

Head of School Succession Planning

“All leaders will inevitably leave office, yet research has long shown that most organizations are ill-prepared to replace them”

Harvard Business Review, December 2016 (Eben Harrell)

The long-term success and sustainability of a Catholic school is deeply impacted by the quality of leadership that guides the school in fulfilling its mission. Strong school heads (Presidents, Headmasters, Head of School) are a hallmark of Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools, but it is inevitable that these leaders will eventually transition out of their roles. Whether a leadership change is anticipated or unplanned, the impact on the school community can be immense, both emotionally and operationally. Boards and school heads must collaboratively and systematically plan for leadership changes, even during the healthiest times in the school’s life cycle.

Prerequisite: Critical to any succession plan is a shared understanding of the school’s mission and vision, particularly among members of the leadership team and board. Successors to key administrative roles could undermine any succession plan if they don’t subscribe to the mission or previously shared vision for the organization. School leadership should engage in honest discernment on the mission-driven leadership capacity of any individual considered in a school’s succession plan.

Prerequisite: Also critical to succession planning is the assurance that job descriptions, roles & responsibilities, and desired skills/attributes of key leadership positions have been clearly defined. A current organizational chart should also exist. In the event of an emergency, boards should not be debating or deciphering the skills or attributes needed in an interim leader (or supporting C-suite roles).

I. Succession Planning - Unplanned/Emergency Change, Mid-Year

Unplanned changes in the head of school’s tenure, particularly if mid-school year, can be the result of many factors. Such an unexpected change will create stress and uncertainty among stakeholders and, without proper planning, is likely to cause significant disruption to the school’s operations. Boards and heads need to annually create and review an “Unplanned/Emergency Succession Plan” to best position and prepare the school for any interruption in the head’s ability to lead.

Identify Interim Leader

- Don't wait until an unplanned situation arises with the head's tenure or ability to fulfill the duties of the role to identify an individual capable and willing to serve as the interim head
- Annually identify the individual to serve as the interim school head should an emergency arise (Why annually? Dynamics and situations can change from year to year among school personnel)
 - Board and sitting head should discuss the potential interim role with the identified leader; ensure she/he is comfortable with assuming the interim role if/when the need arises. It should not be assumed the identified individual would be willing to serve in an interim capacity
 - Board (via executive committee) is prepared to compensate the interim leader appropriately if/when she/he fulfills the interim role
- Identify any current head responsibilities that would not be assigned to the interim; outline plan for distributing responsibilities to other members of the school's leadership team

Communication Plan

- Identify lead spokesperson in the case of emergency communication regarding head's status/tenure (Typically the Board Chair)
- Identify resources and onsite personnel responsible for disseminating communication of any unexpected change in leadership (Communications Director, etc.)
 - Inclusive of other stakeholders beyond the immediate school community
 - Local media
 - XBSS Office (Religious Order Leadership)
 - Diocesan Officials
- Acquire sample communications to aid in crafting time sensitive community notifications about head's sudden departure (samples found online)
- School's legal counsel and phone number readily accessible to board leadership
- Board leadership prepared for face-to-face messaging with faculty/staff if time and circumstances allow

Leadership Domino Effect

- Annually identify other key members of the administrative/leadership team who would need to assume additional duties under the emergency succession plan
 - Outline plan for distributive leadership
 - Ensure clearly defined, written job descriptions exist for all key positions

Succession Materials

- Current head creates a "succession folder" with plan information (as outlined in this document) and also includes relevant resources/data points contained in Addendum C
 - Ensure board leadership and key members of the administrative/leadership team, including the executive assistant, know the location of the succession folder

Other Considerations

- Professional development afforded to any/all administrators/staff who would assume additional duties in unplanned changes in leadership at the school

- What skill development do identified leaders need to eventually assume additional duties?
 - Consider one meeting, annually, with leadership team to discuss the emergency succession plan
- Are there sufficient back-up “signatories” for school, financial accounts?

II. Succession Planning - Planned Change

Conducting a “national search,” perhaps with the aid of a leadership search firm, should not be the default “succession plan” for planned changes in the Head of School. Long before a head announces her/his plans to leave the position, that leader should work closely with the board to identify and cultivate leadership talent within the school. Internal hiring for key leadership positions, inclusive of the head of school, can have significant benefits and should not be an overlooked step in the succession planning process.

