

What Your Board Should See Each Year

A short guide for Christian school leaders

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Why this guide exists

Most boards receive a great deal of information and very little evidence. There are enrollment figures, a financial report, an update from the head of school, and a general sense that things are going reasonably well. Everyone leaves the meeting informed and no one leaves it wiser.

That is not the board's fault, and it is usually not the head's fault either. It is a problem of what gets reported. Schools tend to report the numbers that are easiest to produce, and those are almost always the ones that describe what already happened. Enrollment. Attendance. Test results. Budget variance. All true, all important, and all history.

A board cannot steward history. A board can only steward what is still in front of it.

This guide describes the evidence that helps a board do that work: what to look at, what each piece of it actually tells you, and the misreading most likely to cause harm. It is short on purpose. If your board reviewed only what is described here, once a year, with real conversation attached, it would be doing better than most.

The guide at a glance

Four areas of evidence, and the question each one answers for your board.

Area	The board question it answers
1. Health of the school community	Are the conditions in which our mission is delivered getting better or worse?
2. Confidence of the families we serve	Are the families who know us best still willing to stake their reputation on us?
3. Quality of what happens in classrooms	Do we actually know what is happening in our classrooms, or do we only believe we do?
4. Stewardship of leadership itself	Are we supporting and developing the leader we have, or only evaluating them?

The distinction that changes everything

There are two kinds of numbers in a school, and confusing them is the single most common mistake in board reporting.

	Lagging numbers	Leading numbers
They report	An outcome that has already settled	A condition being lived right now
Example	Retention rate — who re-enrolled	Whether parents feel like partners, students feel they belong, employees would recommend the school
Timing	Arrive in the spring, already decided	Move first, in the fall
What a board can do	Respond after the fact	Act while acting still matters

The practical rule. For every outcome number your board reviews, ask what leading evidence would have warned you a year earlier. If there is no answer, that is the gap to close.

1. The health of the school community

Every school has a climate, and every group inside it experiences that climate differently. A board that hears from one group has an opinion. A board that hears from all of them has evidence.

WHAT TO REVIEW

- **Results from the major groups.** Students, parents, and employees at minimum — and for a Christian school, evidence about spiritual formation and about student relations and safety as well.
- **Where those results agree, and where they diverge.** Agreement across groups is strong evidence. Divergence is the more interesting finding, because it usually means something is true for one group but not for another.
- **The direction of travel.** How this year compares with prior years.

WHAT IT TELLS YOU

It reveals whether the conditions for learning are strengthening or weakening, and for whom. Children learn best in environments marked by safety, belonging, encouragement, and love. Climate evidence tells you whether those conditions actually exist in the lived experience of the people in your building.

WHAT IT IS NOT

It is not a grade, and not a target to chase. A board that treats it as a score to improve will get a school that manages the score rather than the condition. A composite climate number is directional — it tells you whether to look closer and where. The individual results are where the actual information lives.

THE MOST COMMON MISREADING

A healthy overall number can hide a weak area entirely. If four groups are flourishing and one is struggling, the average still looks respectable. Always read the parts, not just the whole.

This answers: *Are the conditions in which our mission is delivered getting better or worse?*

2. The confidence of the families we serve

Enrollment is the outcome of a thousand family conversations you never hear. But you can hear the conditions underneath them, long before they show up on a re-enrollment form.

WHAT TO REVIEW

- **Willingness to recommend, asked of parents, students, and employees.** The single most revealing question in most surveys. Satisfaction is cheap — people remain satisfied in places they would never recommend. Recommending costs something, because the person is putting their own name behind you to someone they care about.
- **A read on enrollment risk.** Drawn from what actually drives it: whether parents believe the school is preparing their child for what comes next, whether their child enjoys school, whether the family feels they belong, and whether the partnership between home and school feels real.
- **Retention rate itself.** The outcome those conditions eventually produce.

WHAT IT TELLS YOU

It points to where family confidence is strong and where it is thinning—early enough to do something about it. It also tells you something a single number cannot: if parents would recommend the school but employees would not, you do not yet have an enrollment problem. You have a culture problem that has not reached families. Most of the time, it will.

WHAT IT IS NOT

It is not a prediction about any particular family, and it should never be used that way. It is a school-level signal about conditions. It is also not a competitive benchmark; these measures are built for tracking your own school across years, not for comparing yourself with the school across town.

THE MOST COMMON MISREADING

Assuming a lower signal means families are leaving. It does not. It means there are conditions worth investigating. Many things determine an actual enrollment decision, and most of them are outside a survey.

This answers: *Are the families who know us best still willing to stake their reputation on us?*

3. The quality of what happens in classrooms

Everything else in a school exists to support what happens in classrooms. If improvement does not eventually reach the classroom, it has not really happened.

WHAT TO REVIEW

- **The shape of teacher practice across the school.** Whether the faculty as a whole is growing, whether coaching is happening, whether the school has real evidence about teaching or only impressions.
- **Not individual teacher results.** That is the head of school's work, and a board that reaches into it damages both trust and its own governance role.

