

NAIS at the Crossroads 1974-76

By Thomas Read
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In the summer of 1974, Cary Potter and John Chandler (president and vice president of NAIS at the time) shared with me a list of concerns they had regarding the National Association of Independent Schools. I had the good fortune of attending the Harvard Graduate School of Education as a Bush Leadership Fellow in 1974-75. The Fellowship made it possible for me to undertake a special project for NAIS over a two-year period.

While Cary Potter and John Chandler were satisfied with the development of NAIS since its formation in 1962, they realized that this was a time when other independent school associations – regional, state, and local – were also changing and growing rapidly. Some of the initial concerns expressed to me by Cary and John were:

- The need to review again the significance of functions that came from the two merging associations in terms of current realities;
- Snowballing demands on NAIS for services – some new – requested by school heads and trustees;
- Increasing personal demands on the NAIS executive staff in the form of advice, information, and informal consulting requested by school heads and trustees;
- A general feeling that membership dues were about as large as they could be without pricing the association out of existence, thus making expansion of the staff to handle additional activities a dubious proposition;
- Complexity caused by the existence of other organizations, which had taken on functions paralleling or duplicating those provided by NAIS, including such organizations as the new Council for American Private Education (CAPE), the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), the American Alumni Council (AAC), etc.;
- Additional complexity caused by the other independent school organizations to which NAIS members also belonged and some of which provided services paralleling or duplicating those of NAIS. Several regional associations, in particular, were reviewing their objectives and long range plans and needed to know what NAIS intended to do.

In November 1974, I submitted to the NAIS board of directors a detailed NAIS Special Project Proposal. In December, the NAIS board commissioned me to do a two-part study for the NAIS board of directors, to be completed in the spring of 1976. The two parts of the study, described in the next section of this paper, were:

- NAIS and its internal operations and services.
- NAIS and its relations with member associations.

I was able to complete this study by the end of 1975 and to submit a formal project report – the Read Report – to the NAIS board of directors in January 1976. As I have earlier indicated, I

presented a summary of the report at the NAIS Annual Conference in February in Boston, and the report was published in the NAIS 1975-76 Annual Report.

This section is drawn principally from the existing text of the NAIS Special Project Proposal approved by the NAIS board in December 1975 and NAIS board meeting minutes for 1975-76.

NAIS Background (1975)

In 1975, NAIS had a membership of 841 schools enrolling approximately 306,000 elementary and secondary students. Member schools were represented by the Board of Directors, consisting of 15 men and women, mostly school heads, who were elected for four-year terms. The work of the association was done by a full-time executive staff of 11, plus secretarial staff, and 21 committees comprising 120 administrators and faculty from member schools (who were not paid for services).

The operating budget was approximately \$622,000, designated for staff salaries and benefits, workshops and conferences, printing, general office expenses, and travel. Slightly over 50 percent of the operating income came from dues paid by member schools and the remainder from workshop and conference fees, publications sales and subscriptions, and other miscellaneous sources. In addition to ongoing operations, NAIS also carried out certain special projects primarily supported by foundation grants. In 1974-75, these special project expenditures totaled \$478,000.

Two major studies of the functions and organization of NAIS had been conducted since its formation through the merger of ISEB (the Independent School Education Board) and NCIS (National Council of Independent Schools) in 1962:

- The Planning Report by Norman Berg in 1964.
- The Report of Policies, Procedures, and Plans by Dexter K. Strong in 1973.

While the role of NAIS had been a continuing focus of attention by the board of directors and executive staff, pressures on the organization were increasing and changing; the Strong Report had made a good start in reviewing goals and purposes, but it needed to be implemented in light of snowballing demands for new and old services as well as implications of future economic situations and the future needs of the schools in the NAIS membership.

