

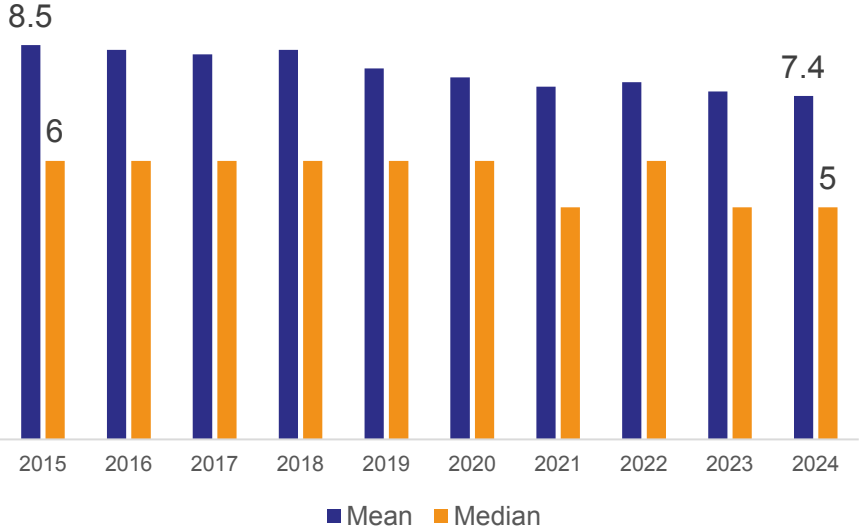
The State of Governance in Independent School

ISCA Webinar, May 2025

A fragile head-board relationship can impact head turnover.



Head Tenure-NAIS



Head Turnover-NAIS

	2023	2024	2025
% schools with turnover	11.2%	11.4%	10.6%
% turnover that was unexpected*	17.9%	21.1%	23.6%

*within 3 years or less.

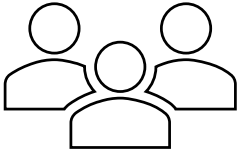
AGENDA

- ❖ Board Recruitment Strategies
- ❖ Board Culture
- ❖ Board Performance
- ❖ Board Support for the Head's Work

Board Recruitment Strategies

In 2023, the number of board members, including ex officio and emeritus members, was 20.

Board Composition- NAIS Schools



TOTAL

2006	2012	2018	2023
22	21	19	20

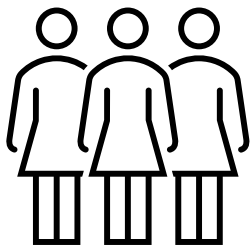
	2023 avg	2023 %
Total Voting Members	17.7	--
Current Parents	8.5	48.1%
Past Parents	5.1	29.0%
Alumni/ae	4.2	23.4%
External Community Representatives	1.5	8.5%
Clergy or Church Representatives	0.5	2.7%
Grandparents	0.4	2.2%
Other	0.3	1.6%

Most important factors when recruiting

- Passion for the school’s mission
- Desired skills
- Community connections

In 2024-2025, half of trustees were women; 22% were trustees of color.

% Female Trustees



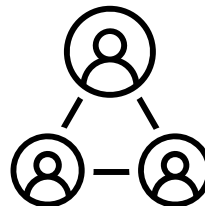
2014-2015

43%

2024-2025

50%

% Trustees of Color



2014-2015

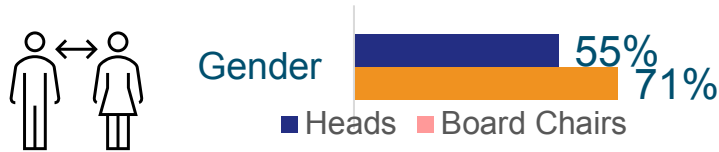
12%

2024-2025

22%

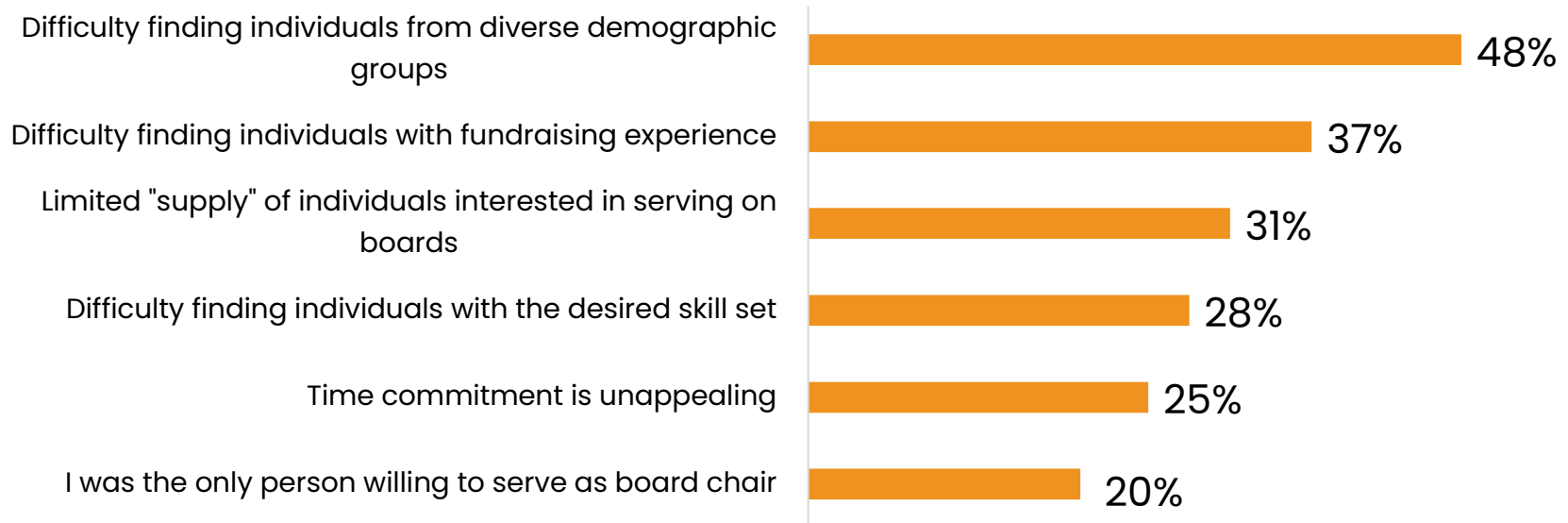
Heads and chairs were more satisfied with the gender and age diversity of their members.

