

DEPARTMENT CHAIRS

PREAMBLE: The NAIS Guidelines of Professional Practice (GPPs) outline standards for professional conduct for various roles or positions within independent schools. We encourage NAIS member schools to view the individual Guidelines of Professional Practice below and share them within their school communities. It is our hope that the increased visibility of and easy access to the guidelines will go a long way in helping schools fulfill their missions.

OVERVIEW: *Academic department chairs play a key role in stewarding instruction and learning in their respective departments. At the same time, they work collaboratively with the other department chairs to ensure the academic program aligns with the mission of the school. Department chairs play a key leadership role in independent schools as they often fulfill the role of teacher and administrator simultaneously. This valuable, middle-level leadership is crucial in establishing open communication between and among departments and between administration and faculty.*

1. The department chair serves as a communication liaison between faculty and administration. The chair's role as both faculty member and administrator serves to further mutual understanding of complex issues. The department chair openly participates in dialogue with members of the department, other department chairs, and administrators to ensure that the goals and direction of the school are clearly stated and aligned with the mission of the school.
2. The department chair serves as a leader in curriculum and pedagogy in his or her respective department. The chair guides conversations about teaching and learning in each department to ensure that rigor and innovation are being pursued and good practices are being followed. The department chair leads annual (or more frequent) reviews of the curriculum in the department to ensure vertical continuity and appropriateness of content, skills, and assessment.
3. In order to stay in "front of the curve" of new developments and the most current pedagogy in the respective subject area, the department chair maintains relationships with local, regional, and national associations of teachers of their respective subjects. The chair attends local, regional, or national conferences in the discipline or creates the opportunity for others to do so and shares what was learned with the department. The chair seeks out new ideas and initiatives and introduces them to the department. The chair models good teaching by using a variety of teaching techniques suitable to the subject and age group as well as by incorporating a variety of tools to reach students with a wide range of learning styles.
4. The department chair assists in hiring, training, evaluating, and supporting the faculty members in their respective department. The chair supports teachers who are new to the department or profession, teachers who might be struggling professionally or personally, and provides a first line of accountability for teachers in the department, partnering with the administration when more significant intervention is needed.
5. During meetings with the other department chairs and with administrators, the department chair serves as an advocate for one's own department while at the same time supporting the wider mission of the school. The department chair supports a culture of healthy and open discussion about school issues, while also showing active support for the school's decisions.
6. The department chair facilitates department meetings that promote participation from all department members. The chair keeps department meetings focused on curricular or teaching issues or needs of the students. The chair will use meetings to make sure administrative details are being attended to as well as to engage in meaningful conversation about teaching and learning.
7. The department chair should have a purposeful approach to developing his or her own leadership and collaboration skills. The chair should participate in formal and informal efforts to strengthen and improve his or her own leadership skills and seek out feedback on his or her own leadership as often as possible.