

My Years at NAIS: 1978-1991

By John Esty

Introduction

When my family learned of my appointment as president-elect of NAIS in late 1977, my father said to one of my brothers, “What do you suppose it means?” When my brother said, “I have no idea,” my father replied, “Well, I don’t know either, but it sure has a hell of a ring to it!” [I later recounted this to my predecessor, Cary Potter, who recalled that when he was elected president of NAIS in 1964, his friends thought he had been made head of an airline.]

What NAIS meant in 1964 was the new merger of the Independent Schools Education Board and the National Council of Independent Schools. The former was an organization of school heads who came together periodically to deliberate on issues of curriculum, testing, and good teaching. The latter was a loose collection of state and regional associations concerned more with issues such as accreditation and government controls and the national image of independent schools. The former faced inward to preserve high standards and educational excellence; the latter turned outward to provide collective strength at the state and regional level for the occasionally embattled position of independent schools in American education.

By 1978, under Cary Potter’s leadership and foresight, the two organizations – dissimilar in form and purpose – had become one strong national professional education association. Yet the separate purposes of the two founding groups still played out as each claimed the ascendancy

in the new NAIS. In caricature, was its symbol to be the schoolhouse or the circling of wagons around it?

An attempt to answer this continuing if overdrawn conundrum, was the creation in 1976 of a study group called the “Coordinating Committee”, headed by Tom Read, former head of St. Paul Academy. Building on an earlier study by a former head of Lakeside School, Dexter Strong, the purpose of the committee was just that – to coordinate better the “independent” efforts of schools, regional associations, and the still-new national organization. Being president of the National Association of Independent Schools still had a hell of a ring to it, but did it speak with one voice, did it speak with authority, did it truly represent the best values in teaching of independent schools?

The goals of the committee began to take shape in the summer of 1977 with a transformation of the report of the Coordinating Committee into a clear, deliberate, long-range plan, and the search for a new president of NAIS to carry out the plan. [Cary Potter had announced his intention to step down as president of NAIS in the early winter of 1977.]

The plan, called *NAIS and The Future*, addressed mainly the emerging role of NAIS as a national organization and its relation to the far-flung local, state, and regional associations of independent schools. It called for a full-time Washington office, a full-time public information officer and program, and a full-time field representative to coordinate activities among the different levels of associations. It also defined which activities were most appropriate for each level, and emphasized that NAIS should function at the national level and concentrate on activities and services that only it could do and do best.

As for a new president, the search had begun in the summer of 1977, but intensified in the fall under the clarity and goals of the new long-range plan. As one of the four final

candidates, I found the process to be the most thorough and exacting I had ever experienced. In November 1977, my appointment was announced; I was to succeed Cary Potter upon his retirement in June 1978. [At this point, the NAIS board asked if, before taking over officially, I could spend two months visiting NAIS schools all over the country. The board proposed to cover my compensation for the month of May if the Rockefeller' Brothers Fund – my employer at that time – would let me leave early and cover my compensation for the month of April. This innovative arrangement provided me with the opportunity to see at first hand the new constituency I was inheriting, while Cary Potter presided over the affairs of the association right up to his retirement.]

As I have reviewed my annual reports, my seemingly endless list of speeches, and my records for the period 1978-1991, there has emerged a powerful theme. In that 13 years, NAIS changed from being the unifier of schools and associations and public information at the national level, to becoming not only that, but additionally a national presence and strong national voice for independent education, and for all education in general. This story is told in the work of five major projects or initiatives at that time.

The NAIS Commission On Educational Issues

The idea for this NAIS project began with some conversations in the early 1970s among Ted Sizer, then dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Bill Dietel of the Rockefeller Brothers' Fund, and me: I had recently stepped down as head of the Taft School and was Staff Associate for Education at the Fund (which was later to provide start-up funding). Our purpose was to devise a mechanism by which leaders of both independent schools and public schools could talk with each other. The commission itself was to comprise six well-known independent

school heads and six thoughtful public school educators. Art Powell, second director of the commission, tells the story in the preface for his book, *Lessons From Privilege*:

The Commission was a 1970s response to the NAIS's belief that independent education was too isolated from innovative developments in public education. Its mission was to link prep schools to outside practice and research, with financial support separate from the dues member schools paid for regular NAIS services. I was privileged to direct the Commission during its last decade, and to work with unusually distinguished commissioners drawn from almost every corner of the American educational landscape. Although this book's Appendix emphasizes research and methodology, much of what I know about independent schools I learned during my work with the Commission between 1978 and 1988. My debt to the commissioners and the NAIS board of directors is immense.