How satisfied are you with the current diversity of your board?
(Very/Extremely Satisfied)



Demographic diversity was the top challenge when recruiting board members.

What challenges, if any, are you facing in finding people to serve on your board? Select all that apply.



Consider the following potential challenges regarding board composition and structure.

- ❑ **Board chairs and heads disagree on whether their boards have enough diversity.** If a school is facing issues and challenges due to a lack of board diversity, heads need to help the board understand these issues rather than continuing to make the case for diversity without the board fully understanding what is at stake.
- ❑ **Board chairs report difficulties findings board members with fundraising experience or desired skills. Schools may need to change their board recruitment practices.** For some boards, this means changing the way they identify potential candidates by moving beyond the personal networks of existing board members.

Consider the following opportunities regarding board composition and structure.

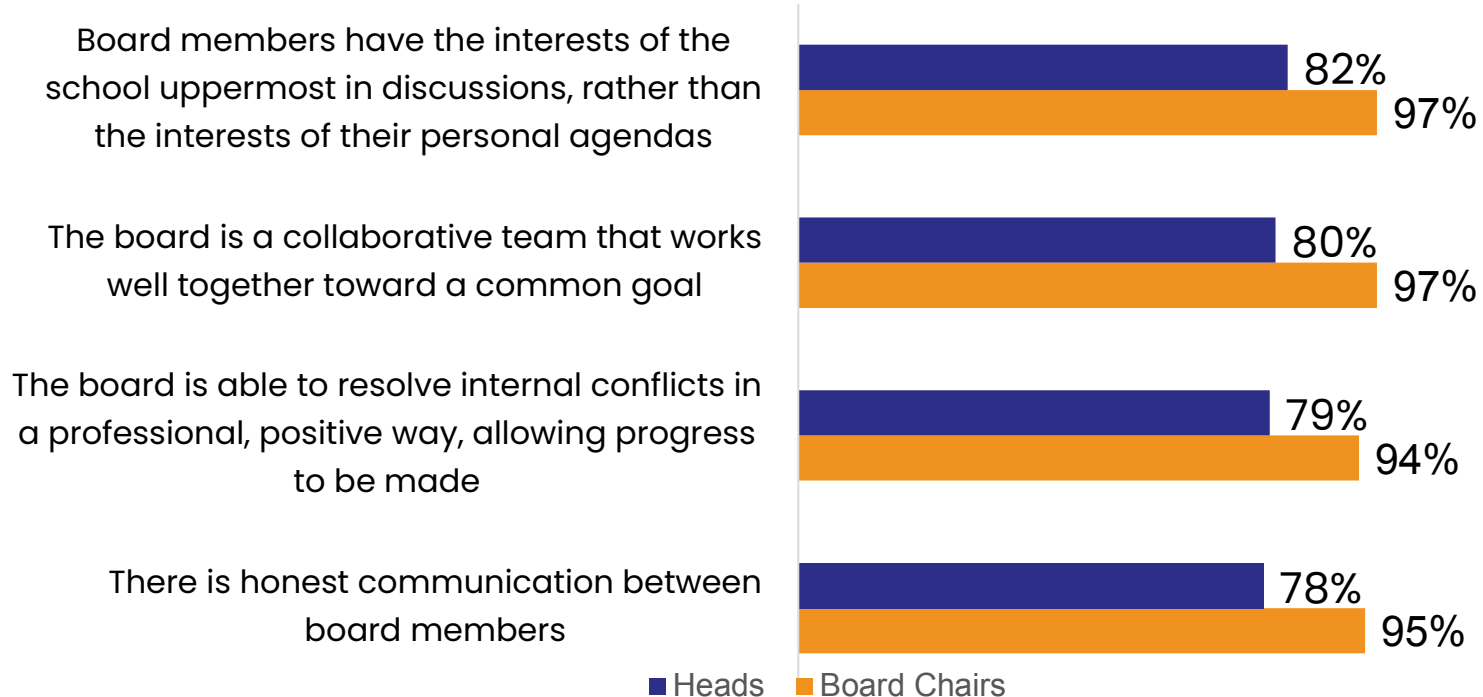


- ❑ **Independent school boards are becoming more diverse.** This matters because a board's composition impacts how it leads. A lack of diversity can create blind spots and result in strategies and plans that ineffectively address societal challenges.
- ❑ **The recruitment process can be improved. Understanding trustees' expectations is crucial for recruitment, retention, and the board's overall success.** Reviewing NAIS's research on these motivations can help governance committees and boards make informed decisions about invitations and match working styles to task forces or special projects.