Purposes of the NAIS Special Project

- (1) As a basis for a long range view of NAIS, to:
 - a. Examine the current roles of NAIS in terms of cost, time, schools, or individuals served, possibility of duplication, significance, etc.
 - b. Determine the additional and/or future needs of the association, such as leadership in matters of public policy, anticipating future needs before they become crises, etc.
 - c. Examine the roles of other associations and their relationship with NAIS.
 - d. Project potential future resources.

- e. Project future needs of the membership.
- (2) To develop models of criteria for evaluating present and future functions of the association.
 - (3) To develop alternative models of relationships with other national and regional associations.
 - (4) In view of anticipated future roles and needs, to develop alternate models of organization for NAIS, including both central administrative staff and volunteer committees.

Plan of the Study and related activity

January 1975: Reached agreement with the NAIS board on the purposes, scope, and desired outcomes of the study.

December 1974 – June 1975: Reviewed the available documentation, including the Berg Report of 1964, the Strong Report of 1973, the book – “American Nonpublic Schools” by Otto Kraushaar, and many NAIS documents – annual reports, financial statements, staffing and committee structure, current policies, and board meeting minutes, etc.

April – June 1975: Conducted a job and time study of the NAIS executive staff, including:

- Current job descriptions with rough breakdown by time consumption.
- Two, one-week sample time studies on each staff member, to be done as far as possible at “typical times.” This involved asking each staff member to keep a week-long log for two different weeks.
- General impressions of the staff members concerning function and use of time, involving one or two one-on-one interviews with each staff member.

Summer 1975: Developed an initial input-output summary and typology of current NAIS functions: Differential cost, differential time use, duplication, quantity and type of school or individual served, degree of perceived need, etc. I attempted to develop a real, total cost of each function by assigning direct costs and then allocating general overhead costs based on the time studies conducted earlier.

Summer 1975: Worked with the NAIS staff to determine what input was needed from member schools and constructed a questionnaire to be sent to a random sample of school heads. This survey was administered in September. The survey itself has not been found, but it consisted of questions related to NAIS services, relations between NAIS and member associations, and a few specific matters, such as perception of association costs. I do remember one surprising statistic. When school heads were asked what percentage of the school’s budget should be allocated for all association memberships, on the average, they reported a higher percentage than the current reality of expenditure.

Fall 1975: Arranged for visits to key national and regional associations. At each of these, the host association arranged for me to meet with the board, or a committee, or a randomly selected group. Discussion was organized around the principal questions in the study, and each participant was asked to complete the same survey as the one sent to school heads. The minutes

of the NAIS board meeting in November 1975 reveal that such meetings were held with these groups:

- NAIS academic and administrative committees
- Gerald LaGrange, former NAIS board chair
- NAIS Executive Committee
- Connecticut Association of Independent Schools (CAIS)
- New York Guild
- New York Association of Independent Schools (NYSAIS)
- Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
- Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools (PAIS)
- Headmistresses of the East
- Independent Schools Association of the Southwest (ISAS)
- New Jersey Association of Independent Schools (NJAIS)
- Georgia Association of Independent Schools (GAIS)
- Mid-South Association Executive Committee.

It was not possible to visit some other relevant associations because their meetings occurred in the spring, after the project was scheduled to be completed.

November 19-21, 1975: Met with the NAIS board of directors, presented a preliminary report of initial findings, and responded to questions from NAIS board members and staff. Since this was the first real checkpoint on progress of the study, it will be described in the next section.

December 1975: Completed visits to associations, wrote the Read Report, and submitted it to the NAIS board of directors for review and acceptance at its meeting in January.

February 25, 1976: Met with the NAIS board as it considered the recommendations in the Read Report. The board resolved to implement two of the major recommendations:

- To authorize the formation of a plan to reorganize the composition of the board in order to provide for a combination of directors elected directly by member associations of schools, directors elected by the national membership, and directors representative of teachers and trustees.
- To establish a coordinating committee of association representatives to make recommendations for an appropriate distribution of functions between NAIS and member associations.