By far our largest project was an inquiry into American secondary education, *A Study of High Schools*, which was directed by the Commission's chairman, Theodore R.Sizer. By 1986 the high school study had produced three books and one of the largest school-reform projects in American history, the Coalition of Essential Schools. But it was unarguably a study mainly of public schools. Public education by then seemed less notable for the solutions it offered than for the problems it confronted. The Commission gradually became less germane to the emerging priorities of independent schools, and by the late 1980s its time had passed. It was instead timely to ask what lessons independent schools may have to offer other schools, just as in the mid-1970s independent schools asked the question in reverse.

Lessons From Privilege, subtitled, *The American Prep School Tradition*, was a reflective, insightful essay on independent education. It made innovative use of two research techniques

new to independent school histories. The first – ethnological study – involved in-depth qualitative examination of 10 or more specific schools. The second new research source used by Powell was the inclusion of independent and private schools in large scale data collection by the U.S. Department of Education. For the first time, independent schools had access to comparative figures that helped define their unique position in American education.

The Sizer Study of High Schools was co-sponsored by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Its executive director was Scott Thomson, whom I had known from my foundation days. He became an early supporter of a new NAIS program a few years later, called Recruiting New Teachers (see below). He was instrumental in NAIS being invited to become a member of the Education Leaders Consortium. This group, based in Washington, was the inner core of the nation's public school establishment. Among its 16 members were the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Alliance of Black Educators, the National School Boards Association, and the Council of the Chief's State School Officers. NAIS was the only non-public association member. One measure of the arrival of independent education in national leadership was the election of my successor, Peter Relic, as chair of the Consortium.

NAIS and Public Policy: The Washington Office

It was Cary Potter who first realized that independent schools not only needed a national voice, but were being drawn inextricably into the national debates over public policy for elementary and secondary education in America. In his 1969 Annual Report, he wrote:

The independent school, like other kinds of nonpublic schools, may be nonpublic in control, but its fundamentally public role with public

responsibility, which it has always had, but not always recognized, is becoming clearer every day.

This was the time hundreds if not thousands of small, often-Christian, academies were springing up in the south, largely to bypass school integration laws and pressures. In his 1970 Annual Report, realizing he had to distance independent schools from this phenomenon, Potter wrote:

With regard to the issue of race, like every other institution in our society, independent schools as a group, with only a few exceptions, were inexcusably slow to live up to their responsibilities to minority groups in this country. The nation's most pressing business is our business, and we have an obligation to advance it to whatever degree is within our powers... It is important to let people know what we believe and what we are attempting to do, realizing as we should that we have only begun.

A year or so later, this sentiment was strengthened when NAIS filed an *amicus curiae* brief before the U.S. Supreme Court hearing a case pleading for the right, in effect, to discriminate in admissions based on race. In the brief, Cary Potter declared that, “Independent schools believe that racial discrimination was unacceptable in any form, at any time, in any place.” And the die was cast for NAIS to acknowledge the public responsibility of independent schools! This new role led Potter to the co-founding of the Council for American Private Education (CAPE) in 1971, “To provide a coherent voice for private schools in the educational community.” In this endeavor, he was joined by colleagues representing Lutheran, Catholic, Episcopal, Jewish, and other religious schools. They all subscribed to non-discrimination in their admission policies; several already had fully-staffed Washington offices. Potter clearly hoped that organizing and strengthening CAPE might obviate the need for a separate Washington office for NAIS.

It was soon clear, however, that independent schools had a slightly different agenda than most other CAPE organizations. For us, the abiding concern was our independence from government regulation and sectarian control. The main agenda item for the others was pushing for federal aid to private schools. So, office space was found and Dick Thomsen, former head of Episcopal High School, was appointed part-time NAIS Washington representative. This arrangement worked satisfactorily through the mid 1970s, but by 1977 the new plan, *NAIS and The Future*, specified there was to be a full-time Washington office – with full staff and office complex.