Board Culture

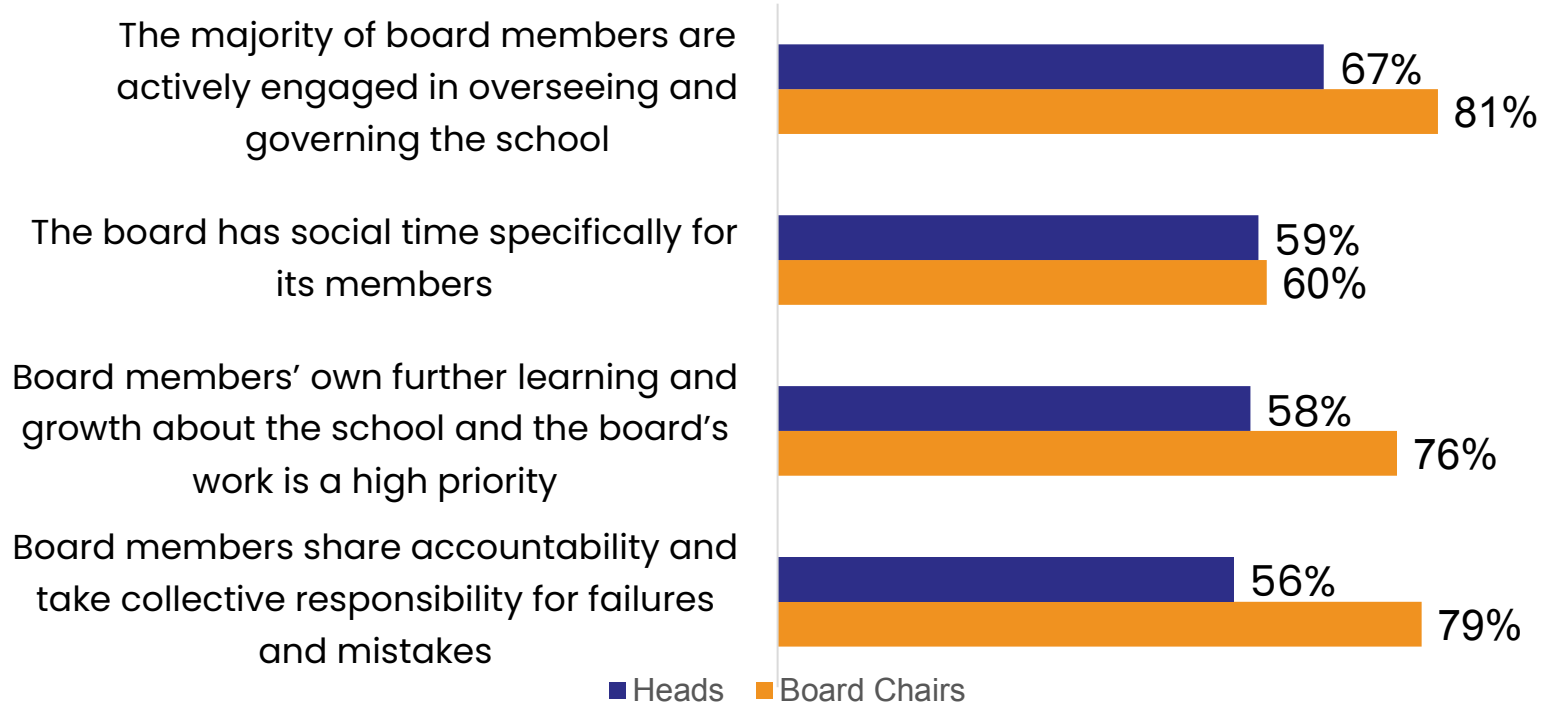
Over 80% of heads and chairs agree board members prioritize school interests.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding the way your board works? (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



Fewer heads said that board members prioritize accountability and their growth.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements regarding the way your board works? (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



Consider the following potential challenges regarding board culture.

- ❑ **Although more heads and agree that their boards prioritize school interests and solve conflicts in a positive way, there are important gaps in teamwork**—such as collaboration, honest communication, learning about the board work, and accountability. This can undermine board unity, especially when a unified voice is needed.
- ❑ **About 6 in 10 heads and board chairs report that their boards have social time, which is crucial for building trust and teamwork.** Since board members meet infrequently, intentional relationship-building is essential for effective collaboration. Social time not only improves board performance but also increases members' enjoyment and satisfaction.

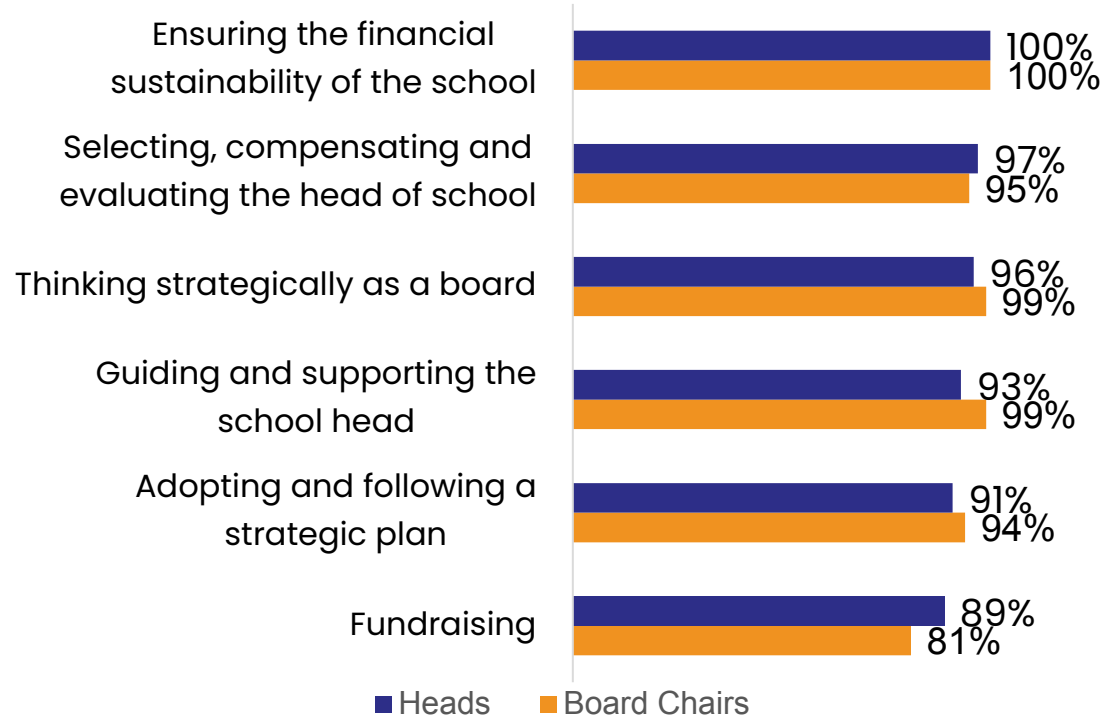
Consider the following opportunities regarding board culture.