February, 1976: Presented a summary of highlights and recommendations in the report to the membership at the NAIS Annual Conference in Boston. This presentation was later included in the 1975-76 NAIS Annual Report.

This concluded my assignment as a consultant to the NAIS board of directors, but I was asked to continue as a resource for the Coordinating Committee, and I was able to attend the first two meetings of the Committee on July 20-22, 1976 and September 26-28, 1976. The Coordinating Committee completed its work and submitted its complete report to the NAIS board on May 15,

1977. This report, along with extensive further study by the board and executive staff, became a starting point for a complete strategic plan, published later in 1977 by Cary Potter as “NAIS and the Future.”

NAIS Special Project – Highlights, Issues, and Recommendations

At the end of the project, it was abundantly clear that Cary Potter’s and John Chandler’s definition of issues to be addressed (listed on page 1) were right on target. In addition, it was also apparent among the various associations that there was substantial agreement on the problems to be solved, even though there was wide variation in proposed solutions. The Read Report contained a reconfirmation of these problems, which I was also asked to enumerate at the opening session of the Coordinating Committee on July 20:

- a. Widespread misunderstanding in the schools of the functions of the various associations that served them.
- b. Low visibility and lack of appreciation of certain services rendered by NAIS and other associations.
- c. Overlapping and duplication of services rendered by associations.
- d. Great variation among associations with respect to resources, staffing, services, and effectiveness.
- e. Random, even “topsy-turvy,” growth and evolution of associations without an overall design.
- f. Difficulties for schools, and school heads, in understanding how associations served them and what value they received from their investment in association dues.

There were several themes that emerged at every meeting with associations and committees that were consulted in the course of the study. Of paramount importance was the question of how services should be distributed among the various associations. The independent school associations seemed to fit into four categories: national (NAIS); strong, regional, full-service (or strong, state, full-service where there was no regional group); state associations inside regional groups with limited services and personnel; and local or metropolitan groups also with limited services and personnel. Most associations, of course, wanted to be of importance to the entire school and not separate such constituencies as trustees, administrators, and teachers. But, the question of whom an association serves had to be resolved on the basis of whom an association can realistically know and reach.

A particular example of this consisted of services to teachers, which became a separate and controversial issue with political implications. While NAIS did indeed provide services for teachers, it did so primarily through the head of the school, the principal school contact with NAIS. NAIS could only know and reach a tiny proportion of teachers for geographical and economic reasons. Thus, there seemed to be clear logic for NAIS to concentrate its direct services on the head of the school and perhaps key administrators; it also followed that direct services to teachers and probably parents and trustees could be best provided by local, state, and regional associations. The implications of this logic became very painful for NAIS staff

primarily concerned with teacher services even though the survey of school heads and meetings with associations supported decentralization of direct services where appropriate.

Teacher services became a principal agenda item for the NAIS board meeting in November 1975, which I was asked to attend. At the meeting, several directors expressed concern over the random sampling used for the survey and the fact that the survey only went to school heads. Most of the concern about random sampling came from lack of familiarity with it, but there was still concern about people being “left out” even though I had checked the sampling procedure with a Harvard Graduate School of Education professor. Random sampling was used, of course, to minimize necessary expense. Limiting the survey to school heads seemed appropriate because it was the school head who would decide which associations to join and what would be invested in associations through member dues. There also was concern whether or not the regional and state associations could and would make direct services to teachers a priority and provide the staffing and financial resources that would be required.

At the same meeting of the NAIS board there was also discussion of the costs of services and the impact on fees and dues. I shared with the board the analysis of real costs of services provided by NAIS based on adding estimated staff and overhead costs to direct costs. As a general rule, it appeared that the real cost of workshops and seminars would run from one-quarter to one-third higher than the current accounting indicated.