As the new president of NAIS, I sensed this should get top priority, and by the fall of 1978 I had recruited Jack Sanders as NAIS Director of Government Affairs. He had been a student of mine at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst in 1972, and was now working in DC. He found ample office space while I solicited advice from old Washington hands on what one did in such an office! Luckily, I ended up with Steve Bailey, who was Vice President of the American Council of Education (ACE) for Government Relations. His three-part advice to me is etched in my mind and remains the keystone for the functioning of the NAIS Washington office: (1) Don't look back in anger, nor forward in fear, but around in awareness; (2) Communicate daily with the government and its agents from a position of informational, analytical, and political strength; (3) Be sure *all* your schools conduct their affairs scrupulously and with impeccable good practice.

The NAIS plan calling for an enhanced Washington presence turned out to be prescient, and our preparations in the summer of 1978 turned out to be just in time – for a difficult and subtle test was on us immediately. In the fall of 1978, the Internal Revenue Service had posted a proposed new school anti-racial discrimination regulation for review and public comment

(standard practice we quickly learned). It mandated withdrawal of tax-exemption and deductibility of donations from private schools whose student composition did not reflect the racial make-up of their surrounding areas. Although aimed at the “segregation” academies, the regulation would have serious financial implications for many of our schools, particularly those in cities or just outside cities. Ironically, the proposed regulation would have hurt precisely those schools that were making the greatest effort to increase the enrollment of minority students.

So, uneasily, we joined forces with hundreds of Christian school representatives at the first public-comment session. They wanted to be able to avoid integration orders; we saw a threat to our independence. Faced with this overwhelming response, and realizing the proposed regulation did not make very much sense for public schools either, the IRS removed the proposal from consideration.

It was then necessary, however, to articulate as clearly as possible the part of the regulation that was objectionable to independent schools. Once again, we found the right public position in an earlier speech made by Cary Potter:

“The private school world in general does not support the right of private schools to discriminate in admission of students on grounds of race. Such schools do believe that they are fully entitled to determine their own philosophy, to design the curriculum and choose the teaching materials and methods they consider most effective, and to admit students whom they believe, and whose parents believe, will benefit from the education offered. But they do not believe that race as a criterion for admission is one that is in accord with public interest or the public policy.”

This language was the basis of a quickly produced press release from the new Washington office, and we found that once again, the press was paying more and more attention to the relatively new voice of independent schools.

Shortly afterward, the NAIS board of directors approved a resolution endorsing the Equal Rights Amendment, affirming its basic principal that, “Equality of Rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex.” At the same time, the Board – urged on by Director Edes Gilbert, head of Mary Institute, and by long-time NAIS staffer, Adele Ervin – created the NAIS Council on Women in Independent Schools. It was to become a permanent voice to remind NAIS and independent schools of unfinished business in this area. These two actions were noted favorably by the DC press.

In early 1981, the NAIS directors passed a resolution (15 to 8) supporting tuition tax credits for parents of private school students. It was not a blanket endorsement, however. Its provisions included an insistence on non-discrimination in admission policies, a cap to the dollar amount of the credit, and an understanding that any monies obtained would not diminish the federal support of public education. This was a public position that was hot news in Washington, where new bills supporting tuition tax credits were being proposed in Congress. The DC office issued another press release walking the fine line between government aid and government regulation, between supporting the position of CAPE which had a more positive stance, and the NAIS provision-ridden position. The press release had defining language to mitigate a clear public disapproval of federal funds going to wealthy “private schools”. This was an early harbinger of the increasing and unremitting need to define the uniqueness of independent schools, which will be traced in the last section of this history.

The impact of the DC office and the increasing presence of NAIS in national education debates, were highlighted at the 1985 annual conference, which was held in Washington. Whenever DC was chosen to host the conference it was customary to invite the President of the United States – with no expectation of an acceptance! To our astonishment, President Regan did accept. At the urging of his newly appointed Secretary of Education, William Bennett, he included in his address a call for greater public aid to private schools and a loosening of restrictions on prayer in schools. Since these subjects were not part of the NAIS agenda, we felt we had to distance independent schools from them by calling a press conference for a group of reporters already clamoring for clarification. The conference and the press release that followed were models of delicacy and tact; they represented for me a sign that NAIS in Washington had become a seasoned performer on the national political stage.

Through the 1980s, my records show I delivered an increasing number of speeches on independent schools and their public responsibility – or variations on that theme. This was due to a heightened sensitivity by our Washington listening post to public perception that we were anti-democratic, separatist, overly-advantaged, racially discriminatory, and inevitably elitist. Ironically, the more we succeeded in becoming politically sophisticated, the more we became vulnerable to public misapprehensions. This may have been due partly to the school reform movement that was heating up in the 1980s. The reform literature often underscored the higher quality of independent schools, but dismissed them as unavailable to all but the rich. [This sentiment is well-illustrated by the education editor of *Newsweek* magazine, who often attended sessions at our annual conferences. I had come to know him and liked him a lot, but he always bore an animus toward independent schools. At one conference, I ran into him again and he said

grudgingly, “Well, I still don’t approve of your schools, but I have to admit that my son now attends one.”]