- ❑ **Since board culture influences how members interact with each other and the head, as well as how they approach their work, it is essential for heads and board chairs to work together to cultivate a strong, positive culture.** Without it, boards may face challenges in decision-making, deliberation, and retaining strong members. A healthy culture promotes collegiality, productivity, and mission alignment, providing a competitive edge, while poor culture breeds conflict and disruption.
- ❑ **The leadership of the board chair is crucial to fostering a strong board culture.** Data shows that a chair who effectively resolves conflict, builds trust, sets clear expectations, and encourages strategic discussions significantly enhances the board's ability to work as a collaborative team. Since a strong board culture is key to organizational success, boards should prioritize consensus-building and conflict resolution skills when selecting a chair or help their chairs to develop these skills.

Board Performance

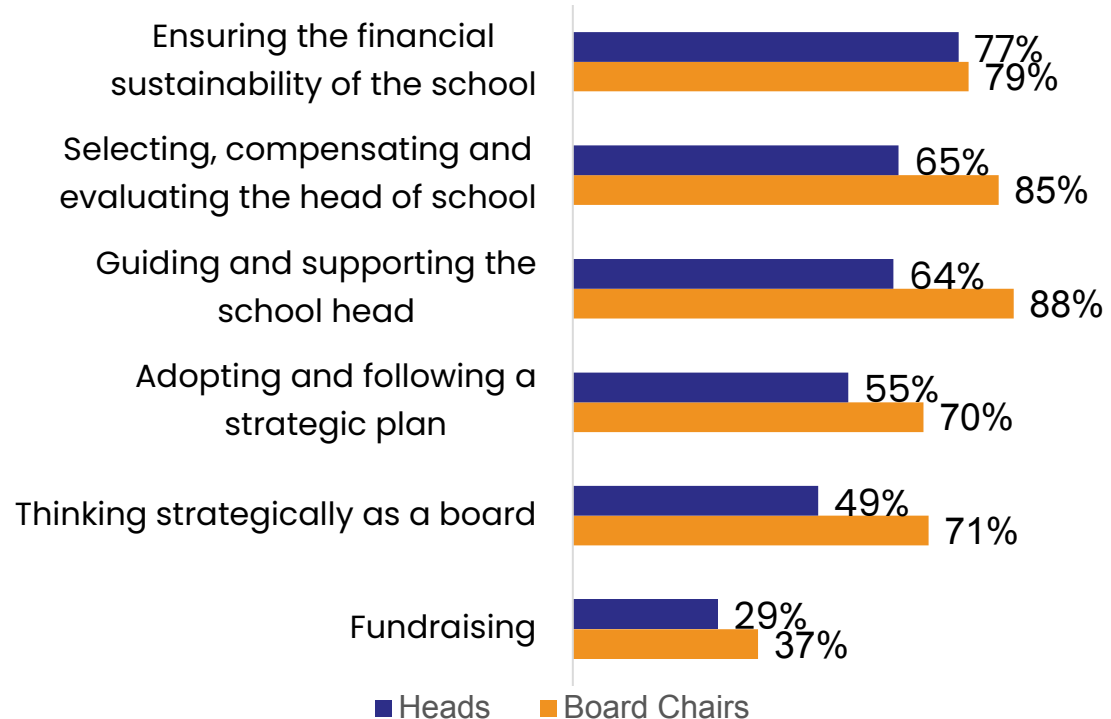
Fewer board chairs recognize fundraising as a critical responsibility for the board.

School boards serve a variety of roles. How important are each of the following roles? (Very/Extremely Important)



