

The Effective Catholic School Board

A Guide For the Parish Elementary School

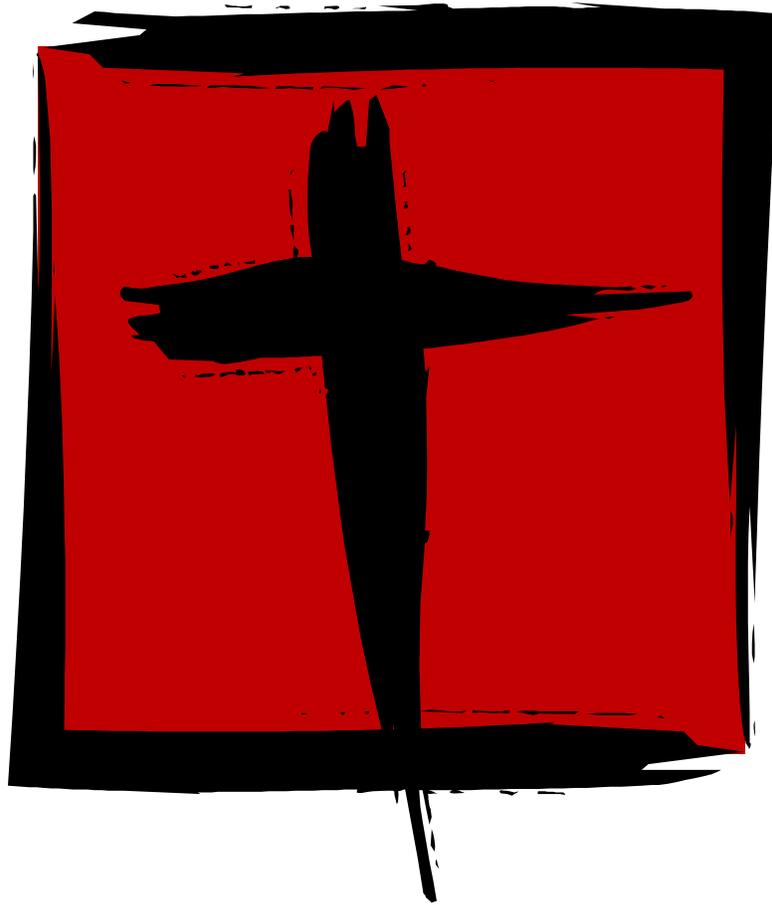


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THE CATHOLIC PARISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BOARD

The school board

The school board of a parish elementary school serves in an advisory capacity for the purpose of guiding the school into the future and ensuring the fidelity of its mission. The board will help the school leadership by developing policy that will guide the principal's day-to-day leadership. Being a parish school, the Pastor has the final say in all matters, but should allow the board to develop appropriate policy.

Board members will be invited to participate in June, following an annual review of board performance and will have until July to respond. Once members have been appointed, an August meeting will be held for the purpose of selecting officers and the secretary.

It is important that the members of the board be selected using specific criteria. When looking for a potential board member the candidate's affluence, influence and energy level should be considered. It is also paramount that board members possess a wide range of viewpoints and expertise. This can be accomplished by inviting board members who are representative of the school community regarding age, gender, profession and ethnic background. Discussion and spirited debate are vital to the success of a board, and a variety of viewpoints will ensure that this happens.

Although Catholic school boards are authorized to develop policy, they represent the school community and have only those powers that might reasonably be inferred. (See Chapter 3 for a look at "Duties and powers.") The dual function of the school board can be stated this way; to develop the policies of the school; and to pursue the aspirations of the local community.

Only as a board

The rule is well established that when school boards are authorized to perform acts involving judgment and policy development,

they may act only as a corporate body at a lawful meeting. It is essential; therefore, those school board members know such matters as:

1. Is the proposed action one the board is authorized to take?
2. Is the action being taken in accordance with proper procedure - such as a motion or resolution and a vote entered in the record?

Individual members of the board may not act alone or make decisions binding upon the board or school. Nor should board members participate in secret meetings. Not only do such meetings destroy the mutual confidence that must exist among board members and the principal, but such meetings deny the most basic premise of school board operation - that of arriving at sound decisions following discussion by all members either in general meetings or at special emergency sessions.

Effective operation of any Catholic school requires that the board allow its chief executive officer to speak for the organization. That is, the principal, as the chief executive officer of the board, should normally speak and act on matters of school operations and administrative procedures. On the other hand, the board chair person should normally speak for the board on matters pertaining to board procedures and policies. (Some "in between" topics might call for the principal and board president to address the matter in tandem.) Individual members of the board should never "bypass" the chair person or principal, in speaking for the board or school unless authorized to do so by official board action.

Only the board's selected officers (elected by the board members) have duties or responsibilities as individual members. Such duties and responsibilities are limited by the

policies of the board. Other than these designated special responsibilities, the officers of the board are considered as regular members of the board.

