

Critical Relationships During Times of Crisis

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John Littleford recently shared his thoughts with SAIS school leaders on the critical relationships that exist within a school community and how those might be strengthened during this time of crisis. Here's a quick look at 10 takeaways from [John's presentation](#) on how we should be building relationships and making plans to move forward.

1. Parents are looking for security. Give them calm and consistent information, avoiding overload. Show certainty and be understanding.
2. The head should develop relationships with community government and local medical service providers. There may be a board member, parent, or alum that can bridge these relationships for the school.
3. Identify the influencers among your staff. Clarify contract timing and the possibility of layoffs. Have a plan, be truthful, advocate for your teachers with the board, and strengthen the faculty's bond with the school.
4. Build political capital now to support the tough decisions you will have to make later.
5. Set boundaries and a clear chain of command with your administrative team. Insist on confidentiality. Use the administrators to help keep parents calm and reach out to new families.
6. Schools should be thinking about new financial, academic, and scheduling models. School may not look the same when we return. We need to be ready to open and close again quickly with a solid plan in place.
7. Develop the relationship between the board and the administrative team. Is there a current succession plan in place? Who would take over for the head in the event of sudden death or illness?
8. Heads need stability in their board. The security provided by institutional memory is very important. Don't lose key people. If you have to bring on new board members, do so now. Let them be a part of decisions while they are being made. Don't expect them to support decisions they had no part in making.
9. Working with the business office and / or chair of the finance committee, develop three different financial options or scenarios for a given situation. Always present options to the board, don't go in without a plan.
10. The board's emotional and financial support of the head is critical. Heads are feeling the stress of the current situation in their personal and professional lives. Increase term life insurance, add executive health coverage, and long-term disability to the head's benefit package. Consider a sabbatical or some time away once things are back to normal.

Finally, crisis equals opportunity. Use this time to take a critical look at your overall program, improve the skill set of your faculty, and develop the relationships that will carry you through.