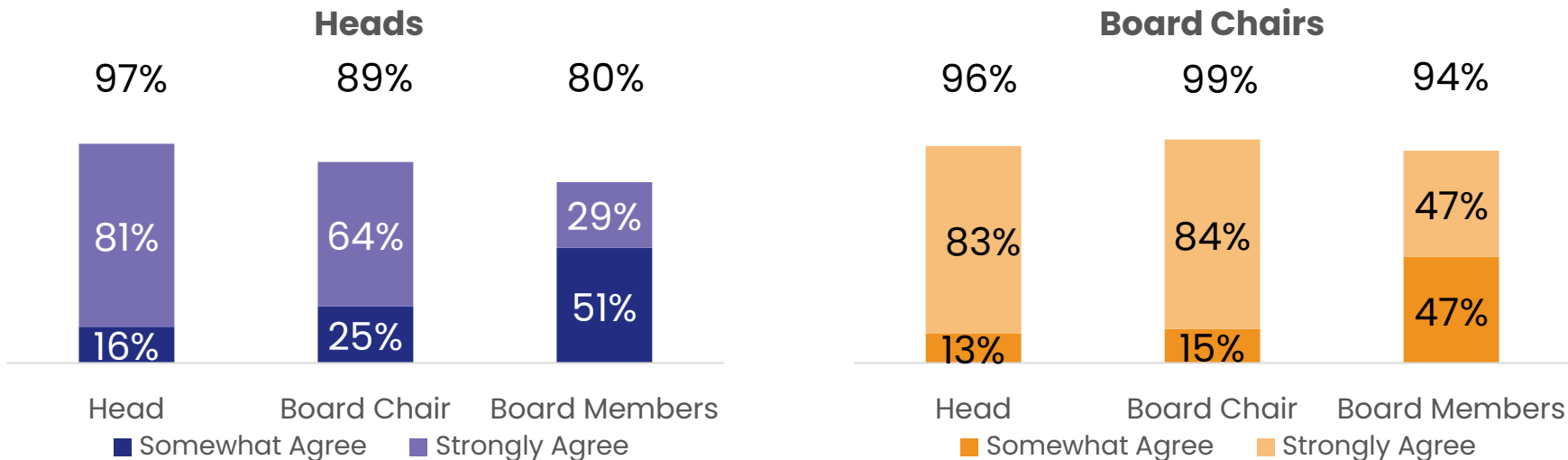
More chairs than heads believe their boards perform well in their responsibilities.

Based on the same list of roles seen before, how well you believe your board has performed in each area? (Very/Extremely Well)



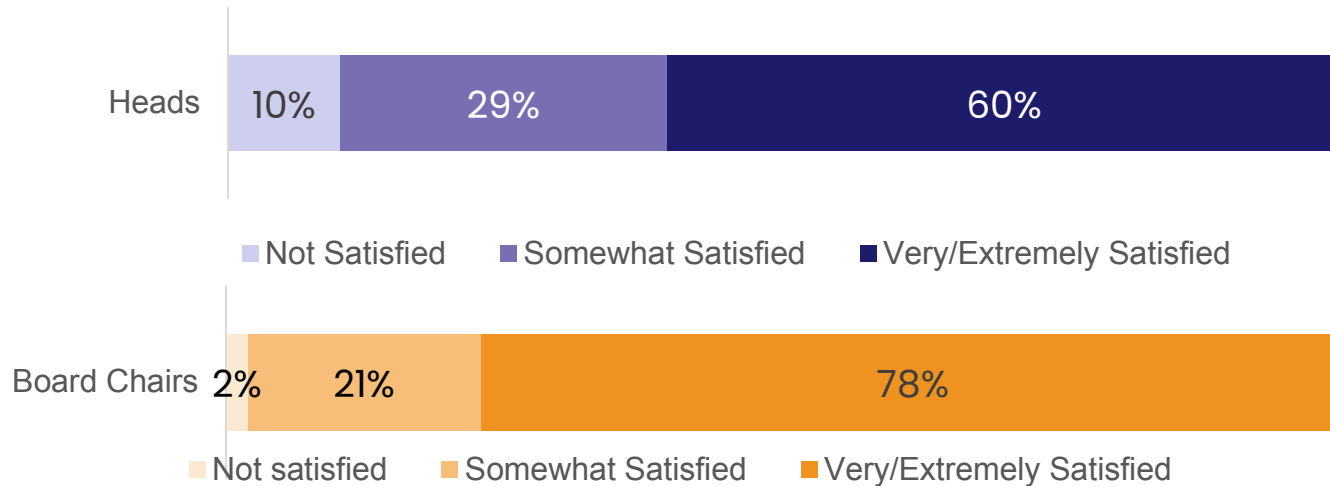
Few heads and chairs strongly agree that board members work within the boundaries of their roles.

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following individuals/groups understand and work appropriately within the boundaries of their respective roles? (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



A larger percentage of board chairs were satisfied with their overall board's performance.

Satisfaction with Board's Overall Performance



Consider the following potential challenges regarding board performance.

- ❑ **Although over 90% of heads prioritize strategic thinking and adherence to a strategic plan as key board responsibilities**, only 49% and 55%, respectively, believe their boards are performing well in these areas. This suggests that boards may not be fully engaged in strategic work. With ongoing shifts in the K-12 landscape, it is critical for boards to focus on strategy, regularly assessing what is working, what isn't, and how internal and external factors are evolving.
- ❑ While large majorities of heads and boards agree that **evaluating, compensating, and supporting heads is important**, board chairs are far more likely than heads to believe the board is performing well in these areas.
- ❑ **A large percentage of heads and chairs view fundraising as a key board responsibility, yet few are satisfied with the board's performance in this area.** Fundraising is vital to supporting the mission, operations, and long-term sustainability of K-12 independent schools.

