

Now More Than Ever, Data Matters

When facing difficult decisions, a better understanding of peer school financial and operational behavior can help immensely.



Elizabeth Dabney is NBOA's director, research and data analysis.
elizabeth.dabney@nboa.org

“Is your school considering a higher than normal endowment draw to help support your budget?”

“We’re rethinking the structure of our business office. How many FTEs are in your business office?”

“What increase in awarded financial aid can we expect as a result of the economic effects of the pandemic?”

These and other questions have been swirling in the independent school community since the spring, when COVID-19 changed how we operate. While trying to predict the future — or even next week — has been impossible, a strong foundation in data can give business officers more confidence in answering questions and making difficult decisions.

“BIIS allows me for the first time to compare standardized, audited financial data points with peer groups. In other words, it’s a true ‘apples to apples’ comparison.”

—David Wright, University School

No one understands the power of data like an independent school business officer. That’s why NBOA’s signature data collection platform, Business Intelligence for Independent Schools (BIIS), was developed by business officers for business officers. BIIS focuses on the financial and operational indicators you need to be a good steward of your school’s resources. In these uncertain times, being able to track indicators like net tuition revenue, operating margin, total tuition discount, and net assets per student over time is invaluable. And putting your school’s data into context using BIIS reporting tools, like the NBOA Financial Dashboard, helps you understand how your school compares to your peers.

But you don’t have to take my word for it. Here’s what David Wright, finance director at University School in Ohio, has to say about the value of BIIS: “I really appreciate the flexibility in the platform. It allows me to take a deep dive into specific data sets I might be researching. And it also allows me to quickly get a 50,000-foot view of a few high-level data points that show the strengths and weaknesses of my school. The most exciting thing for me about the BIIS platform relates to audited financial data points. With other platforms, many data points are subject to



Go Time


BIIS is open for data collection from October 26 to November 20. All you need is your 2019-20 school year audited financials, year-end FY20 compensation, as well as data on income and expenses, financial aid, admissions and endowment. Data entry should take only a few hours.

Visit biis.nboa.org to begin.

how each school may define it. BIIS allows me for the first time to compare standardized, audited financial data points with peer groups. In other words, it’s a true ‘apples to apples’ comparison.”

Here’s what’s new with BIIS this year:

- Revised timeline, in response to member feedback, to better align with the receipt of completed financial audits.
- Streamlined compensation data collection focused on the head of school, chief business officer, controller, director of human resources, director of facilities and director of information technology.
- Incorporation of the Commonfund Benchmarks Study® of Independent Schools (CSIS) data collection on school endowments to reduce the number of data collection requests and to bring additional endowment data into BIIS reporting tools.

Log into BIIS (biis.nboa.org) to complete your school’s FY20 data entry and populate reporting tools and dashboards to help you understand and communicate your school’s financial health. 

RELATED CONTENT

Financial State of the Industry: BIIS 5-Year Trend Report 2015–2019 (white paper, 2020)

Commonfund Study of Independent School Endowments (white paper, 2020)

Key Financial Indicators of Vitality for Independent Schools: BIIS Data Trends 2015–2017 (white paper, 2017)

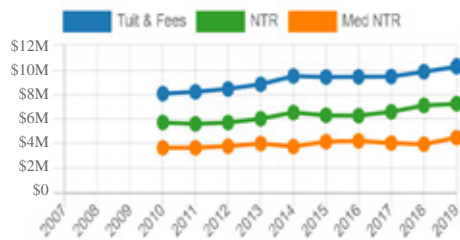
Business Intelligence: Positioned to Succeed (Jan/Feb 2020)

A Dashboard for Staff Expenses and Productivity (Jan/Feb 2019)

Net Tuition Revenue

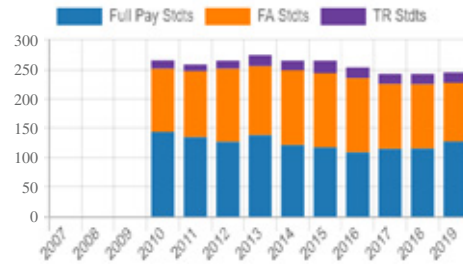
Net tuition revenue is gross tuition and fees less all forms of financial aid (need-based/merit/tuition remission). Net tuition revenue should show an upward trend over time.

Reference point is median NTR of all schools in BIIIS.



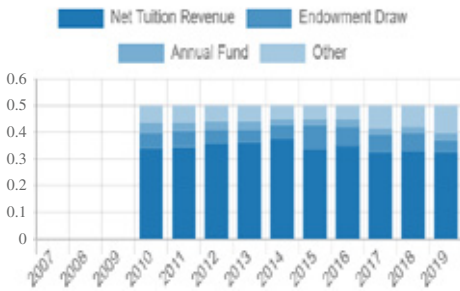
Total Enrollment with Financial Aid

The total number of students enrolled segregated into full pay, financial aid and tuition remission students. Trend is more important than total number of students.



Operating Income

Operating income includes net tuition revenue, unrestricted philanthropic support, auxiliary revenue and draws from endowment or reserves.



Operating Expenses

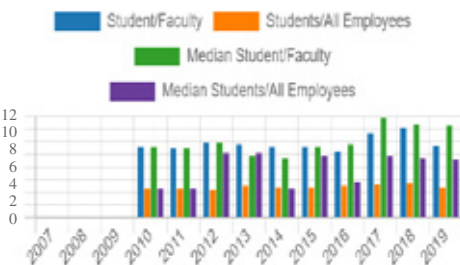
Operating expenses include salaries, benefits, instruction/program, auxiliary, facility and other expenses.



Staffing: Per Student Ratios

Student-to-faculty and -to-all employees ratios are a measure of the cost and efficiency of delivering your program.

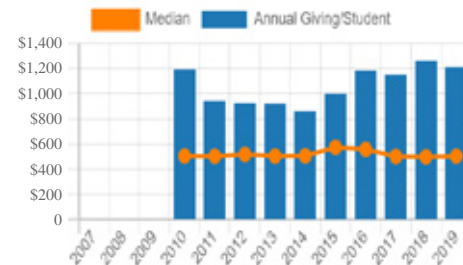
Reference point is median for all schools in BIIIS



Annual Giving Per Student

This is a measure of parent and alumni satisfaction with the school.

Reference point is median AG/stdt of all schools in BIIIS



The NBOA Financial Dashboard, available within the BIIIS reporting platform, helps you identify, understand and monitor the financial indicators that have the greatest impact on your school's financial health. These are the income statement data points. The Dashboard also includes six balance sheet data points.