who works with the non-profits.

Organizational Management

Whether it is your accrediting agency, the state education department or the department of children and families, we all have codes and criteria to abide by. Keeping the standards and hopefully exceeding them helps keep your students and staff safe and helps to determine your reputation in the community.

When your licensing agent comes to inspect your school, you should know what your requirements actually are and make them as easily accessible to your auditors when they come. At one of our schools, we color-coded everything each year. Missing a teacher's affidavit for this year—that's the blue form. We also kept a master copy of all required forms with the dates on them for each staff, so if something was missing, or a date of, let's say, termination was needed, we could provide the date while we looked for the paper in the file.

It all sounds very minor now, but when the auditor shows up unannounced—and they do—it is really nice to get them in and out as quickly and effortlessly as possible. An added bonus is the more inspections that go off flawlessly, the less inspectors are looking for something to be wrong. One inspector told me once, they needed to go to a school that wouldn't take long as they had a tight schedule. They picked us as they knew we were always well organized. That's the kind of reputation I want to have!

Writing a Budget

For many of you, you will have a bigger budget than the last job you were at. Ours got consistently bigger. The format of people's budget may change, and you don't really know what you are walking into until you are in it, but here are a couple of tips.

Assuming your budget is pretty healthy, when you go to write a budget, dream big. I used to try and fit things in and lowball everything. One year, once we were finally leveling out, I tried a different tactic. I work my dream budget. I put into my budget the amounts I really wanted to spend and then looked at how far off they were from my income. Surprisingly, they weren't that far off.

If possible, always do raises first—take care of your staff. Then look at supplies: furniture, curriculum and so on. Next go after professional development. Then lay everything else into place. Last, put in income. See how far off you are. You might not need to cut as much as you think you do, and look at what you've been able to put in! Start big, shoot for the stars and work your way backwards from there. You'll be making more headway and be able to see how you are growing your school. Remember, writing a budget is a collaboration between the board and you. You are setting the direction you want to see money allocated and you will need to be board buy in on the direction and allocations you are looking at.

Congratulations on your new venture! Welcome to the exciting, overwhelming and challenging job of being a school head. We have both spent the majority of our professional lives being heads of schools and love it. All jobs are trying at times, but to have that kind of impact on so many lives- students, employees and families is truly an honor. Fingers crossed! You're gonna be great.

“Just keep in mind: the more we value things outside our control, the less control we have”. --Epictetus