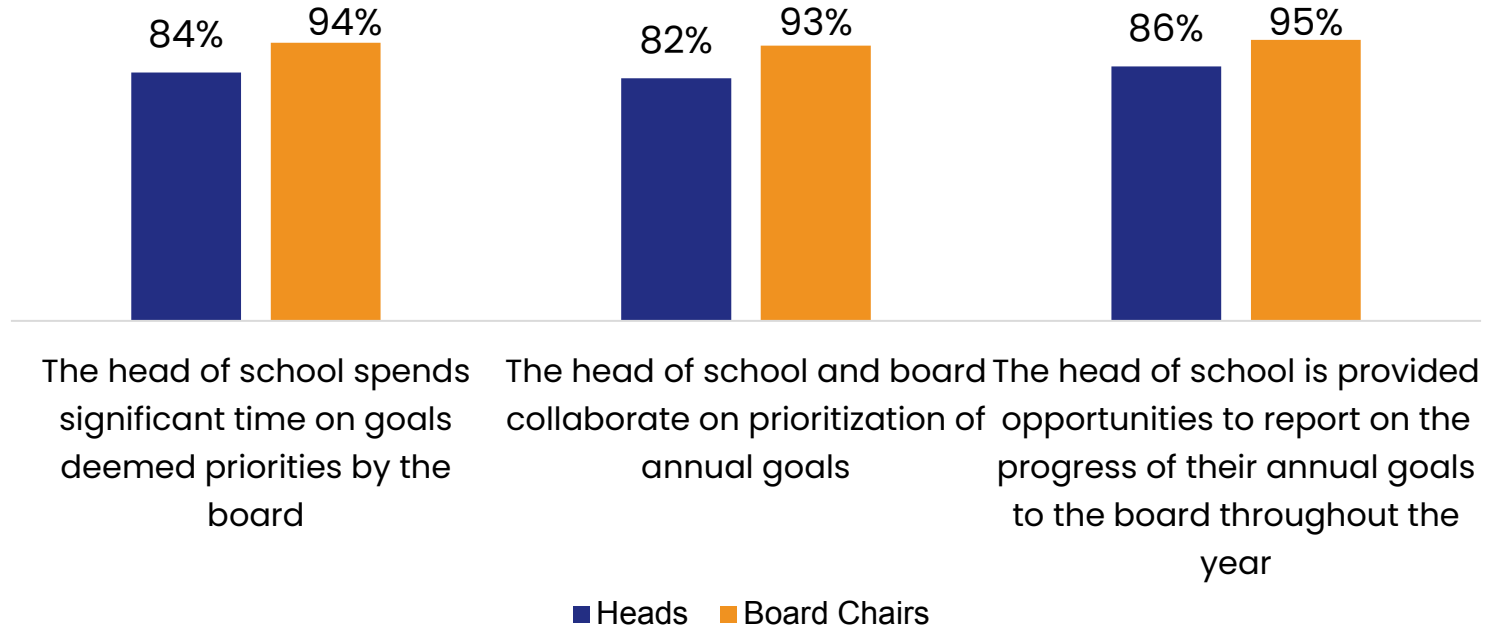
Consider the following opportunities regarding board culture.

- ❑ **Given that close to a quarter of heads and board chairs strongly agree that board members understand and work within their role boundaries, focusing on ongoing trustee training is key.** Board training should be continuous, building on a practical, formal orientation program and informed by regular self-assessment. Regular and collective learning opportunities will enhance board members' understanding of their school, its operating environment, and their roles and responsibilities, ultimately increasing their effectiveness.
- ❑ **Since satisfaction with the board's overall performance is higher among heads than board chairs, understanding the source of this gap is crucial.** This underscores the need for regular self-evaluation. Gaining a clearer understanding of strengths and areas for improvement could enhance overall satisfaction with board performance.

Board Support for the Head's Work

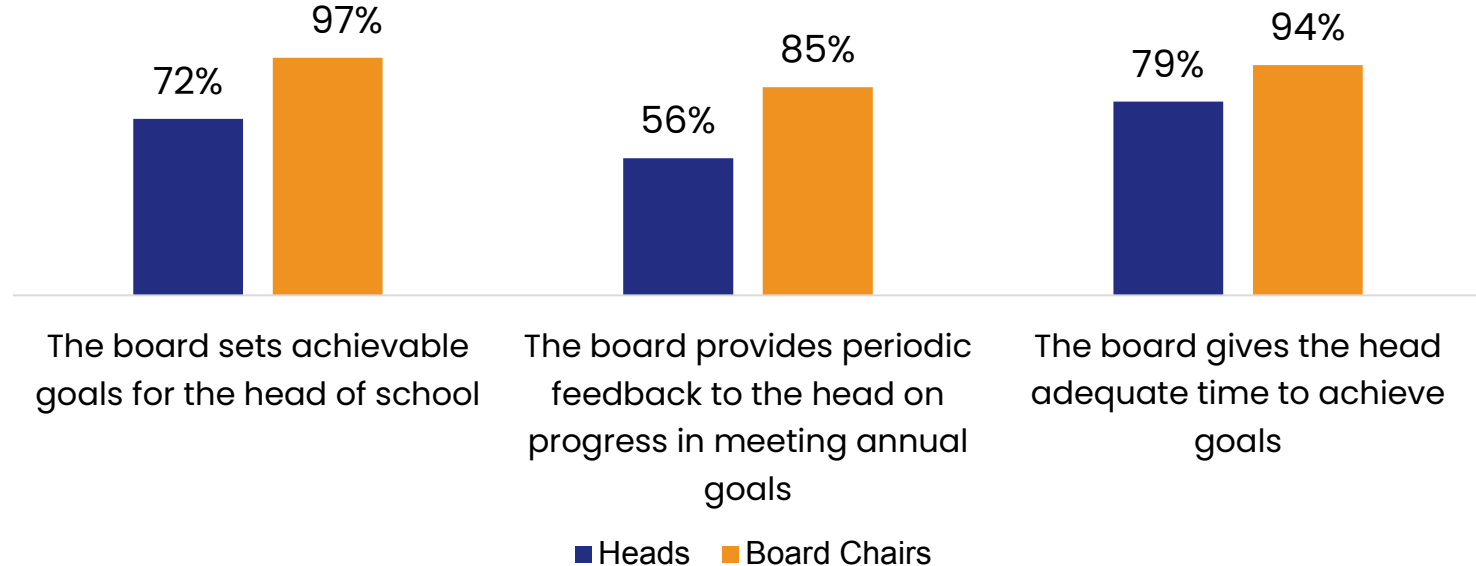
Heads and chairs agreed that heads focus on goals, prioritize them, and report their progress.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the head of school's goals? (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



