

Ethical Behavior & Best Practices for Admission Professionals

The mission of the Association of Independent School Admission Professionals is to support and advance those involved in admission and enrollment management in their responsibilities for advancing institutional mission and financial sustainability. AISAP's 2010 Strategic Plan established as a goal the need to set guidelines for ethical behavior and best practices for the enrollment professional. This document was developed by a diverse group of AISAP member schools representing a cross section of the membership, to serve as a resource and guideline for ethical behavior and best practices. These guidelines are offered in the spirit of advancing the profession, supporting our schools, and serving our students and families. Furthermore, these guidelines signify the commitment of AISAP to advance the professionalism of the admission field for all. While not intended to be regulatory in nature, the document was crafted with the highest standards of behavior and practice in mind and in turn will suggest to all independent school leaders the importance of maintaining high standards of competence and integrity in the profession.

As a professional, the admission officer should be:

1. Trustworthy, honest, and ethical

- a. We believe our work in admission and enrollment management requires candor and honesty in our dealings with parents, students, and colleagues in our schools, in other schools, and in the broader communities we serve.

2. Educated and well-informed

- a. We believe in the capacity of professional development opportunities and improved educational resources to help our respective offices serve families and our institutions better. We seek to facilitate widespread and easy access to the very best ideas in admission, enrollment, and financial aid.

3. Fair and equitable; socially responsible

- a. We believe that by acting in a socially responsible fashion, and by prioritizing fair and equitable treatment of parents, students, and our respective institutions, we can help the greatest number of families flourish and achieve the broader mission of our schools.

4. Collegial and collaborative

- a. We believe our best work in admission will arise from a collaborative spirit and from taking advantage of opportunities to share ideas that help families, help our schools, and help our profession flourish.

When working with parents and students, the admission officer should focus on the best interest of students and families. The following methods can best ensure that these interests are secured:

- 1. Be transparent and clear about requirements, thresholds, and the importance of achieving an appropriate fit between student and school.**
 - a. Schools should aspire to be transparent about process requirements and appropriateness of fit.
 - b. When communicating with families, process requirements should be clear and consistently applied.
 - c. While each applicant is an individual and should be evaluated as such, schools should keep at the forefront of decision making the appropriateness of fit and likelihood of success and positive outcomes.

- 2. Treat admission and financial aid information about candidates as confidential.**
 - a. It is important for families and schools to share truthful and complete information when participating in an admission process.
 - b. In order for this honest sharing to take place, schools must treat as completely confidential the academic, personal, and financial information shared by families, teachers, and schools.

- 3. Encourage and support access and inclusion.**
 - a. While the financial circumstances of schools vary, ongoing priority should be placed upon creating diverse and inclusive communities, creating and supporting an admission process that is open and accessible, and communicating with families in a manner that both honors access and inclusion and communicates selectivity accurately and fairly.

- 4. Be clear about full costs.**
 - a. Schools should share complete information about the total costs of attending the school and other financial expectations with families before an enrollment commitment is required. This should include tuition, fees, athletics, lunch, extended day services, auxiliary programs, books and materials, miscellaneous expenses, transportation, and labs.

- 5. Ideally, keep the financial aid process separate from the admission process.**
 - a. Ideally, schools should aspire to have financial aid awards and outcomes determined independently from regular admission decision-making.
 - b. While the needs of schools vary enough to make merit scholarships a realistic possibility or even a requirement, need-based aid should be a central priority in our schools and a continued key component of our respective missions as independent schools.
 - c. In all cases, requirements for both financial aid and merit-based programs should be clear and consistent.
 - d. Schools should endeavor to notify aid applicants of their financial obligation and level of aid support prior to requiring an enrollment commitment; when the timing of the aid process makes this impossible, schools should allow families the opportunity to be released from the commitment if the school is unable to provide sufficient financial support.

- 6. Communicate decisions in a clear and consistent manner.**
 - a. While schools have a variety of enrollment procedures, great attention should be paid to communicating process expectations and decision outcomes both to families and between partner schools clearly and consistently.