On the survey sent to heads of schools, responders were asked to indicate what proportion of the school budget they felt was appropriate for association memberships of all kinds and the dues they pay. The results of this survey no longer exist, but the NAIS board members at the board meeting were surprised by the results. The average proportion of the budget that school heads indicated would be appropriate was, in fact, significantly higher than the reality of what the average school was paying. While many school heads had complained about increasing dues, some to the point of considering dropping their NAIS membership, it seemed that cost was not the real issue. What was more likely to be the cause of complaints was lack of satisfaction with certain services or lack of understanding of the “hidden” values of association affiliation.

At the time of the November 1975 meeting of the NAIS board, the part of the special project devoted to NAIS and associations was still underway, but there was discussion of three additional themes that had emerged from meetings with associations and association representatives:

(I) The federal role of NAIS was the most urgent question. What was the proper role of NAIS in dealing with national issues and regulation? Was it to inform, to attempt control, to intervene? Perhaps the perceived power of NAIS to influence legislation and public opinion was unrealistic. Should NAIS count upon the growing influence of CAPE (Council for Private Education) to be the principal, nationally coordinated force?

(II) The Annual Conference was a frequent source of complaints. While it could not truly be a national conference for teachers, it was significant as a regional meeting for teachers. There was general belief in the value of the conference in providing significant national visibility for independent education annually. Some members of the National Association of

Principals of Schools for Girls (NAPSG), however, expressed frustration that the Annual Conference was not designed for administrators and they felt lost among the teachers; many other heads had felt the same way. There were strong feelings that the conference had to provide more for heads of schools and trustees. As a part of the special project, I had examined registration patterns for recent conferences. The person most likely to attend the conference was the head of the school, but the school person next most likely to attend was the head's spouse. All this led to a conviction that the NAIS Annual Conference needed a stronger focus, such as a special day, for heads of schools and to develop a stronger focus as a regional meeting for others.

(III) A Washington, DC, presence for NAIS was clearly another emerging issue. While NAIS should certainly continue its collaboration with CAPE, did it need to expand its efforts there beyond the work of one part-time NAIS representative? Did the reality that the national headquarters of many educational organizations were in Washington have implications for NAIS? While the NAIS staff had long resided in the Boston area, did Boston provide the most effective locale for NAIS, particularly to offset some feeling that NAIS was dominated by Easterners, as it probably had been in the days of ISEB?

Principal Recommendations

The principal recommendations of the Read Report were in two concluding sections:

- Section F – “Recommendations Concerning Structures, Functions, and Interrelationships of Associations,” and
- Section G – “Recommendations concerning Activities, Finances, Governance, and Staffing of NAIS.”

While the exact language in these sections is missing, the content of them is readily apparent in the existing Minutes of the NAIS Board Meetings at which the report and its recommendations were discussed: February 25, 1976; May 4-5, 1976 (NAIS Board Executive Committee); and June 21-22, 1976. The content of the recommendations also appears in the existing proceedings of the NAIS Coordinating Committee at its first two meetings in July and September, 1976.

The first recommendation in Section F was that the structure and relationships of the various associations be based on a systematic and agreed upon division of responsibilities among NAIS, regional, state, and local independent associations. This did not presuppose or anticipate any particular overall changes in the association structures, respecting the independent authority and modus operandi of each of them. While it was intended that this be only a starting point for discussion, the NAIS board strongly endorsed the proposed criteria and functions after making a few changes in those for NAIS.

A second recommendation was that a coordinating committee of association representatives and of NAIS directors be established by the chairman in consultation with member associations to make recommendations for an appropriate distribution of functions between NAIS and member associations. There was also a recommendation concerning the appropriate membership of such a body (representatives from six regional, 12 state, and three teachers' associations in addition to

five appointed by NAIS). The board agreed that such a coordinating committee was the only way of securing the collective ownership, collaboration, and cooperation necessary to achieve the desired commitments. As has already been mentioned, the NAIS board authorized the formation of the NAIS Coordinating Committee at its meeting on February 25. It also voted to seek the funding necessary for the committee to do its work. It also directed that the sections of the Read Report (sections F and G, in particular) be distributed to the Coordinating Committee before its first meeting.