While we were engaging in political and legislative skirmishes, there was another somewhat unforeseen advantage to the expanded Washington presence. We came to know an increasing number of specialized national organizations that provided services to various college administrators. We began to enter into some constructive alliances, for example, with the National Association of University Business Officers (NACUBO) for help to our school business managers; the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) for school advancement (PR, alumni, and fund-raising) officers; the Association of Governing Boards (of Universities and Colleges (AGB) for trustees. By the end of the 1980s, the resources and opportunities of Washington were challenging the idea that NAIS had to stay in Boston. Public relations in Boston was transferred to the Washington office and so were business services – both of which were able almost immediately to enhance their services to schools. Perhaps the most striking occurrence to illustrate the role of NAIS on the national stage was my invitation to the White House in September 1989. President Bush had convened the 50 governors to a rare meeting in Washington to discuss the failures of American elementary and secondary education. In order to set the agenda, he invited 15 educators to each of two two-hour sessions in the Oval Office. I was privileged to represent private education, although I tried to steer clear of any promotional instincts. But my fellow discussants, however, seemed more intent on forwarding the agenda for each organization they represented. I was impressed that President Bush adroitly chaired the meeting, posed many of the most important questions, and was one of the most attentive listeners. I was astonished to discover that the only idea I contributed in that meeting

was noted by President Bush and made it to the editorial pages of the *Atlanta Constitution*, the *Chicago Tribune*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. A national voice indeed!

Minority Affairs and the Commitment to Diversity

In the late 1960s, the NAIS board of directors, at the urging of Cary Potter, and with the strong leadership of Board Chair Jerry LaGrange, head of Rye Country Day School, voted to take the then risky step of requiring all independent schools to embrace racial non-discrimination publicly and demonstrably, as a requirement for membership in NAIS. When I attended my first board meeting in June of 1978, I noted that there was a report of a minority affairs committee of the board on the situation with respect to NAIS leadership on continuing to emphasize minority issues in our schools. The moment the chair of this board subcommittee finished his report, one of the board members, Robert Binswanger, provost of the University of Maine, spoke up and said, “Obviously the situation is not satisfactory, and I propose that we stop discussing it, and ask our new president and the staff to prepare a program for action for the November meeting of the board.” After the meeting, I huddled with the very effective Director of Minority Affairs Bill Dandridge, and told him I wanted him to develop over the summer a program that would carry out the board’s request. My intent was to approach some private foundations to get funding for a totally new and expanded initiative. I said further that he could count on something like \$50,000 or \$75,000 to support the plans I wanted him to develop. By the end of the summer, and in plenty of time for the November board meeting, we had a long-range plan and full support from the Dodge Foundation and the encouragement of its executive director, Scott McVay. At that meeting, the board voted to adopt our recommendation, noting with approval the funding that

came with it. They further voted to reaffirm an earlier statement of the NAIS board with respect to minority concerns:

“...independent education must reflect the racial, ethnic, and cultural pluralism which is a distinctive quality of American society. In active pursuit of this principle, we the directors of NAIS, commit ourselves to a policy of promoting this principle in the association’s activities, programs, staff composition, and procedural practices; and we urge our member schools and associations to undertake a similar commitment.”

As a former admission associate (at Amherst College), I knew that the key to enriching the independent school student bodies was in the admission office. I had earlier that fall been asked to speak at the annual meeting of the Secondary School Admission Test Board to an audience of almost entirely of independent school admission officers. On that occasion, I said, “I would hope that the present 8 percent of minority students in our member schools over the next 10 years would go as high as 16 percent.” [Ten years after I set that goal for the admission officers, the enrollment had reached 14 percent and it hit 16 percent four years after that. As of 05-06, this enrollment had increased to 21.2 percent.]

