

AISGW RECOMMENDATIONS ON “SCHOOL RANKING”

1. AISGW encourages prudent involvement with the media by its member schools. Especially in the Greater Washington area, there is both opportunity and need for articulate public comment regarding the role, contributions, strengths, and core values of independent schools. Whether talking about their particular school or commenting more broadly on educational issues and community concerns, representatives of the independent school community can contribute greatly to the goal of furthering thoughtful and straightforward public discourse.
2. AISGW requests that member schools not comment on matters that could result in “ranking,” i.e., hierarchical comparisons which are misleading and irrelevant to mission-oriented schools and/or detrimental to students and their families who are seeking a “good match” placement. AISGW reminds member schools that inappropriate ranking causes detrimental effects for mission-oriented schools, and that significant corrosion often results for all when even only a small number of schools participate in such practices.
3. AISGW recommends that each head of school ensures that the school’s beliefs and practices in regard to public inquiry be thoughtfully considered and periodically reviewed with the staff and Board.
4. So that no school employee unwittingly responds inappropriately to media questions, the entire school community should be aware of how media requests are to be handled. AISGW recommends that one person be authorized to speak on behalf of the school and be adequately trained and prepared to do so.
5. Even if the information that could lead to inappropriate ranking is available publicly (e.g., test scores, next school placement on the website), or selectively (e.g., school profile for next-school placement purposes), schools are not required or encouraged to provide this information directly to an inquiring reporter.
6. Schools should consider carefully whether they will participate in comparative “listings” even where there is no qualitative overlay (i.e., characterization of “good/better/best”).
7. AISGW recommends that schools not participate in any attempt to rate schools by “reputation” and refuse to give personal opinion about the perceived quality of other schools, their programs, their students or their personnel.
8. AISGW recommends that schools’ promotional materials and websites not use the results of media coverage that inappropriately ranks schools, their programs, or their students.

Adopted by AISGW Board of Trustees on May 17, 2005

NAIS STATEMENT ON “RANKING”

With this, as with all questions related to elementary and secondary education, we must keep our focus on the children’s best interests. The National Association of Independent Schools is and always has been opposed to the ranking of schools. The “best” school - public, parochial, or independent - is the one that uniquely meets the needs of each particular child.

In the independent school sector, each institution, in its mission statement, defines its own objectives: the kind of program and campus culture the school provides, and often, the qualities that

will help a student to succeed there. These schools were not created from one mold. They have different missions, offer different grade ranges, curricular emphases, pedagogical approaches, and extracurricular programs. Some schools are highly competitive by design, others intentionally create a nurturing atmosphere in which certain students will thrive; some focus on the arts, some on mathematics and science, others on outdoor education. Different schools offer programs for different types of students - bright students with learning differences, the gifted, students of average ability, children who face particular challenges.

Independent schools are to be judged, through their rigorous accreditation processes, according to what they individually set out to accomplish. Ranking such wonderfully different schools against one another misrepresents the institutions, misleads consumer-minded parents about the factors that should be considered in the complex process of choosing a school, but most importantly, can hurt children. Ranking elementary and secondary schools is a *de facto* labeling of vulnerable children and adolescents and is inherently wrong.

Ranking of schools encourages a destructive competitiveness, leading institutions away from offering rich alternatives and toward a stultifying sameness. It is a disservice to the schools, concerned parents, and children, and therefore, to our society.

Adopted by AISGW Board of Trustees, 2004