



INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS SERVICES

15 Roszel Road | PO Box 5910
Princeton, New Jersey 08543-5910 USA

tel: 609.452.0990
fax: 609.452.2690

www.iss.edu

Twelve Suggestions for a Successful Search

How to effectively and efficiently apply for a director vacancy is a question many administrators face when they choose to look for another position. The following paragraphs contain twelve suggestions that administrator candidates can consider as they review the pros and cons of searching for a new position.

1.) *Apply only for positions you are willing to accept.* This is certainly not a profound statement, but some candidates seem to apply for virtually every position that is listed. We suggest that candidates only apply for positions in which they are truly interested, and for which they meet the required qualifications and many of the preferred qualifications. Candidates who declare their interest in a vacancy should note the time line for each search, and be prepared to accept an invitation to visit the school as a finalist within that time frame. We suggest that candidates research each school thoroughly before submitting a letter of interest.

2.) *Explore all opportunities available.* Administrator candidates should pursue opportunities with several recruiting agencies. We suggest developing a complete dossier with ISS, and then pursuing vacancies handled by other placement agencies as well. ISS will forward your dossier to other recruiting agencies upon request.

3.) *Carefully prepare the letter of interest.* The letter of interest is the first page of a semifinalist candidate's dossier when it is sent to the Search Committee. The letter of interest is a very important document because it is the Search Committee's first impression of the candidate. The letter expresses the candidate's interest in the position, and also presents the candidate as an individual. Each letter of interest should be developed specifically for the vacancy the candidate is applying for. Although much of the letter of interest can also be used for other opportunities, each letter should emphasize the skills, talents, and experience that demonstrate the quality of the match between the candidate and the profile of the desired director. The letter should be addressed to Ralph Jahr at ISS, but the content should be directed to the Search Committee / Board of Directors. We suggest the letter be approximately two pages in length, although there is no minimum or maximum length requirement. The letter can be submitted as a fax, e-mail, or an e-mail attachment (document or PDF). We suggest sending the first copy to ISS electronically, and following up with a signed hard copy written on letterhead. Although in our opinion content is more important than form, why not have both! One final recommendation is to have someone other than the writer edit the letter of interest before it is sent. The letter of interest is too important to treat casually.

4.) *Prepare your own resumé and submit it as a supplementary document.* ISS prepares a resumé for each administrator candidate based on the general information the candidate submits

during the application process. The ISS resumé is generic, and purposefully does not vary from one candidate to another. We recommend that each administrator candidate prepare his/her own resumé and submit it to ISS to be included as a supplementary document in his/her dossier. Each candidate is unique, and one goal all candidates should have is for their dossier to distinguish them in several positive ways from others who are applying for the same position. A candidate's personal resumé is a personal document, and as such it can highlight aspects of the candidate's background and/or qualifications and experience that might not be noticed in the generic resumé prepared by ISS.

5.) *Provide current contact information for all referees.* It is the responsibility of the candidate to provide current contact information for all referees. We recommend providing both home and office telephone numbers as well as e-mail and regular mailing addresses for each referee. Listing a name of a referee without providing current contact information is viewed negatively by most Search Committees. We suggest candidates verify all telephone and e-mail contact information before they are submitted to ISS.

6.) *The dossier of the candidate's spouse should accompany the candidate's dossier.* We suggest candidates who have a spouse who is an educator include the dossier of their spouse along with their own. Most schools view tandem couples positively. It is important for the candidate to clearly mention (in the letter of interest) the preference of the spouse - if the spouse wishes to work, is available to work, or prefers not to work. The dossier of the spouse gives the Search Committee additional information about the candidate team that usually places the candidate at an advantage as the selection process continues.

7.) *Consider establishing a personal website.* A personal website can present additional information the candidate is unable to share in his/her dossier that is prepared by ISS. The website can contain photographs, recent accomplishments, and other personal and family information that Search Committees might find attractive. It can certainly be an expression of the candidate as a person, and is yet another way a candidate can distinguish him/herself in a positive way from others by demonstrating initiative and technological expertise.