Officers of the board

Each board must elect its own chairperson, vice chairperson and secretary. These officers elected by the board have their performance reviewed on a regular basis by the board.

The chairperson and vice chairperson of the board must be members of the board and elected by the board members. The secretary may be a member of the board but need not be.

Differing practices exist with respect to the board secretary. In some schools, a board member is elected secretary, but is provided with staff assistance in carrying out the very important recording duties of the secretary and freeing the board member to participate fully in the deliberations of the board. Some boards employ a staff member or other person as secretary. Whatever the plan adopted by the board to fill the secretary's position, such a plan should be described in an official board policy and must assure complete and accurate records and minutes of board meetings.

The officers of the board are elected at the organizational meeting in August.

Role of the board chairperson

The chairperson of the board presides at all meetings of the parish school board and performs all duties incident to the office as may be advised by board policy. The chairperson is frequently required to sign official documents on behalf of the board. The chairperson should participate fully in the deliberative process and vote on all issues before the board.

The ideal chairperson should be a proven leader who is passionate about Catholic Schools. The chairperson should be discerning and able to separate emotion from the task at hand. This person should also be collegial in nature and able to problem solve.

The board chairperson is very important - too important to be bestowed lightly. The chairperson should be a leader who can draw the board together to act as a unit. However, like any other board member; the chairperson must subordinate self-interest and look beyond personality differences if the board is to work effectively.

The major functions of the board chairperson can be summarized as follows:

- 1) Preside at all meetings to assure that such meetings start promptly, keep moving in a positive direction, and permit each board member the opportunity to participate fully.
- 2) Insure that the agenda for each meeting provides for the transaction of essential business identified by the principal and meets the needs and priorities of the school board.
- 3) Conduct all meetings in accordance with the procedures set forth in school board bylaws.
- 4) Call special meetings of the board.

Other specific duties may be assigned to the chairperson by the board through its bylaws.

In general, the chairperson's duties are limited to those prescribed by board bylaws. It is not the chairperson's duty, for example, to act as an administrative representative of the board in conducting day-to-day operations of the school.

Good communication and trust between the chairperson, board members and principal are essential for the successful governance of the school.

The vice chairperson's primary function, by policy, is to perform the duties of the chairperson if there is a vacancy in that office or if the chairperson is absent or unable to act. The school board may adopt rules imposing other duties upon the vice chairperson.

Role of the board secretary

The secretary may be a member of the school board or a non-member.

Duties of the board secretary are such that most school boards appoint a staff member as secretary or employ a staff member to perform the duties as the secretary's designated representative. It is extremely difficult, for example, for a board member to record minutes of a meeting and participate fully in discussions at the same time.

Among other duties, the secretary keeps full and accurate records of the proceedings of the board; has general supervision of such books of record and accounting as are required by policy or ordered by the board; sends notice of all regular and special meetings of the board, and has custody of all official documents and correspondence of the board.

Note that records under the secretary's supervision are kept at the school office. School board records must be available for inspection by the pastor.

The secretary should be present at all board meetings. In the absence of the secretary, the board must appoint a temporary secretary to be responsible for the duties of the secretary.

Role of the principal

The principal of the school is the chief executive officer and is responsible to the school board and pastor for managing the school. School boards delegate executive functions to the principal through written policies that define the relationship between the board and the chief executive. The principal also typically functions as an adviser to the school board, in the fact that he is the expert. In order to function effectively in these two roles; leader and adviser, the principal should be an ex officio member of the board and should be present at all meetings of the board.

In the role of chief executive, the principal is expected to contribute to the board's deliberations by furnishing reports, information, and recommendations for action. The chief executive keeps the board thoroughly informed about all the conditions of the school, problems ahead, and alternative courses of action to deal

with the problems. The principal also provides the board with evidence of progress towards its strategic goals, adherence to the school's mission, and compliance with its policies.

In summary, a partial list of the principal's duties and functions as the board's chief executive is to:

- 1) Attend all meetings of the board and serve as an ex officio member.
- 2) Provide direction and guidance for all school operations in a manner consistent with goals, policies and mission of the school board and school.
- 3) Advise the board and make recommendations to the board for the educational advancement of the school.
- 4) Ensure the wise use of school resources and provide for their protection from misuse in accordance with board policies.
- 5) Provide information the board needs in developing policies to govern the school.
- 6) Develop administrative procedures as may be required to implement board policies and ensure that all staff knows the goals and policies of the board and school.
- 7) Select staff and provide for the supervision and evaluation of the staff in carrying out the philosophy, objectives and policies of the school.
- 8) Direct the preparation of the annual budget for adoption by the board and parish finance council and administer the budget.
- 9) Maintain educational programs, activities and services that offer a complete system of education, instruction and care for all pupils attending the schools.
- 10) Represent the school before the public and provide educational leadership, both within and outside the school; keep the staff and public

informed as to the activities, needs and successes of the school .