Turning to the even more complex issue of recruiting minority teachers, in 1980 NAIS teamed up with A Better Chance (ABC) and Independent Education Services (IES) to collaborate on a minority teacher recruitment program. Funded by the Klingenstein Fund, this program proved only slightly helpful in what has always been an intractable problem. It was quickly clear that the problem was not that there was a shortage of top-notch candidates; the problem was much more about persuading minority teachers to join our faculties, particularly the boarding faculties that were more likely to be somewhat more isolated from urban areas. Since IES was basically a teacher recruitment service to independent schools, it kept careful statistics

on such matters, including the cost of recruiting teachers in general. The measure of the difficulty of the program was that it cost four times as much to place a minority teacher in an independent school position as it cost to place teachers in general.

The issue and the concern over minority teachers surfaced again in 1987 in the Annual Report of board chair Dick Barter. Citing the general issue of diversity, he suggested there were three main strands: (1) The issue of a limited number of minority teachers must be addressed; (2) The glass ceiling, or the invisible barrier that keeps women from the highest levels of management, not only in business, but in independent schools, must be “shattered”; and (3) Access to our schools must not be limited by economic barriers. In my president’s report, at the same meeting as the chair’s report above, I further extended the NAIS concern by stating we must address, “The paucity of women in leadership positions in independent schools and the inequities in their compensation.”

Fortunately, at this time, a new approach to minority recruitment was developing by means of the NAIS-initiated public service ad campaign called, “Recruiting New Teachers” (described in the next section). When it became evident that the public service ads were encouraging many more people to investigate entering the field of teaching, and that a very high proportion of these respondents were people of color, a new source became available. The new director of minority affairs, Randolph Carter (Bill Dandridge had been appointed NAIS director of academic services), devised various methods for tapping this newly emerging pool for independent school teaching positions.

Several other new avenues began to appear. The ABC program undertook a new initiative to encourage more of its graduates to go into teaching. The DeWitt Wallace – Reader’s Digest Fund began the program to provide greater opportunities for students, especially minority

students, to attend private schools. Selected independent schools would be awarded large grants of money for the purpose of increasing enrollment students of color as well as faculty. By 1992, 23 schools had received grants totaling more than \$6.5 million.

All these, and similar initiatives in programs developed in independent schools themselves, were gradually producing results. But for me, as a former college dean and independent school head (Taft), the issue was even broader, as I tried to explain in my president's report in 1989. After giving a very broad summary of the state of elementary and secondary education in the United States, I asked the question, "What is left for independent schools?" For me, perhaps the most important of my seven answers to that question was the following:

"The potential to be truly multicultural communities. Usually considered the purview of the public school, this objective is rarely reached in either public or private schools. Simply to juxtapose students of differing backgrounds under one roof does not ensure a multicultural community; in fact, it often works in reverse. Because they are smaller and value the ideal of community in general, independent schools can better prepare young people for the changing American society of which they will be a part."

A year after I left the NAIS presidency in 1991, I noted with satisfaction that the NAIS board of directors was continuing to lead not only by strong words but by example. Board chair, John Ratté, noting this was to be his last year on the board, observed "In 1991-92, the board comprised 10 women and 14 men, including six men and women of color." It was fitting that it should be he who made this observation for Ratté had contributed long years of distinguished service on the NAIS board, especially in this critical area.

Recruiting New Teachers: The NAIS Role

On August 26, 2000, during a regular national address, President Bill Clinton discussed the “critical teacher shortage and how we can meet the growing need for more teachers in our classrooms.” He went on to say:

Today I'm announcing the first ever national on-line teacher recruitment clearinghouse. By logging on to www.recruitingteachers.org school districts can find qualified teachers and teachers can find out where the jobs are.

I'm also directing Secretary Riley to notify every school district about this new tool and to provide them with information about how to make the most of it. This will transform what has been a hit-or-miss process into a more efficient, effective exchange of information. And over time this site will help us alleviate the national teacher shortage and to bring down class size.

A press release went on to say:

The clearinghouse site not only offers a jobs bank, it also provides information for people interested in becoming teachers and gives school districts and state education departments ideas on how to boost teacher recruitment and retention efforts. The site is hosted by Recruiting New Teachers Inc. (RNT), a Belton[sic], Mass.-based nonprofit established in 1986 to help build a “qualified and diverse corps” of teachers nationwide.