WHAT IT TELLS YOU

Teaching is far too complex to be judged fairly by one or two observations or one number. Sound evidence stacks several different kinds of information: what an instructional leader observed in the room, what students consistently experience in that room, the quality of what was planned, the teacher's contribution to the wider life of the school, the teacher's own reflection, and where appropriate, evidence of how much students actually grew academically.

WHAT IT IS NOT

Simple. Teacher evaluation is a complex process involving multiple assessment inputs. Averaging them as though all measures are of equal value produces a number that looks more precise than the evidence warrants. They should be combined deliberately, weighted according to how much each can actually be trusted, and held loosely until enough sources have contributed.

THE MOST COMMON MISREADING

Treating a single composite figure as a verdict about a teacher. It is a starting point for a conversation, not a conclusion. The purpose of gathering evidence about teaching is not to rate teachers; it is to help them grow.

This answers: *Do we actually know what is happening in our classrooms, or do we only believe we do?*

4. The stewardship of leadership itself

Leadership deserves the same care the school extends to teaching: multiple perspectives, honestly gathered, held with grace.

WHAT TO REVIEW

- **How the head of school's leadership is experienced.** The board, employees, and parents each observe something real and partial.
- **For principals and directors, the view from those they lead.** The people who report to them see something none of the others do.

WHAT IT TELLS YOU

Where the perspectives align and where they diverge. Divergence is the useful finding again: a leader experienced one way by the board and another way by staff is showing you something worth understanding before it becomes a crisis.

WHAT IT IS NOT

It should not be collapsed into a single leadership score. Leadership sources are fewer and more alike than the evidence available about teaching, and averaging them would look far more exact than it is. Separate views, read together, are more honest than one number.

THE MOST COMMON MISREADING

Reading a leadership result as a verdict on the person rather than as information about how their leadership is landing with each group.

This answers: *Are we supporting and developing the leader we have, or only evaluating them?*

How to read any number your board is shown

Four habits will protect your board from most of the mistakes available to it.

- **Ask how many people answered.** A result from too few respondents is not a small result; it is a result you cannot interpret at all. Good reporting hides numbers rather than showing unreliable ones, and it tells you when it has done so. Be more suspicious of a system that always has an answer than of one that sometimes says there is not enough evidence yet.
- **Never accept an average without its shape.** A question can average 3.9 out of 5 and still be the most serious problem in the school, if a meaningful minority strongly disagreed. In a school of four hundred, twelve percent is roughly fifty children having an experience the average conceals. Averages summarize. Distributions tell you who is struggling.
- **Watch direction before level.** A single year's number tells you where you are. Three years tells you where you are going, and where you are going is the thing a board can influence.
- **Ask what happened last time.** Evidence that produces no decision produces nothing at all. The most valuable question at any board meeting reviewing data is what the school did about last year's findings, and whether it worked.

A simple annual rhythm

Season	The work	What it looks like
Fall	Gather	Run the climate and perception evidence early enough that results can still shape the year. Review participation rates before results — thin participation is itself a finding.
Winter	Read and decide	Review with the leadership team first, then the board. Choose one or two priorities. Not eight. A board that endorses eight priorities has endorsed none.
Spring	Watch outcomes arrive	Retention and enrollment land here, read against what the leading evidence told you in the fall. This is where a board learns whether it is reading its own school well.
Summer	Return to the plan	What changed, what did not, and what will be asked again next year.

For the Board, the rhythm matters more than mass. Evidences reviewed faithfully every year will serve your school far better than a comprehensive study conducted once and filed. The head of school needs both breadth and depth; the Board needs continuity.

A closing word

Accreditation taught many of us how to describe a school thoroughly. It taught us far less about how to improve one. Schools invest hundreds of hours producing a report, receive a list of strengths and recommendations, and then return to normal life. Five years later the process begins again.

The purpose of evidence is not to describe reality. The purpose of evidence is to help faithful leaders decide what to do next.

Most systems are built around the question “How are we doing?” That question produces report cards. A better question is “Knowing what we now know, how can we become better?” That question produces growth.

Your board does not need more data. It needs a small amount of trustworthy evidence, reviewed in a rhythm it can sustain, discussed honestly, and connected to decisions someone is accountable for. That is stewardship. Everything in this guide is in service of it.

About the author

Dr. Brian Hazeltine has served Christian schools for many years as an educator, head of school, accreditation team member, and consultant. He designed the CSM Data System, an integrated set of instruments covering school climate, teacher practice, and school leadership, distributed by Christian School Management.

If you would like to talk through what your own board should be reviewing, or see how these measures work in practice, write to brianh@christianschoolmanagement.org. Licensing of the CSM Data System is handled by Christian School Management. Learn more at hazeltineconsulting.com and christianschoolmanagement.org.