

# NAIS STATEMENT: On Ranking Schools

NAIS Board of Directors

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.

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