Although RNT is a national organization with a board of directors of distinguished citizens, chaired originally by David Rockefeller, Jr., and currently by Louis Harris, of the Harris Polls, it originated with the NAIS board and a group of independent school leaders. Its literature states it was established in 1986, but that was the year of its incorporation, for it actually began

in 1983. In the spring of that year, the National Commission on Excellence in Education released its report entitled, *A Nation At Risk*. It was notable for its pungent brevity (one government official said after 18 months of committee meetings and almost a million dollars expended, they only came up with a 36-page report!); its memorable lines (“... our schools are being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity...”); its ominous warning (“If an unfriendly foreign power had attempted to impose on America the mediocre educational performance that exists today, we might well have viewed it as an act of war.”); and its finding of substandard teacher quality and an impending teacher shortage.

The report must have been read by several NAIS board members, for at the June meeting, the board formed a Task Force on Teacher Recruitment to advise it on appropriate action steps. This group reported in November, 1983, that there was overwhelming evidence of a serious teacher shortage. The NAIS board felt strongly that independent schools were not going to be immune to the shortage and that ways had to be found to attract qualified young men and women to the teaching profession; the board also felt a strong responsibility to improve both the status of teachers and their compensation. It was clear to them that independent school action could be effective only in concert with other private and public-school efforts.

The board then asked that I, as NAIS president, work to establish a “blue-ribbon committee of national leaders to alert the nation to the dwindling pool of qualified teacher applicants and to provide direction for addressing the problem.” At this juncture, I concluded that if the NAIS Task Force were correct – that persuasion is needed to attract young people to teaching – perhaps involvement of the advertising industry would be productive. I had long admired the public service campaigns of the Ad Council. (It was the Ad Council that created the powerful slogan for the United Negro College Fund: “A mind is a terrible thing to waste.”) In

initial discussion with Robert Keim, president of the Ad Council, I learned that although a campaign receives million of dollars of free billing and creative design, it requires several hundred thousand dollars to produce advertising materials and “response” pieces, and to sustain requisite staff for a major campaign and appropriate follow-up mechanisms. While Keim was encouraging – he felt this idea was perfect for an Ad Council campaign – he indicated that every campaign needs a national coalition behind it.

Preferring not to invent another national committee, I approached an existing group, the Education Leaders Consortium, comprising the chief executives of a wide variety of national educational organizations. At its meeting on May 25, 1984, I presented the idea for a public service advertising campaign. The consortium unanimously and thoughtfully responded that there is clearly a need for an effort like this to attract young people to teaching, and that it would be an appropriate and willing sponsor.

I had been advised by the Ad Council that a full-time director of such a program would be required for a period of two to three years. At its June 1984 meeting, the NAIS board concluded that I personally could not make a commitment of this magnitude, and the board asked that I recruit a director for the project. The board again strongly endorsed the idea of enlisting the Educational Leaders Consortium and the Ad Council in such a project.

The ensuing eight months made clear that a great deal of time and background work would be required by me just to lay the groundwork. Consequently, the NAIS board approved a leave for me for the fall of 1985, with the understanding that one of my projects would be to find a director, seek initial funding, and if possible, launch the project. At the beginning of my leave, I enlisted the help of Rick Belding. He was formerly director of business services and business manager at NAIS, and before that a teacher and administrator in private schools in Connecticut

and Texas, and a teacher in public schools in New Hampshire. He was to serve as part-time director of the project, pending its full development.

In October 1985, Belding and I met with Eleanor Hangley, vice president for campaigns, and Robert Keim, president of the Ad Council at its offices in New York. Keim continued to be very supportive of the ad campaign plan. He encouraged the preparation of a formal proposal for presentation to the Public Policy Review Board of the Ad Council in April 1986. He also indicated that from the Ad Council's experience and perspective, a campaign of this magnitude required more visible national sponsorship and more organization than could be provided by the Educational Leaders Consortium and a single project director. He also expected that the campaign and related activities would need \$200,000 a year for several years.

The task thus came to include recruitment and organization of a national board of prominent citizens who would co-sponsor the campaign along with the ELC. In order to recruit this committee and raise funds to sustain the initial effort through September 1986, the NAIS board, at its November 1985 meeting, voted to ask me to spend one-half of my time on the project, upon returning from leave in January 1986. We had received a grant of \$50,000 from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation to hire Rick Belding as executive director and lay the groundwork for the longer term.

At this point, Bruce McClellan, recently retired head of Lawrenceville School, stepped in and with high enthusiasm for our project, approached the heads of seven New England boarding schools and raised \$65,000 to keep us going. By 1989, when David Rockefeller, Jr., and an outstanding national board of directors and a full-time staff, took over fund-raising responsibilities, the NAIS board and I had raised \$350,000.