11) Ensure the maintenance of all personnel records, pupil accounting, business records, and other records which are necessary as prescribed by parish and diocese.

12) Delegate to other staff members the authority necessary for effective operation of the school.

13) Provide all information the board needs to monitor performance of the school and progress toward its stated purposes and goals.

14) See that the school is in compliance with applicable laws and regulations, including Canon Law.

15) Uphold the fidelity of the school's mission.

16) Ensure that the Catholic identity of the school remain a visible strength.

Board meetings

School boards conduct all of their business in meetings. Because meetings are so important to them, school boards need to adopt clear, written procedures or rules of order for their meetings. They also need to develop refined skills at conducting and participating in meetings.

An effective board meeting:

- 1) Requires preparation of a schedule of regular meetings.
- 2) Requires notification to members of a change in regular meeting dates.
- 3) Requires a meeting agenda that is shared with members 10 days in advance of the actual meeting.
- 4) Requires minutes of all meetings, both open and closed.
- 5) Provides remediation policy for violations.

The types of meetings for boards may be grouped into five categories, namely: organizational, regular, special, reconvened, and committee.

Organizational meetings

Most school board policy suggests that within 28 days following the appointment of school board members, an organizational meeting of the board must be held. At this meeting, the board elects its officers, establishes the date, time and location of regular board meetings, and conducts other business the board may consider necessary for the orderly operation of meetings and for the purpose of orienting new members to board policy and procedure.

Regular meetings

Regular meetings are the meetings of the board as established by annual schedule. Regular meetings may include all business necessary for the ongoing operation of the school district and any other items included in the regular meeting agenda or as authorized by board policy. Board policy states that an agenda be provided to members 10 days before any meeting, regular or special.

Special meetings

Special meetings may be called by the board chairperson or by any three members of the board. Notice must be written and presented to each board member 48 hours before the meeting if delivered electronically. The notice must contain an agenda for the meeting and discussions are restricted to those items listed on the agenda.

Reconvened meetings

By a majority vote of the schools board members present and voting at any regular or special meeting, the board may schedule and hold a reconvened meeting. Any action that could have properly been taken at the initial meeting may be taken at the reconvened meeting. Members must be notified unless the meeting is to reconvene within 24 hours, the time and place of the meeting are announced at the original meeting, and there is no change in the agenda.

Committee meetings

Some school boards establish committees to give attention to particular areas of business of the school. Some boards use the total board as a "committee of the whole."

Official decisions of the board can be made only by the board at a duly constituted meeting.

Committees cannot make decisions binding upon the board. Typically, a board committee studies an issue and brings information to educate the full board. Suggested Catholic school board committees are as follows:

Marketing: Helps with developing a comprehensive communication plan and programs to promote the school's image and brand as well as a marketing plan for the school.

Strategic planning: Establishes and maintains a 3-5 year plan for the school; conducts an annual review of the parent handbook and proposes revisions as necessary.

Development: Assists in building relationships with stakeholders, such as local businesses, other schools, parish community and alumni.

Nomination and Membership:

Recruits candidates for the board, provides new member orientation, on-going training and annual evaluations.

Ad-hoc: Committees appointed by the chairperson to study and report to the board on any specific assignments. These committees cease to exist upon acceptance of their final report.

A quorum for meetings

For any meeting scheduled or called to conduct business, a quorum must be present. A majority of the full board membership constitutes a quorum. A majority of a quorum - three members of a seven-member board- is not enough to hold a lawful meeting.

Members of the board may participate in the meeting by means of video or audio conferencing, but a quorum of the members must be present at the official location of the meeting in order to conduct business.

With a few exceptions, a majority vote is sufficient to pass or defeat a motion so long as a quorum is present (even if three members abstain and the vote is 1-0).

Minutes

Board minutes should indicate clearly the type of meeting held, along with all other information required by board policy. The actions of each board meeting should be recorded in an orderly, punctual and reliable manner. This includes the recording of the votes of individual members on items requiring a roll call vote.

THE SCHOOL BOARD IN ACTION

Importance of good meetings

For all practical purposes, a Catholic school board exists only when it is engaged in a meeting. School board members, singly or in small groups, cannot stand in the place of the board. The fiduciary capacity granted to the school board to carry out its functions is delegated to the whole board acting as a deliberative body. By definition, therefore, a school board does its work as a group and makes its decisions by majority vote at a meeting.

It stands to reason, therefore, that a school board needs to be effective at meetings. A board that aspires to excellence needs to be very effective at meetings.

The quality of a school board's meetings will vary with a number of factors, including an agenda focused on true board work and a presiding officer skilled at leading a deliberative body. Equally important is a set of well-defined meeting policies and procedures that capture the board's best thinking about how to do its work. These policies and procedures should cover such important items as agenda development, the roles of board officers, board/principal relations, and rules of order.