- 7. Allow families an appropriate (or predetermined by association or consortium) amount of time to make an educated enrollment decision.**
 - a. In all cases, families should have an appropriate amount of time to weigh their decision and address any questions or concerns before making a final commitment.
 - b. As noted above, schools should provide financial aid outcomes to families before an absolute enrollment commitment is required.
 - c. Establishing regional or affiliated associations or consortia can sometimes be difficult. However, we believe that collaborative arrangements that establish a consistent amount of time to make an educated enrollment decision cultivate trust.

- 8. Provide accurate and official academic records or reports for current students wishing to explore other options; allow them the time and opportunity to do so. Expect parents to respect the terms of the enrollment contract, at their own school and any others.**
 - a. We believe that providing accurate records for current students wishing to explore other options, and allowing families the time and opportunity to conduct that process without hindrance, ensures the best educational experience and outcomes.
 - b. We also believe it is important to respect the need for schools to secure enrollment contracts and enforce contractual obligations of families and for schools requesting official records to respect other schools' expectations in this regard.

Within the School, the admission officer should:

- 1. Ensure everyone knows and understands the process, this Best Practices document, and any applicable rules/regulations.**
 - a. It is the responsibility of the admission office to educate others within the school community, including the head of school, faculty, coaches, parents, alumni, and trustees, with regard to the admission process, outcomes, and applicable rules and regulations.

- 2. Do our best to ensure a fit/match for admitted students based upon knowledge of the school.**
 - a. Schools should aspire to be transparent about fit. Establishing committee input and consensus is considered smart process, as is the assessment of student progress and outcomes as it applies to predictors of success for future students.

- 3. Accurately represent the school and its programs and educate others to do so as well.**
 - a. Admission officers will ensure that, as much as possible, the experience of enrolled students and families match what has been represented in the admission and enrollment process.
 - b. Admission professionals should ensure that other members of the community who participate in the process are also well-informed and honest in their representation of the school.

- 4. Abide by all local, state, and federal laws.**
 - a. Schools must be aware of and abide by all local, state and federal laws.

Within the educational and larger community, the admission officer should:

1. Require records from the current school before making final decisions.

- a. Requiring a formal transcript from a sending school ensures that the admitting school has accurate academic and enrollment information to best ensure an appropriate fit, and also prevents the sending school from unexpected enrollment changes.

2. Practice ethical recruitment behavior.

- a. Recruitment is a highly sensitive issue in many ways. As such, it is the experience of many schools that building regional or affiliate association agreements on recruitment conduct can better ensure the highest patterns of ethical behavior. Particularly when affiliate associations and or consortia exist, it is essential that schools uphold their commitment to those association or consortia standards or requirements.
- b. Schools should be transparent about fit in communication materials and treat families in a manner that serves the child. Schools should refrain from practices that limit choice, apply undue pressure, or require families to make commitments before they have had the opportunity to appropriately consider their options.
- c. Schools should not knowingly initiate the recruitment of students enrolled in other independent schools. In schools where offices outside of admission also participate in recruitment or yield activities (including but not limited to athletics and special talent programs), these ethical recruitment practices and behavioral expectations also apply.
- d. AISAP believes that current admission professionals and other members of the school community who directly participate in the admission process have an explicit conflict of interest if they also participate in any type of personal for-profit admission, enrollment, or financial aid counseling or consulting. AISAP strongly encourages any admission professionals who participate in incentive compensation to be transparent about those practices to their clients and their school communities.

3. Build collegiality. Focus upon the positives of own school and programs, and ensure that others do the same.

- a. As educators, we embrace the existence of many different educational options, and believe that this variety enriches the experience and opportunities for all. Admission officers and school communities will appropriately focus on and highlight what distinguishes or differentiates their own programs, population, or educational outcomes, and may use marketing, research, endorsements, and other means to do so. While encouraging schools to market themselves proactively, AISAP believes schools and members of school communities should refrain from disparaging or derogatory references to other specific schools or programs, independent, public, or private. That practice violates AISAP's stated professional goals of collegiality and social responsibility.