The first public service ad appeared on TV stations and on radio. After a number of focus groups around the country, and the guidance of an advisory council of advertising professionals, the slogan for the initial campaign and the title of the TV ad became, “Reach for the Power. Teach.” The ad itself showed a young teacher in all the manifold duties and contact with students in a kind of triumphant, hard, but joyful teaching day. It concluded with an 800 number to call for more information about how to become a teacher. There were certainly skeptics about the whole idea of using advertising to recruit teachers, but a few days after the ad appeared, there were almost 200,000 telephone responses. Two or three more complete new ads followed, the most popular of which had the slogan, “Be a hero, Teach.”

By the time RNT had concluded the public service ads in 1990, it had garnered a million and a half telephone calls from prospective teachers who seemed often desperate for general advice on how to enter the profession and where the job openings might exist. Perhaps most significantly, a very high proportion of responders were people of color and a very high proportion of responders wanted to teach in an urban setting. This in turn led to the establishment of an urban hotline, which was advertised in all RNT ads and publications, and provided personal counseling for those in need of direction.

Through the late 1980s and the 1990s, RNT focused less on public service ads and much more on various publications designed to help prospective teachers. The most popular of these was a highly successful, *Careers In Teaching Handbook*. It was given out at six national conferences entitled, “Pathways to Teaching”.

The National Teacher Recruitment Clearing House announced by President Clinton in August 2000 received 1.2 million hits in the first two days of its functioning website. By the end of the first week, there were 2 million hits and over a hundred thousand individual users who

received relevant, up-to-date information and guidance about careers in teaching and where the jobs lay. In a report in March 2005, RNT reported that as of that date, 4.4 million visitors had used the site's resources, which include more than 230 pages of information and links to nearly 800 job banks, containing an estimated total of 270,000 jobs nationwide. This database is free of charge, and enables educators to search jobs in the geographical locations where they would like to teach, and facilitates matching the right teachers to the right positions.

In recent years, RNT has expanded clearinghouse services for prospective teachers. The centerpiece of this work involved designing a unique "Ask an expert" area of the clearinghouse modeled after RNT's successful urban helpline service, which provided free individualized counseling to more than 1.5 million prospective teachers. An estimated 40,000 respondents were hired as teachers during the first four years of the helpline service, representing approximately 6 percent of all new teachers hired in the country. Significantly, 37 percent of respondents were people of color, and 60 percent of callers had four-year degrees or higher. With more than one million visitors per year, RNT's clearinghouse has an unparalleled opportunity to help attract and support prospective and novice teachers. Building upon its nearly two decades of experience and expertise in the field, RNT is planning a new initiative dedicated to improving education in high poverty communities.

And it all began with an NAIS board of directors eager to do its share in addressing a national problem and reaching beyond the limits of just independent schools to an idea that was to benefit all elementary and secondary education in the country.

What Is an Independent School?

When Cary Potter asked former Goucher College President, Otto Kraushaar, to write a book about independent schools in the early 1970's, he told me Kraushaar had to spend almost six months trying to figure out exactly what schools he was supposed to research. The final title of his book was *American Non-Public Schools*, because the relationship and interconnection between independent schools and other private schools (mostly church-related) was so complicated. The only thing that was clear was that they were not public schools.

According to Art Powell, the foremost recent researcher of private schools, the term "Independent School" was first used by the College Board in 1938, presumably to distinguish them from religious schools and public schools. In 1989, NAIS commissioned a poll of American parents of students not in independent schools to find out what that group thought about independent schools; the purpose was to develop new sources and new diversity for independent school admissions. A major finding was that the term, "independent school", had little meaning unless combined with "independent-private schools". The most meaningful title to this group was "preparatory" or "prep" school – the one stated reason the College Board had used the new term "independent"!

Why is this important? For two reasons, both of which were major characteristics of the years I served as NAIS president. The first reason was the increasing use of data from the non-public schools by the U.S. Department of Education, which were increasingly useful to researchers for scholarly and comparative purposes, and, more importantly, to develop sound policies for federal aid to schools. The second reason it became more important, was to distinguish independent schools from other private schools because the governance, purposes, and public policy of NAIS schools were often quite different from other non-public schools, especially the Christian academies. At the time President Clinton announced the teacher

clearinghouse, he mentioned that there were 53 million school children in the country. Of that number, roughly 10 percent of the school children were in non-public schools, of which 10 percent were in NAIS schools.