Board policies also should ensure that the board deals only with governance work and avoids management issues that are the responsibility of the school administration.

Board Agenda

The agenda for a board meeting outlines the order of business, listing specific items for consideration under each heading. Here is a sample structure:

1. Welcome, opening prayer, reading of mission statement
2. Approval of agenda and approval of minutes

Informational Items

3. Reports

Reports might include the pastor's and principal's report, board committee reports and other reports as necessary. Reports should only be discussed during the meeting if action needs to be taken.

Action Items

4. Old Business
Here list the specific items on which the administration is expected to take formal action.
5. New Business
Here list new items for which the board will receive information for possible action at a future meeting. New topics should be assigned to the appropriate board committee for research, discussion, and recommendation.
6. Closing prayer, adjournment

Agenda items should be specific, so that what is to be considered can be clearly understood by board members. An agenda listing specific topics for action or discussion should be posted or disseminated at least ten days in advance of all meetings. All accompanying reports and materials should be disseminated with the agenda so all members can process the materials and be ready for discussion at the board meeting.

Non-agenda items brought to the attention of the board from any source, such as from community members or parents, should be referred by the board chairperson to the administration, and scheduled for a future meeting.

Usually the board chairperson and principal work together to compile an agenda that, among other things:

- enables the principal to call the board's attention to areas of focus, in order to initiate policy formation.

- enables the school board to fully address its governance functions, including committee recommendations, policy adoption, assuring the mission, and planning for the future of the school.

Because the agenda serves as a roadmap for the board as it carries out its governance responsibilities, the board and the principal must determine which issues and topics will take priority. Board policies, therefore, should state how agendas are to be prepared, as well as procedures and deadlines for submitting agenda items.

The agenda, along with explanatory material, should be distributed to board members at least ten days in advance of the meeting. The packet of agenda and accompanying materials distributed to members should provide all supporting information and the recommendations of the principal on action items. If the agenda and background information are distributed in a timely manner before the meeting, board members can be expected to arrive at the board meeting ready to discuss and transact business.

Meeting rules and conduct

The agenda identifies the content of a meeting. The board's policies and procedures determine how that content is treated.

Most school boards develop rules of procedure based on a combination of *Robert's Rules of Order*, common sense and common courtesy. The most effective rules of procedure conform to the basic principles of Robert's Rules:

- protection for the right of all board members to participate fully;
- maintenance of a positive relationship among all members, and
- efficient transaction of business

The chairperson should be expected to conduct meetings in accordance with the procedures established by the full board. The manner in which board meetings proceed is a reflection on the full board and the school. School board members must follow the board bylaws and reflect the values of the Catholic Church in all procedures and actions of the meetings.

Making board decisions

Archdiocesan regulations – not to mention financial constraints and local tradition – impact much of what goes on in a school. The fact remains, however, that the school board plays a role in ensuring the mission and future of Catholic education in the local community. The board serves as stewards and trustees of the mission and purpose of the school. Effective boards keep the big picture in sight and monitor the school's progress toward its vision.

One of the main areas of board responsibility is to form policies that assure the mission and the future of the school. A policy is a guide to discretionary action by the principal. The board-created policy states what should be done, and then the principal formulates a regulation to delineate how the policy will be implemented.

Good policies are:

- anticipatory and responsive to need
- clear enough to provide guidance and broad enough to give space
- written in plain, easily understood language
- communicated effectively
- evaluated regularly

Policies cannot:

- control or supervise the principal
- resolve specific problems after the fact
- address isolated cases
- substitute for programs
- conflict with archdiocesan policy

To be most effective, the board and the administrator must keep their roles separate—the board guides through policies and the administrator manages the implementation of the policies through regulations.

Reaching Consensus

Again, successful school boards spend their time on policy decisions. The goal often is to find common ground that expresses the mission, values, and vision of the school community. These deliberations are best not pursued as win-lose. Some decisions (the small stuff) are best disposed of with a simple vote. But, when confronting big decisions, the board and community are best served by striving for the common ground.

This means each board member agrees to listen to the opposing view and possibly amend their own view in order to form the most effective policies to benefit the school. The board can then adopt a course of action that all members can support – or at least live with and agree not to sabotage.

Consensus decision making avoids the win-lose approach of “majority rule,” leads to better teamwork, and often produces better decisions.

Supporting board decisions

Sometimes a school board cannot reach a consensus within a reasonable length of time and must adopt a motion that leaves one or more members in the minority. Each member, of course, has a right and a duty to state his or her views in an effort to prevail before the final vote is taken. But what about after the vote? Is a member on the losing side obligated to support the majority decision?