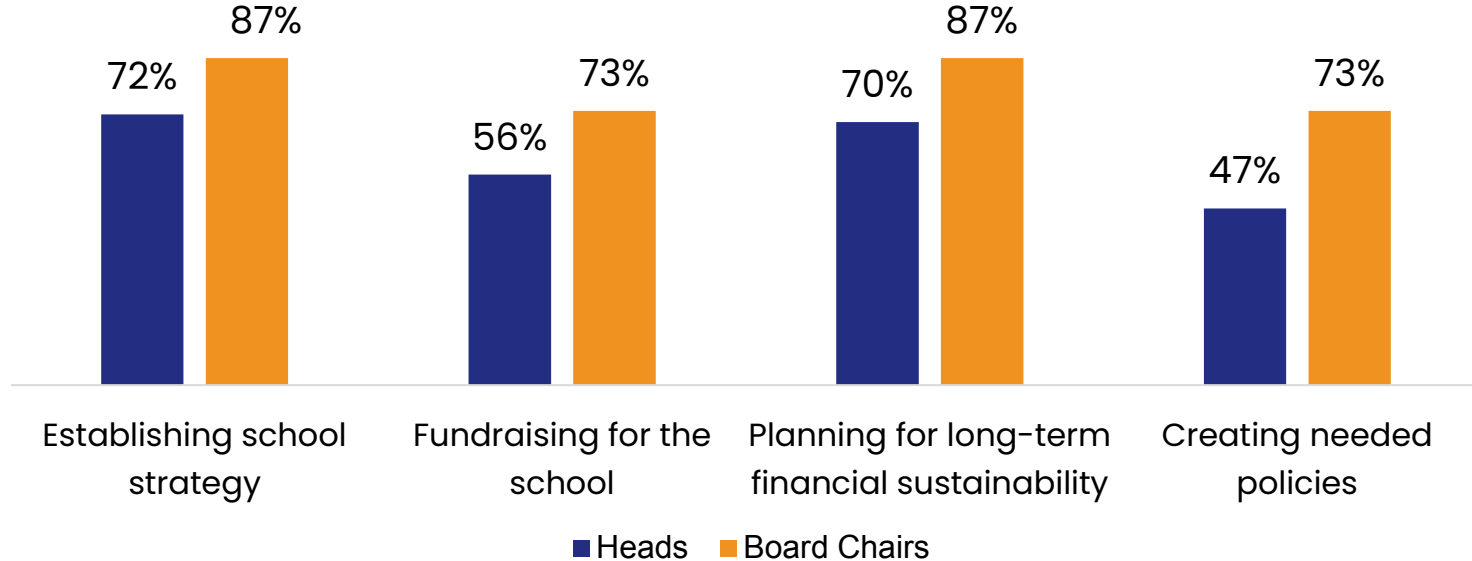
Fewer heads agree that their boards play an appropriate role in setting the head's goals.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the board's role in setting the head of school's goals? (Somewhat/Strongly Agree)



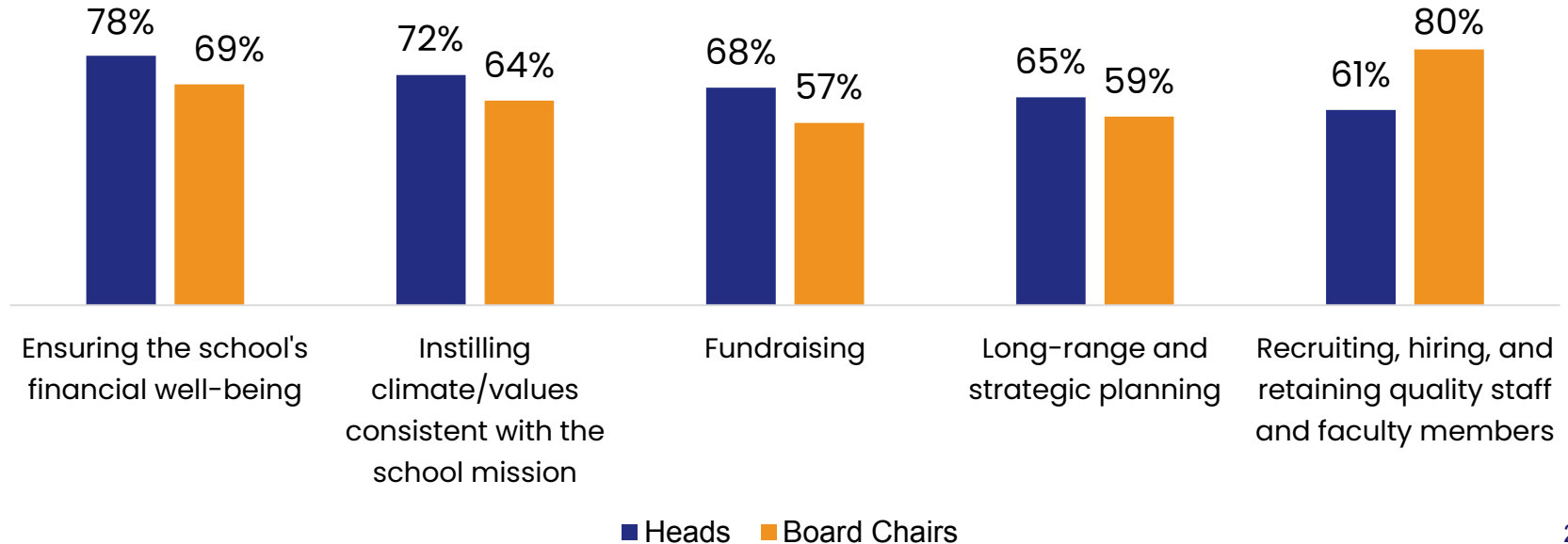
Most heads felt supported in establishing school strategy and planning for financial sustainability.