Selecting the next/new Head of School is arguably the most important responsibility of a school board. While a “national search” may be the eventual step in any succession plan, the current head and board will do an injustice to the process if internal leaders are not identified, assessed, and potentially developed to serve in the head role. (The following can also be expanded to explore succession plans for any key administrative roles)

Cultivating Talent from Within (See Addendum B)

- Identify Critical Positions & Assess Leadership Potential
 - Identify critical leadership positions and individuals (emerging leaders), who in time, and with proper support and training, could potentially fill said roles
 - Ensure job descriptions of C-Suite administrators are current and easily accessible
- Identify skills
 - Notate strengths and areas of skill development for these emerging leaders
- Design professional development plan & develop leaders
 - Create professional growth opportunities for emerging leaders/potential successors
 - Afford possible successors with experiences and learning that develop them to serve a greater leadership role
- Monitor/Evaluate
 - Annually evaluate leadership growth for each emerging leader; gauge likelihood emerging leader could fulfill duties of the new/higher leadership position
 - Share annually with executive committee of the board as part of annual succession planning review/process; discuss/consider sharing with full board

Communication

- Share impending resignation/retirement of school head with school’s stakeholders
 - Ideally face-to-face with employees and key donors; written communication to all other community members

- Offer thanks, outline process for moving forward, & timeline for identifying new leader
- Communicate with media as determined/necessary
- Beyond assessing internal candidates, explore value of contracting with a leadership search firm

Onboarding Prep - President Transition Committee

- See Addendum C: Consider forming a committee to aid in the transition and onboarding of a new school leader
- Create a transition folder and plan that addresses all the considerations in Addendum C
- Current head considers creating annual calendar of important, annual events or considerations - share accordingly with new hire.

Head of School Search

- See Addendum D for search process considerations
- Contact the XBSS office for specific guidance on search firms, search processes, etc.
- Ensure job description, roles, responsibilities, and desired traits/skills for head position are clearly defined
- Clearly budget for any impending search process

Addendum A – Succession Planning Checklist Unplanned Change in Leadership

The following should be reviewed and documented, annually, before the start of a new school year.

Action	Yes/No	Notes
Job descriptions for key leadership personnel updated		
Interim leader identified		
Interim salary/comp discussed at board/executive committee level		
Interim job description & responsibilities defined, reviewed with interim		
Delegated duties to other administrators defined		
Spokesperson identified (Likely board chair)		
Communication resources/plan outlined		
Succession materials/folder created; location shared with interim, board leadership, and executive assistant		
Professional development plan for key admin/interim		

Addendum B – Succession Planning Checklist Planned Change in Leadership

Action	Yes/No	Notes
Board convenes special meeting to discuss search process, communications, budget, timelines, roles, and expectations; make determination on use of a firm or handle internally		
Communication plan announcing impending change in leadership		
Transition Committee Formed/Identified		
Succession materials/folder created; location shared		
Search firms reviewed/discussed		
Cultivating talent worksheet maintained/employed		

Cultivating Talent Worksheet

Position Title, Current Leader Assigned	Vacancy Risk (High, Medium, Low)	Potential Successor(s)	Successor Readiness (High, Medium, Low)	Mission Focus (Strong, Needs Improvement)	PD Plan - Talent Cultivation

Addendum C

Head of School/President Planned Leadership Transition

President Transition Committee

Consider forming a President Transition Committee to assist with the onboarding of a new leader. Committee membership might be comprised of the following:

- 2 Board Directors – at least one who serves on the Executive Committee
- 2 Administrators
- 2 Faculty
- 1-2 Staff (Perhaps Executive Assistant to the President)
- Others as determined locally

The Transition Committee would be tasked with reviewing the contents of this document, prioritizing recommendations in each category, and assigning persons responsible for seeing any given task/action through to completion. Persons assigned to any given task need not come from committee representation. There may be other key employees or Board Directors who are assigned a particular action item.

I. Materials to Share in Advance of New Hire's Arrival

School to decide how far back to go on any given resource (e.g. 2 years or 5 years)
Prioritize the list so as not to overwhelm the new hire
Consider creating a digital folder vs hard copies (ask new hire for preference)

- a. Current (and possibly prior) Strategic Plan
- b. Board & Committee Meeting Minutes (2 years)
- c. Budget (2 years)
- d. Audit Report (2 years)
- e. Corporate Documents (Bylaws, Articles of Incorporation)
- f. Annual Report (2 years)
- g. Accreditation Materials
- h. Alumni/Development Newsletters/Magazines/Yearbook
- i. Written History of the School
- j. Handbooks (Student, Parent, Faculty/Staff, etc.) and/or Policy/Procedure manuals
- k. Job Descriptions; Organizational Chart
- l. Recent evaluations of staff reporting to the President
 - i. Perhaps could wait until 7/1 – ask new hire

- n. International Program information (if applicable)
- o. Board and Employee Phone contact list
- p. List of required/recommended meetings for President
 - i. Rationale for suggestion: As the new President gets further immersed in the school year, the community may forget to mention to her/him that she/he has a speaking role at any given event; or it's assumed the President will be a visible presence at events that otherwise is not on her/his radar when the time comes.
- q. Provide a new email address to the President (ahead of time)
 - i. Add to key distribution lists; don't expect full email engagement till start date.