The third recommendation was that the NAIS board make changes in its structure to provide linkages with the other associations at the governance level. More specifically, it was proposed that the composition of the board consist of some directors elected nationally and others elected by member associations to provide such linkages. The NAIS board voted to accept and implement this recommendation. The resolution was presented to the Annual Meeting on February 26, including this preface:

“Whereas, the present separateness of the associations contributes to a feeling expressed by some that NAIS is removed from its constituency; And it makes it easy for associations to go their own way when a more cooperative plan might better serve the real interests of member schools;

“Whereas, the best ways of promoting a greater sense of fellowship, strengthening liaison and coordination, and making schools feel they have a real stake in their organizations, is to spread the responsibility for selecting directors of NAIS and to provide linkages between the NAIS Board and those of other associations;

“Be it resolved ... “

In the Read Report, there was a suggestion that the formula for representation might be eight elected directly by associations, eight elected by NAIS, and four others to represent other constituents. As the board eventually implemented the recommendation, including amended bylaws, the formula was changed to 12 elected by associations and eight by NAIS, of which two would be teachers and two would be trustees. The board also agreed with the Read Report recommendation that association representatives be elected officers of the association, either present or past, or at least someone very familiar with the affairs of the association.

This action by the NAIS board served as a powerful invitation to collaboration and set a tone of collegiality that resulted in substantial changes in both perceived and actual relationships between association leaders as well as establishing a collaborative climate for the Coordinating Committee. It clearly provided the message that ‘we are all in this together and the whole structure is ours.’ In my opinion, the change in the composition of the NAIS board was the single most enduring and valuable result of the Read Report and its acceptance by the NAIS board.

The final part of the Read Report – Section G contained six imperatives for NAIS itself to confront at some appropriate time concerning its structure and activity. It was understood that a final resolution of some of them would depend upon the deliberations of the Coordinating

Committee and initial action might be limited to designating an ad hoc committee to monitor the issues involved. These issues included:

- A. The need for NAIS to formalize criteria for its activities vis-à-vis those of other associations: This had largely been taken care of at the February meeting of the board of directors at which it endorsed the proposed criteria in the Read Report, including a few changes to strengthen understandings concerning the NAIS role in teacher services.
- B. The need for NAIS to provide a more active, anticipatory federal role: Many independent school leaders believed strongly that NAIS needed a full-time representative and office in Washington while maintaining its relations with and participation in CAPE. It was recognized that NAIS had concerns different from those of other kinds of CAPE organizations; one example was the search for public funding in other groups. In the fall of 1978, John Esty recruited Jack Sanders as the first NAIS Director of Government Affairs, operating in a small Washington office.
- C. The need to clarify relations with other associations: This had been largely resolved through the two board resolutions (change in governance and authorization of the Coordinating Committee) in February and its work on implementation during the spring.
- D. The need for a more active public voice, more visible leadership and more effective publicity for independent education and independent schools: This need was heard at almost every meeting conducted during the study, most often in the form of “NAIS needs to toot its own horn!” The NAIS board started its own investigation of such possibilities in February when it sought advice from a public relations firm (Fred Gehrung and Associates). It reached the conclusion that no decision on a long-range public relations plan should be made without fuller consideration of the Read Report and results of Coordinating Committee deliberations. Later, these matters were significant efforts of the Esty administration.
- E. The need to review the structure and program of the NAIS Annual Conference: By 1975, NAIS was collaborating more significantly with regional and state associations in planning the annual conference, recognizing that the conference could only be national for school heads. Soon, the conference had special days for school heads and trustees, maintaining high quality programs for teachers, administrators, and parents most likely to come from near the conference site.
- F. The need to review the location of the NAIS office: This was a painful issue for many NAIS staff, and there were significant economic and logistic matters that were not easy to resolve. The NAIS office was eventually moved to Washington, D.C., but not until the administration of Peter Relic (president, NAIS, 1991-2001).