The answer to that question should be a definite “yes,” assuming that a criminal act or gross violation of principle is not involved. That is not to say every member should be expected to agree with the board decision. (No group of 7 to 9 people can possibly agree all the time.) But here are

some reasons every member should be expected to *accept or support* the decision:

- The school board is a single entity. Except where the by-laws require a super-majority, an action on a 4-3 vote is as binding as one on a 7-0 vote. To sabotage a majority decision is to sabotage the board as a whole.
- Roles may soon be reversed. A member who is on the losing side of one vote will probably be on the winning side of other votes. Failure to support a board decision may be perceived as whining or, worse yet, generate a response in kind.
- The relationship among board members is readily observed by the community and can impact the tone for human relationships throughout the school community. Board members who fight among themselves have a negative impact on staff morale and public confidence.

Most board members find that on most decisions it is better to support (or accept) majority decisions while retaining the right to seek changes through constructive channels (such as introducing new information to the board). Community turmoil is too often the result when a board member seeks the support of citizens, interest groups, or employees in making a majority decision look bad.

Records of the meeting

Adequate minutes and related records of school board meetings are required and represent the only record certifying the actions of the board. A school board speaks only through its minutes.

The minutes, must include the date, time, and place of the meeting; list board members present or absent; and give a summary of discussion on all matters proposed, deliberated or decided and a record of any votes taken. The minutes must record all motions, identify the board

members making the motion and the second, and show the result of the voting. On matters requiring a roll call vote, the yeas and nays of individual members must be recorded.

In addition to recording in the minutes, most board decisions are policy decisions that call for revisions to the policy manual where they should provide easy access for board, staff, and community.

The first question any board should ask when confronted with a decision is: “What’s our current policy covering this matter?” If the board already has a good policy, it can simply be implemented. If the policy no longer fits, it can be amended. If no policy exists, the board can consider whether a new policy is called for. A board that focuses on

policy will avoid being consumed by ad hoc decisions – which in most cases are more effectively decided by the administration anyway.

Open and closed meetings

The bylaws of the school board determine whether the meetings are open or closed meetings. In a closed meeting, only school board members are allowed to attend the meeting. Any additional meeting attendees must be specifically invited by the board. In an open meeting, any member of the community can attend the meeting to listen to the discussion and policy adoptions. An open meeting does not mean anyone can talk and participate in the discussion; rather anyone is welcome to attend the meeting as an observer.

After the meeting

Outside the board room, members must exercise discretion. They should be careful when talking about school matters in public or in casual conversations with friends. A board member's word can have considerable impact on public opinion – even legal implications. In one district, a teacher who was not rehired claimed that a board member (and the superintendent) talked about her case out in the community. She sued the district for defamation of character. Board members should withhold comments on problems related to individual employees and students.

One difficult adjustment for board members is dealing with the constant verbal bombardment from community members – about school, staff, programs, and board action. In most communities, there are frequent rumors circulating about the schools and their employees. One skill for a board member to master quickly is the art of handling gossip. Often the best reaction is to not dignify gossip with a statement or comment; suggest instead that it be put in writing and sent to the board office.

Criticism is a different matter. Board members should pay attention to it, listen to it, and share it with the appropriate person, usually the principal. No board member wants to appear uninformed about board, school, or parish matters, but board members cannot know all of the details of the school's operations, and saying so is not a poor reflection on their performance.

Pressures of many kinds and from many sources come with the position of

school board member. New members might as well expect them – formal (at board meetings) or informal (on the street or over dinner). The best advice on how to cope with pressures is to make no promises, no deals – they may come back to haunt you.

Board members need to be particularly cautious in their contacts with members of the staff. Although board members have no individual authority, there will be members of the community and staff who do not recognize this limitation. Thus, when board members offer suggestions to the staff, they can easily be interpreted as directives, with unfortunate and unintended consequences embarrassing to all concerned. Most problems should be referred to the building principal. Or it could be suggested that a letter be sent to the board chairperson. Most experienced board members find it awkward to act as a message bearer for community members, and soon learn not to commit themselves until they have heard and analyzed both sides of a story.

Board members also should refrain from assuming special privileges in visiting the school. A board member who has children in school will find it advisable to reassure the principal, teachers and his neighbors that no special attention is wanted for himself or his children.

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POWERS, DUTIES AND EFFECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Powers and duties of the school board

Catholic education is a responsibility of the diocese. Canon 804 states that the Bishop of a diocese has the responsibility “to regulate such education and be vigilant over it.” Each parish is led by its pastor who has final say over decisions made by the board, managed by the school administrator.

While Canon Law does not mention school boards, Canon 536 suggests a pastoral council, and Canon 537 requires a finance council, be established in each parish. The pastor presides over both whereby “...those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish assist in fostering pastoral activity...and [also] assist the pastor in the administration of the goods of the parish...” (Canons 536 and 537). Therefore, boards are formed in the spirit of Canon Law in order to assist the Bishop in fulfilling his executive function by collaborating with others. Among the duties of the school board set forth in the by-laws are these:

- initiate and support school policies
- provide direction and planning in matters of finance
- support leadership
- advocate and promote the school within and throughout the community

Of all duties assigned to the school board, perhaps the most significant is to formulate policies that support the school mission statement and perpetuate the future viability of the school.