II. On-Campus Visit(s) before Start Date (Prioritize Two)

- a. Are there opportunities for the new President to visit campus ahead of their official start date?
 - i. For example: Graduation or any major donor event(s)
- b. While on campus, afford the new hire a chance to meet with:
 - i. The President Transition Team
 - ii. One-on-one with Principal
 - iii. One-on-one with outgoing President, if appropriate
 - iv. C-Suite Admin
 - v. Selected/Key Faculty Representation

III. Initial Donor & Stakeholder Touches

- a. Board Advancement Committee, outgoing President (if appropriate) and Advancement staff identify initial key donor/stakeholder visits (# TBD). Who should the new President visit first? Does anyone need a call from the new hire ahead of her/his start date?
 - i. Outline a plan/course of action for the new President
 - ii. Consider drafting a concise, written background on those key/primary stakeholders; allow the new hire to pre-read and prepare; consider including photos/headshots
- b. Beyond employees & key donors, what stakeholders should the President prioritize meeting with?
 - i. Community/Civic leaders, PTA/Parent Association, Key Alumni & Alumni association rep(s)
 - ii. Archdiocesan Officials, XB General Superior
 - iii. Student leadership
 - iv. Accreditation Body
 - v. Heads of Feeder Schools
 - vi. Other: _____

IV. Formation in Xaverian Charism & Legacy of the Xaverian Brothers

- a. With XBSS input, assign a President mentor from the network
- b. Stress to the new President the importance of:

- i. Attending XBSS New Administrator Retreat
- ii. Attending XBSS Chief Admin Meetings
- iii. Participating in continual formation of our Xaverian Brothers Charism
- iv. Reviewing the Xaverian Brothers Sponsored Schools Mission Effectiveness Process.
- c. Visit with local/area Xaverian Brothers
- d. In coordination with any Transition Committee, identify a trusted School Historian
 - i. Ensure new hire understands history of the school beyond the basics

V. Board Chair/President – Relationship Building

- a. Consider planning monthly check-in calls with new hire and Board Chair;
 - i. Be careful not to overwhelm new hire with too many operational details, but keep the hire abreast of major happenings (potential hiring needs, enrollment projections, budget development, etc.)
- b. Discuss Board & Committee Structure; Meeting processes; Agenda setting, etc.
 - i. Don't wait until the first board meeting to discuss with the new hire.
- c. Review prior year's school calendar and discuss all major events that the new President should have on her/his calendar
 - i. Perhaps have the Executive Assistant on the call, too.
 - ii. Current head should provide annual calendar events/input before she/he leaves the role.

VI. Family/Spouse (If applicable)

- a. If the new President is not local, offer access to a recommended realtor; arrange visits to local elementary schools for children of the new hire (if applicable); obtain helpful materials on “things to do” in the area; consider recommendations on some of the basics (Parishes, shopping, recreation opportunities, etc.)
 - i. Provide resource links to Montgomery County to aid in the introduction to the community; things to do, etc.
- b. Does spouse need assistance with job search?

VII. “The Little Things” & Day 1 Preparations

- a. Collect a preferred “Headshot” for the New President for future communications, social media, and website usage.
- b. Arrange time for President to connect with Executive Assistant 1-2 weeks out from arrival to review info below, discuss last minute needs, etc.
- c. Inform the President where to park. Typical summer office hours.
- d. Does the President need any specific office materials/supplies (in advance)?
- e. Does the President's Office need cleaning or enhancements prior to 7/1?
- f. School SWAG
 - i. Gift your new hire with plenty of school clothing so they immediately “look the part.” Don't forget spouse and kids.
- g. Update school voicemail with name of new President and phone extension.
- h. Address any social media needs aligning President's accounts with schools (e.g. branding, etc.)
- i. Update the website to reflect the new President.
- j. Plan for IT to be present on day 1 to assist with technology, phone set-up, etc.

- k. Are there security needs/measures to take? ID/Badge, access and understanding of school alarm system, name added to any authorized security credentials, etc.

VIII. Bank Accounts, Civil Documents, Passwords

- a. Acquire a credit card, cell phone, etc. for new hire
- b. Update all necessary bank accounts, civil records, etc. with new President's name & contact info; consult with school CFO/Business Manager on needs herein
 - i. Are there any community/civic groups or long-standing school contractors that need to update their records of who the new President is at the school? (Rotary? Local media? Police/Fire? Auditor? Banks?)
- c. Current President (confidentially) share any/all necessary passwords
- d. If necessary, provide additional support or professional development in reading and analyzing all financial statements of the school.
- e. Other: _____

IX. Other

- a. File sharing – current President should review all digital files and decide which personal files should be shared with the new President. Create a shared folder and clearly mark each file with its contents and why it might be relevant to the new President.
- b. Current President consider making a short-list of “things you should know” for the new President. This might be a Word document that just explains nuances to key programs, people, or processes at the school.

X. Politics/Hidden Agendas

- a. Board Executive Committee prepares confidential summary of potential “greasy wheel” / politicking phone calls or meeting requests that the new President is likely to encounter.
 - i. Who will be trying to reach out to the new hire to express their opinion on a certain matter? What issues has the board already resolved yet someone might try and see if the new President can be influenced to re-open the topic?
- b. Board Chair carefully informs the new hire of some of these details at the right time and with the right tone given the circumstance (e.g., try not to “scare them” or “overwhelm them” right out of the gate, but ensure they are prepared if the situations presents itself early on in their tenure.)