8.) *Pursue the application process vigorously.* The sincerity and enthusiasm of the candidate are clearly communicated through the dossier and supplementary materials in the candidate's professional file. Degrees, certification, and previous experience speak for themselves, but the letter of interest, personal resumé, narrative essays, and other supplementary materials present the candidate as an individual. The thoroughness of the dossier, the amount of care used in its preparation, and the enthusiasm of the candidate can be powerful tools that can work to the candidate's advantage. It is up to the candidate to decide how to present his/her candidacy in the best possible light. Although it's true that the decision to hire is largely based on the success of the candidate's site visit and personal interview as a finalist – the candidate must first be selected by the Search Committee as a finalist. A well-prepared dossier will help the candidate reach the final stage of the director recruiting process.

9.) *Site Visit Acceptance.* Candidates should carefully research the position, the school, the city, and the country before they accept an invitation for a site visit. Semifinalist candidates who accept an invitation for a site visit and interview should be prepared to accept the position if it is

offered. Although the candidate might not know all details of the salary / benefit package before the site visit, candidates should be comfortable with the salary range and benefit package for the position. The Search Committee expects any candidate who accepts an invitation for a site visit to be prepared to accept the position if it is offered. Although it is reasonable for the candidate to ask for several days to think about his/her response if the position is offered, the Search Committee is not obligated to give the candidate any set amount of time. It would be reasonable for the Search Committee to expect a response from the candidate in one to three days after the conclusion of the site visit, although ISS recommends that a response time of up to seven days should be acceptable. The difficulty with a long delay between the time of the offer and the acceptance / rejection, is that other finalist candidates could take positions at other schools in the interim.

10.) *Informal Reference Checks.* We recommend that Search Committees and Board members conduct informal reference checks on semifinalist and finalist candidates. Informal reference checks are personal contacts with parents, teachers, board members, or administrators who are aware of the candidate's performance, but are not listed as a referee on the candidate's list of references. Members of constituent groups can also conduct informal reference checks of the finalist candidates. Although informal reference checks are not as important or meaningful as formal references, they can be useful, especially when several checks produce similar results. Candidates can also conduct informal checks by contacting teachers, administrators, and people from the school community about the quality of the relationship between the board and the administration, and between the board and various constituent groups in the school. The purpose of the research and informal reference checks is to do everything possible to avoid any surprises during the site visit and final interviews.

11.) *In a perfect world. . . .* Several administrator candidates have asked questions about their responsibilities when they are selected as a finalist in a director search. In a candidate's perfect world, each candidate would be invited to visit several schools over a short period of time and would be able to select the position of his/her choice. In the Search Committee's perfect world, three dynamic administrator candidates would visit the school for a site visit and interviews within a two-week period. The Search Committee would compile observations and comments from candidate interviews by each of the school's constituent groups, and would offer the position to the Board's first choice candidate, who would (of course) accept the position immediately. But, the world is not perfect, and rarely do either of these scenarios take place.

12.) *Deadlines and Time Lines* – Candidates and Search Committees are faced with deadlines, time lines, and time constraints with respect to their personal schedules and the school calendar. Candidates face keen competition as the pool of qualified candidates is reduced from 50 (long list) to 12 (semifinalists) to 3 (finalists) to 1 (the new director). Although the selection process is made as objective as possible by developing evaluation rubrics based on the required and preferred qualifications of the desired candidate, many subjective aspects of the selection process remain. We suggest that candidates who are selected as semifinalists review once again the information they have assembled about the school, the position, and the community. If the candidate has any reservations about his/her willingness to accept the position, we recommend the candidate withdraw from the search at the earliest possible date. We feel a candidate should rarely decline an offer after accepting an invitation to visit the school at school expense as a

finalist. If the candidate has done a thorough job of researching the school, and if the Search Committee has been open and honest with the candidate concerning the job description and the salary/benefit package, there should be no major surprises during the site visit and final interviews. The match should be a good one, and the search should result in a mutually beneficial and fulfilling relationship between the school and the new director that will last for many years.

It is our hope that the application process reviewed here, and the recommendations that were mentioned, will be useful to administrator candidates, and to Boards that are searching for a new director. Although these suggestions and guidelines were based on the director recruiting process used at ISS, the process used by other organizations is similar. If you have additional questions, please contact Ralph Jahr at ISS.

Revised 6/05