Policies function as a guide toward discretionary action taken by the administrator. It is essential,

therefore, that the policies are put in writing, and made available to all stakeholders.

Trustee for the school community

The board’s role as fiduciary calls for it to act as trustee for the community. As trustee, the board is responsible for:

- protecting and guarding the mission of the school; the mission itself acts as a filter through which every action flows.
- acting as an advisory body; the board provides guidance, discerns, thinks, exercises judgments and plans for the future, not tomorrow.
- developing and maintaining public relations and marketing strategies; the board assists in keeping the vision alive by living the values of the school.

Board policies

In fulfilling its mission, the school board shall follow the intent and spirit of the policies as put forth by the parish and Diocese. Policies are the principles and/or rules adopted by the board to express its expectations for the school. They are clear enough to give guidance and broad enough to leave space for discussion. Written policies also enable the board to “speak with one voice” in providing support to the principal, and need to reflect the best thinking of all board members. Each of the board’s policies should be consistent with the board’s philosophy and objectives for the schools. The philosophy and objectives represent the mission, purpose, values and long-range and short range goals of the school community and its administration. Each policy adopted should in some way relate to the school’s overarching mission and vision. Board policies, of course, must also be consistent with diocesan policies,

which mean that policies are constantly in a state of revision to stay abreast of changes. It is not possible to draft school board policies that will address the specific challenges of any and all issues that may arise. However, good policies will give direction to the board as well as to the principal and staff. In developing policies, it is advisable to consult with any individuals or groups who will be affected. Because the principal is charged with implementing policies, it is essential that the principal be involved in the preparation of all policies.

Following board policy

The school board's credibility with the school community depends to a large extent on how clearly it states its intentions and how consistently it adheres to them. A board that does not follow its own policies is saying one thing while it does another. Inconsistency in abiding by policy is especially confusing for employees who are expected to carry out board policy in the classroom and administrative office.

A school board may properly modify a policy at any time in a manner that is consistent with the by-laws. But such changes should be made knowingly and transparently. Policies should reflect the needs and aspirations of the school community. When a board wishes to make a decision that is contrary to its own policies, the first step should be to change the policy to reflect the new thinking of the board, making certain that the change is consistent with school community values and most importantly, the mission.

Administrative regulations

Once the board has established a policy, it becomes the responsibility of the principal to put it into action. This is often accomplished through administrative regulations prepared by the principal. Whereas the policies state what should be done, regulations describe how things are to be done and how people should act. They are administrative procedures designed to assist in the implementation of the policies, and guide how, by whom, when and where the aims and policies of the board will be pursued.

Administrative regulations are extremely important to a school. Not only are they the vehicle for carrying out the policies of the board, regulations provide one means of evaluating the performance of the administration, staff, and educational programs. Are the objectives and the goals of the school as set forth in the policies being fulfilled by the administrative regulations procedures? If not, is the failure due to the procedures themselves, lack of understanding of such regulations, or the neglect or inability of certain staff members to perform the necessary tasks? The administrative regulations in printed form must be available to all employees who are affected by them or who must enforce them. Each member of the faculty and staff is responsible for following and reinforcing regulations as written by the administrator. They are generally included in the Faculty and Staff Handbook. Some regulations also must be communicated to students and parents, in the form of a Parent Handbook. Parents and students are asked to read the handbook and sign a document stating they have read it, understand it, and agree to follow the regulations. Regulations must be on file in the administrative office and available for public inspection, the same as school board policies.

Relations with administration and staff

Successful organizations rely heavily on teamwork. For that reason alone, the school board should value its relationships with all stakeholders in the school and parish, from the faculty and staff to parents, students and the community in general. Above all, the school board must value its relationship with its chief executive, the principal, for it is around this special relationship that all of the school board's other relationships revolve. It is often said that hiring its principal is the single most important action that a school board ever takes. However, the task of selecting an individual to fill the position is probably no more important than the task of developing an effective relationship with that individual. That relationship is sure to fail if it does not include deep feelings of respect and a clear understanding of one another's roles. The school board and principal invariably find themselves working together to address school

needs and problems, but that does not mean their jobs are the same. In fact, the opposite is true. The board and principal have very different roles to fill. Those roles must complement one another if the relationship is to work and the school community to flourish. The principal is

responsible for the day to day management of the school, and implementation of board policies and regulations. The principal may consult with the board on issues, but he or she with the blessing of the pastor, makes the final decision.

FINANCING THE SCHOOLS

Good school boards know they are in the business of education. They are concerned about education and base their decisions on the educational needs and requirements of their communities. However, in view of the many non-educational pressures confronting boards, it is not easy to focus on purely educational issues.