**To what extent do you agree or disagree that the head of school receives adequate support from the board around the following key partnership goals?
(Somewhat/Strongly Agree)**



Heads and chairs agreed on most head top responsibilities but ranked them differently.

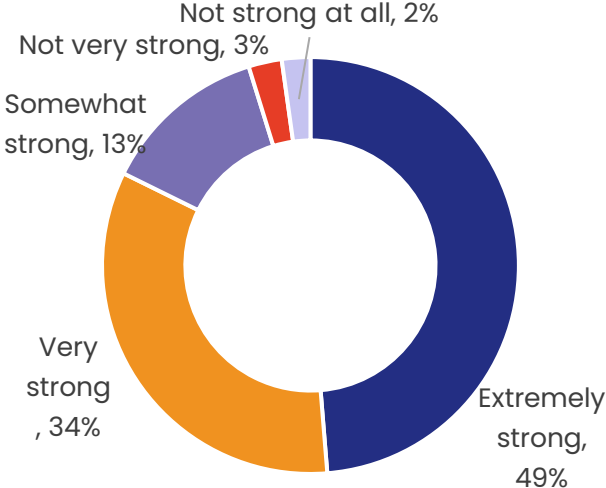
[Heads of school are] called on to perform many tasks. From your point of view, please choose the top five most important responsibilities [they have].



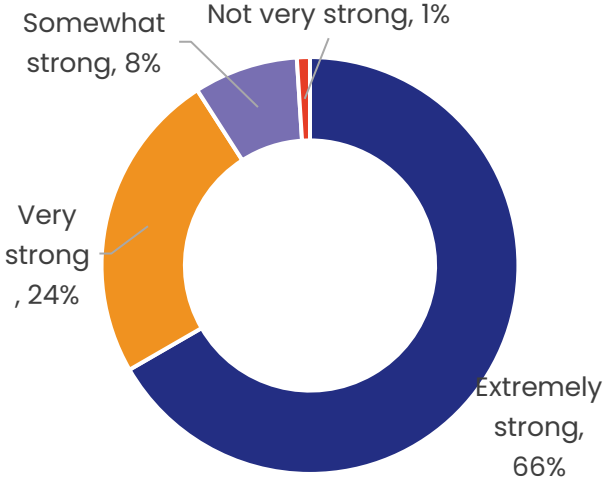
Board chairs more often rated their relationship with heads as “very/extremely” strong.



Relationship with Board Chair (Heads' Responses)



Relationship with Head (Board Chair's Responses)



Consider the following potential challenges regarding board support for head's work.

- ❑ **Significant gaps were noted in heads' views on whether the board sets achievable goals and allows adequate time to meet them. Fewer heads and chairs agree that the board provides sufficient feedback on progress toward these goals.** Clarifying performance goals is crucial for both heads and boards. Since the board annually evaluates the head's performance, it is important for both parties to have a mutual understanding of the expected accomplishments.
- ❑ **About half of heads felt supported by their board on fundraising and policy development. The board should not only focus on fundraising but also on creating essential policies.** This work is vital because policies provide a structured framework for decision-making, ensuring consistency and clarity in school operations. They also play a crucial role in mitigating risks by ensuring regulatory compliance, while holding stakeholders accountable to the school's objectives.

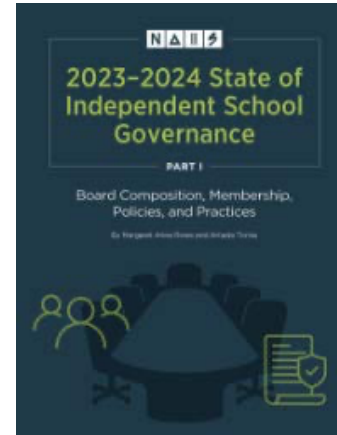
Consider the following opportunities regarding board support for head's work.

- ❑ **Improve the process of setting goals for heads.** Setting goals helps define the head's priorities for the year, aligns their efforts with the strategic plan, and provides a framework for evaluating performance. Goals should follow the SMART criteria: they must be Specific, Measurable, Agreed-upon, Realistic, and Time-based.
- ❑ **Around 50% of heads and 66% of board chairs described their relationship as extremely strong. This indicates potential for improvement.** Board chairs, who often act as the primary liaison between the board and the head, play a crucial role in shaping this dynamic. Effective chairs can be strategic partners and key resources, setting the tone for how the board works with the head, and fostering a trusting relationship based on mutual respect.

Related Resources from NAIS

Email membership@nais.org for this full slide deck and more related resources, including:

- 2023–2024 State of Independent School Governance, Part 1: Board Composition, Membership, Policies, and Practices
- 2023–2024 State of Independent School Governance, Part 2: Head–Board Relationship
- What are Trustees Seeking When They Join Independent School Boards?



Thank You!



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