So, independent schools educated only about 1 percent of the nation's school children, yet the impact and national voice of NAIS greatly outstripped that proportionate share of school children. It is ironic, however, that with the greater voice and involvement in national affairs, independent schools were more and more viewed askance by public educators and legislators. It became necessary for me constantly to define and re-define independent schools and their dedication to democratic ideals. In preparing this short history, I noted that eight of my 13 president reports were devoted to this purpose.

The Annual Report of the President in my third year had the subtitle, "What Are Independent Schools?" I spoke of seven characteristics:

1. Independent schools stress the individual student and channel their resources directly to student learning, counseling, and growth. We do not support great bureaucracies, we have minimal superstructure, and our energy goes into our common purpose instead of incessant political debate and factionalism.

2. Independent schools believe that significant teaching and learning happen all the time – on playing fields, in activities, in the dormitories of residential schools, in a quiet stroll with a teacher. We believe that teaching and learning are not bound by clocks or classroom space.

3. For independent schools, therefore, student competence is not something to be tested for, after the course, after it may be too late to do something about it; teaching and learning continue with constant checks, until every child is competent.

4. Independent schools set high academic standards; we believe schools are basically for learning skills of the mind. Along with high standards go high expectations of every student. Basic skills are stressed not only for their own importance but as the foundation for complex reasoning.

5. Independent schools stress values and ethics – not for simple situations but for complex ones, not just with doctrinaire answers but with highly human, often agonizing, ones. We believe this takes a great deal of time and all the support of sympathetic adults, always available.

6. Independent schools stress social responsibility. We believe in multiracial, multicultural environments. We believe that learning involves differences, diversity, and pluralism. We believe that ambiguity and alternatives are needed for the context to build complex reasoning and problem-solving skills.

7. Above all, independent schools stress public responsibility. It takes many forms:

- Although we now seem to be the gainers by the migration of families from the public to the private sector of education, we view with alarm the negative reasons for their disaffection. We stand ready to work with public education wherever that makes sense and we can be helpful.
- Many independent schools actively promote school lectures by public officials, community service and work programs, and internships in public agencies.
- Most independent schools develop an ethos of service that often permeates all aspects of school life. For many, the public good is the highest good.

My Annual Report in 1988 comprised a 10-year review of my initial priorities for NAIS. One of these was to develop sound public policy for independent schools. One dimension of that was “to support increased cooperation and collaboration between independent and public schools

in the common project of strengthening education for all young Americans.” (A good example of that policy in practice would be the products of the Commission on Educational Issues.) Just to balance that with the core of our existence, the last (of six) plank in our public policy platform was “to work to maintain the independence of our schools as each decides, in keeping with NAIS standards of good practice, who will teach, how to teach, and what to teach, and to resist inappropriate forms of government intervention in these matters.”

In 1990, I reported on – among other things – the National Survey of Public Opinion of Independent Schools already mentioned. The positive perceptions were quite in line with what we value and what we practice. More negative perceptions – as though the respondents had just read my declaration above, “to resist government intervention” – were (1) the idea that independent school teachers are less qualified because they do not meet public school certification requirements, and (2) their support for the oversight functions of public agencies! This finding underscores why I felt it necessary continually to explain the independence of independent education.

Some of the other negative perceptions had nuggets of truth to them. For example, independent schools are prohibitively expensive and are “mostly white.” Or, our students are removed from the real world and lose connections with their neighborhoods. The availability of financial aid is largely unknown. Even as I write this 17 years after the national survey, I suspect we shall always have to be sensitive to these areas and work hard to do something about them.

In the final report of my presidency, instead of reviewing the past, I looked ahead and laid out seven challenges for independent schools in the future. Then, as though feeling my attempts over the years to define independent education, were excessively admonitory, I

concluded with the question, “Why must independent schools be preserved?” And my answers then would still be the same as my answers now – 15 years later:

- Because we are a beacon for reform;
- Because our resources go to children and not to bureaucrats;
- Because we care to create ethical learning communities;
- Because we shelter dissent and differentness in the face of powerful public orthodoxy;
- And, most important – at a time when our country seems to suffer from a moral vacuum – because we still believe in moral leadership.

This last point was proposed and strongly endorsed by school heads at the first Exeter summer seminar in 1962. It has been a central guiding principle for independent schools for generations. It was my last utterance as NAIS president; it was the most important farewell I could say. It is the future of independent education.