The financing of Catholic schools is undoubtedly the most common problem confronting boards. With limited revenue available to meet ever-increasing demands for improved and expanded educational services, the financing of quality education must be a concern that occupies the minds of board members much of the time. The school board must answer the question: "How much is this community willing to spend on its schools and how do we balance that with requirements of the parish, diocese, and the needs of our students?" However, the school board must also remember that since the school is a part of the juridic person of the parish, the school board's work with the budget is advisory to the pastor and the parish finance council. The pastor, the only one who can act on behalf of the entire juridic person of the parish, which includes the elementary school, is the one who makes final decisions pertaining to the finances of the school.

The Catholic school board should have adequate business and legal talent readily available for consultation. It should regularly monitor the financial health of the school, not only its current situation but long-term trends, as well. Primarily, the school board ensures that all fiscal policies are mission focused. The school budget is often a great reflection of how the school is living out its mission.

However, the school board also:

- develops a budget
- provides for realistic funding

- ensures adequate resources and monitors their use
- develops policies ensuring financially efficient operations
- provides reasonable tuition, just salaries, financial aid, and adequate maintenance and development of property and plant
- oversees investments by formulating and monitoring an investment policy and strategy.

Study Your School

It is recommended that each board devote a special committee to discuss the school budget and fiscal matters. This committee should provide financial accountability by requiring an annual audit and reviewing the results. This committee will assist the school in maintaining fiscal transparency.

Sources of Funds

Primary funding for a Catholic school comes from tuition and other private funding. Yet, the school board ought to make sure that the school is maximizing on whatever federal and/or state aid is made available.

Financial Decision Making and Board Policy

A well-informed board can make a big difference to the financial health of a school. Both the board and the principal must have access to a wide range of information that accurately portrays the financial condition of the school and its outlook in both the short and long term.

The school board, of course, is not responsible for making the day-to-day financial decisions characteristic of a large and dynamic institution. But the board helps establish a mission driven budget with clearly articulated goals through policies pertaining to fiscal responsibility.

Outline of Financial Performance For the School Board

- Establish clear expectations for maintenance of the school's "financial health."
- Establish desired outcomes and priorities that need to be reflected in the budget.
- Establish related expectations of the administration in its construction of the budget.
- Monitor month-to-month financial performance - income and expense - in relation to the financial plan represented in the budget.
- Monitor the school's financial health, both current and long-term.
- Stay abreast of other financial issues affecting the school.

Appendix A

Self-Evaluation: A Meeting about Meetings

It is a truism that cobblers don't take time to mend their own shoes, that mechanics don't take time to repair their own automobiles. Many school boards may be in the similar fix. Meeting to death, few boards seem to take time from busy agendas to step back and evaluate objectively the quality of their meetings. They should! It is important that the board looks at itself so it can grow and improve.

Use the key provided and rate the following items relating to the functioning of the board. It is best to complete this evaluation during the last meeting of the year in order for improvements to be planned.

4 = very good 3 = good 2 = average 1 = poor 0 = not able to judge

- ___ 1. PLANNING. Has the board developed adequate planning procedures for determining agendas and preparing backup reports and briefings?
- ___ 2. PRE-MEETING CONFERENCE. Do the board president and principal confer before each meeting to review upcoming business, to clarify agenda items and to anticipate possible problem areas?
- ___ 3. PRE-MEETING DISSEMINATION. Has the board developed adequate procedures for getting meeting materials and notices in the hands of board members, administration and pastor at least ten days before meeting dates?
- ___ 4. HOMEWORK. Do all board members study the agenda, read the reports, and come to meetings prepared to contribute to substantive discussions and not waste meeting time by going over matters that were already included in the pre-meeting folder?
- ___ 5. PROPER ROLE. Does the board have a clear understanding as to the matters which needs the board's attention and spends it time on major issues, avoiding details, matters of pure information, and administrative involvement?
- ___ 6. DECISION MAKING. Does the board understands its areas of competency and operates effectively within them in the decision-making process?
- ___ 7. ADVICE. Are board members knowledgeable about the school and issues facing the school?
- ___ 8. PACE. Do meetings begin on time? Are discussions open, positive and focus?
- ___ 9. STRUCTURED. Does the board use its committee structure effectively by processing items through the various committees first?
- ___ 10. CONTROL. When conflict arises does the board not avoid it but work through it?
- ___ 11. CLARIFICATION. When decisions are made, it is clear as to what they are and as to who will carry them out and when?

- ___12. EXPLORE. Are issues thoroughly explored?

- ___13. POST-MEETING DISSEMINATION. Are the appropriate accurate minutes taken at each meeting circulated in a timely manner?

- ___14. FOLLOW UP. Does the board following up on how decisions made are carried out?

- ___15. MISSION. Does the board understands and commit to the mission and philosophy of Catholic schools?

- ___16. RESPECT. Is there mutual respect among board members and between the board and the chief administrator of the school?

