

# From Recording & Reporting to Analysis + Decision-Making

Independent School | Business Office Services Case Study



## School Profile

- Independent, coeducational day school
- Pre-nursery through 8th grade
- Approximately 500 students enrolled
- 150 faculty and staff

## Partnership Overview

Smith + Howard's Independent Schools Group serves as an outsourced business office partner, providing controllership, accounts payable processing, and financial reporting support while school leadership retains full strategic authority.

## The Challenge

Like many independent schools, this school reached a point where business office needs began to outpace existing operations.

### Operational Strain

- Business office operations had become outdated and heavily manual
- Technology had been added over the years but never fully leveraged
- Month-end close processes consumed significant staff time and bandwidth

### Staffing Risk

- Institutional knowledge was concentrated in a small number of individuals
- Limited redundancy created continuity risk
- Growing financial and technology complexity demanded expertise beyond existing capacity

### Strategic Gap

- The business office functioned primarily in a recording and reporting role
- School leadership wanted to shift the function of the business office from transactional to strategic partnership
- As operational needs increased there was an opportunity to create more space for strategic focus and a chance to redefine the mission of the business office

### Underlying Questions

*Would we lose control or visibility? Would an outside team understand school culture? How would communication really work day to day?*

## The Solution

Rather than waiting for a forcing event—a resignation, audit finding, or system failure—school leadership chose to act proactively. After a deliberate evaluation process, the school partnered with Smith + Howard's Independent Schools Group to redesign how the business office operated.

The engagement was structured selectively. The school identified the functions where outside expertise would add the most value and retained internal control where continuity and relationships mattered most

### School Retained

- Financial strategy and scenario planning
- Budget development and forecasting
- Board and finance committee reporting
- Mission-aligned financial leadership

### Smith + Howard Provided

- Full controllership and monthly close
- Cash, investment, A/R, and A/P reconciliation
- Accounts payable processing
- Audit schedule preparation and support
- Development/fundraising reconciliation
- Fixed asset management

## The Outcomes

<b>Redeployed Resources Intentionally</b>	Reduced headcount naturally over time without disruption, right-sizing the team as functions transitioned.
<b>Selective Outsourcing</b>	Outsourced specific functions to Smith + Howard, preserving internal control where it mattered most.
<b>Retained Operational Control</b>	School leadership maintained full decision-making authority over financial strategy and governance.
<b>Elevated Strategic Role</b>	The business office became a strategic partner to the finance committee and board, shifting from transactional to analytical.

## The Experience

Beyond the structural changes, the school's team described a meaningful shift in day-to-day experience. Common themes from the engagement include:

- A dedicated, familiar engagement team
- Predictable timelines and deliverables that reduced internal fire drills
- Strong internal controls with clear task ownership and accountability
- Less stress and greater clarity across finance operations
- A shift from reacting to leading – more time for planning and analysis
- Expeditious turnaround of data in presenting financial information to the board
- Visibility that school leadership could trust, not just interpret

*Outsourcing doesn't distance you from your finances. It gives you the visibility you can trust.*

## Key Takeaways

- 01** Proactive assessment surfaces risk before it becomes a crisis – and gives leadership control over timing and options.
- 02** Outsourcing is infrastructure, not replacement. The right model reinforces controls and continuity while school leaders retain authority.
- 03** Stabilizing operations unlocks strategy. When daily finance functions are handled, CFOs gain capacity for forecasting and mission-driven planning.
- 04** Scope is flexible. Effective solutions are tailored to a school's complexity, existing staff, and growth goals – not a one-size-fits-all model.
- 05** Most schools already have the tools. Impact comes from having the expertise and capacity to fully leverage them.

### Is your school's business office built for what's next?

*Smith + Howard's Independent Schools Group offers flexible support – from targeted assessments to fully outsourced business office solutions.*