The NAIS Coordinating Committee

The work of the NAIS Coordinating Committee and its report to the NAIS board of Directors on May 18, 1978, are thoroughly described in its proceedings, which include all mailings, minutes, background material, and charts illustrating proposed structures and organization. There was, however, one major issue that arose at the meetings that had not been anticipated in either the Read Report or the work of the board preceding the first meeting of the committee. Since that issue did result in a controversial proposal for NAIS and member associations, I will outline it here.

The stated purpose of the Coordinating Committee, established by vote of the NAIS board of directors on February 25, 1976 was to serve “as a coordinating committee broadly representative of the member associations and the NAIS board to plan and oversee action to be taken in the several areas specifically identified and discussed (in the Read Report), including governance, definition and division of functions, coordination of services and schedules, financing, and others.” The Read Report did not deal with structures or organization of the various assumptions. It recommended a specific model representing a balance between recognition of existing circumstances (status quo) and creating the capability for moving in desired directions. The proposed division of responsibilities was designed to be compatible with the current organization and resources of the various associations, recognizing their right to make certain decisions independently. The changes in the composition of the NAIS board and the linkages between NAIS and member associations were, as far as it seemed, wise.

On July 21st, however, Rod Snelling, headmaster of the Tatnall School (Deleware), suggested “that it might not be logical or possible for the committee to talk about the division of functions and services before making decisions about the appropriate overall structure of collective action through associations.” At first the group seemed to feel that considering changes in structure was beyond the committee’s purview and that such discussion would only “be an exercise in theory,” because of vested interests and cherished traditions in all associations. The sense of the meeting “seemed to be that alterations in the structure of associations were more a matter of long range planning than a current priority for the Committee.” It was agreed that Snelling and a small committee would explore matters of structure more completely and report at the second meeting of the committee in September.

The Snelling Subcommittee met separately in August and prepared two models of structure for associations; each was studied for advantages, disadvantages, feasibility, cost, and salability. Model B was essentially the current reality and in accord with the Read Report. The other, labeled Model A, was an expanded national association with branch or regional offices that would replace the current, separate regional associations. Schools would then belong to only one association (NAIS) receiving services of national importance from the NAIS central office, and all other services through the NAIS regional branches – either directly from the regional branch or indirectly through local associations. There were many questions, such as how accreditation of many independent schools through member associations would be continued since NAIS had always been opposed to providing accreditation itself. Salability of Model A was also a major concern.

The Snelling Subcommittee concluded that, in spite of many complexities, Model A was feasible, that it could be funded, that it could be sold, and that it could be implemented. It also

concluded “that the time was right for strong and forward-looking action” and recommended that the Coordinating Committee endorse in principle the creation of a Model A structure. The final report of the committee to the NAIS board contained the model as its principal recommendation.

The recommendation provided a serious dilemma for Cary Potter and the board. In his Annual Report of the President in 1978, Potter referred to the recommendation as follows:

While the plan in its original form had the advantages of being a simpler and more uniform means for delivery of services, in the opinion of many, it failed to take into sufficient account the historical roots and the substantial development of the existing structure of associations. When subsequently modified to give greater recognition to that structure and to the need for a considerable degree of local independence and autonomy, the plan seemed likely to be both cumbersome and costly.

After extended discussion, the board decided to adopt an essentially organic approach to the matter of future structure by starting with the present order of things. Further, it accepted the concept of regionalized delivery of services as a goal to be pursued, but preferred to pursue it by enlisting the active collaboration of existing associations in moving toward that goal rather than by creating a new structure.

It was in the summer of 1977 that Potter developed his own statement of a strategic plan for NAIS, which was distributed to all schools as “NAIS and the Future: Association Responsibilities, Services, and Relationships.” In this, he drew heavily on the best features of the Read Report and the findings in the Coordinating Committee report, including the changes in NAIS governance, the division of functions, and acceptance of NAIS responsibility for enhanced national leadership.

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