Appendix B

Foundational Principles of Effective Governance

As the entity entrusted with assisting the principal in the governance of the school, each School Board sits in trust for its entire community. The obligation to govern effectively imposes some fundamental duties on the Board.

1. **The Board Ensures Mission Effectiveness:** As its primary task, the Board continually articulates the overall direction of the school with regards to its particular mission.
 - By providing direction, the Board helps the school focus on who it is and what it desires to become.
 - One of the primary ways the Board provides direction is through the clear articulation of a mission statement. A mission statement is a reflection of the identity and values a school desires to live.
 - The Board ensures that all things are aligned to its mission; that the mission is the primary filter through which all things flow.
 - The Board develops policies that effectively put the school's mission into practice.
2. **The Board Connects With the Community:** School Board members are active ambassadors of the school to the broader community and ensure a strong public image of the school.
 - Effective communication is essential to create trust and support among the entire school community.
 - The Board must be aggressive in reaching out to the community to engage people in conversation about the school's mission. In contrast, people who bring management concerns to Board members should be appropriately directed to the school's principal.
 - A Board in touch with the community concerns and values will serve the broad good of the school rather than being overly influenced by special interests.
3. **The Board Advises the Principal:** The principal is the one entrusted with the management of the school and the nature of a Catholic School Board is one of consultative advisory.
 - An effective Board develops and maintains a productive relationship with the principal.
 - The relationship between the Board and the principal is one of mutual respect through a clear understanding of roles, responsibilities, and expectations. School Board bylaws should articulate the proper roles, responsibilities, and expectations of the principal and Board members.
 - It should be clear that the Board does not employ the principal. The principal is employed by the Pastor. Since the Board is consultative advisory by nature, the principal is entrusted with the management of the school and must listen to the Board and ask important questions of the Board, but does not have any obligation to follow the advisement of the Board.
4. **The Board Monitors Performance:** the Board constantly monitors progress toward the achievement of its goals.
 - The Board regularly participates in the process of strategic planning. Strategic planning is a never ending process of evaluating the school, developing action plans, adopting a plan, communicating a plan, implementing a plan, evaluating results, and planning again.
 - The Board must always be ready to evaluate new information and events that may hinder or assist the school in achieving its goals.
 - The Board must always function from the guiding principle of "mission driven, market sensitive." The constructive use of data is a skill that must be learned and the Board should have an understanding of pertinent data, but must always place the

mission of the school as the driving force behind its advisement.

- A distinction should be made between monitoring data (used by the Board for accountability) and management data (used by the principal and school administration).

5. The Board Takes Responsibility For Itself:

The Board, collectively and individually, takes full responsibility for Board activity and behavior - the work it chooses to do and how it chooses to do the work. Individual Board members are obligated to express their opinions and respect others' opinions; however, Board members understand the importance of the Board ultimately speaking with one clear voice.

- The School Board's role as a trustee for the community is unique and essential to the school community.
- While the Board must operate within its bylaws, good governance requires the Board be responsible for itself, its processes and contributions. Board meetings and actions are limited to Board work, not staff work.
- The Board seeks continuity of leadership, even as it experiences turnover in membership. The Board accomplishes this by using written Board policies to guide Board operations, by providing thorough orientation and training for all members, and by nurturing a positive and inviting Board culture.

Appendix C

Making the Board Meeting Work is Every Member's Job

The Catholic school Board is one that works as a unit. Each board consists of individuals from varied backgrounds and experiences, but they are entrusted with keeping the fidelity of a shared mission by knowing who they are and their reason for existence, and being witnesses to the mission itself by the way they live it out.

Each member feels responsible for productive meetings by coming prepared, abiding by the board's procedures, respecting all other members and working collaboratively toward the board's goals.

In addition to these basic considerations, following are suggested directions pointing toward a positive influence in making board meetings productive:

1. Using communication skills
2. Dealing with conflict
3. Working with an uncooperative member
4. Helping the new board member
5. Encouraging evaluation of the meeting

1. Using communication skills

If things did not go well at your last board meeting, ask yourself how you could have helped. Did you talk too long? Were you willing to share ideas and feelings? Did you truly listen to others' ideas and feelings? Did you seek the opinions of others who were reluctant to speak? When each member feels a sense of responsibility for a successful meeting and uses reasonably appropriate communication skills, success is easily attained.

Some of the essential communication skills are *paraphrasing* in order to ensure understanding of ideas, *listening for feeling* in order to comprehend how people feel, and *giving feedback* to explain your own thoughts and feelings. Fortunately these skills are not difficult to acquire. They just take practice.

Paraphrasing. The process of restating in your own words what others say and then checking it out with them is called "paraphrasing." For example, after listening to a member expound on the dress code, you might paraphrase him or her by saying, "Then you are not in favor of the dress code change, is that right?" Note that the paraphrase ends in the form of a question in order to check out the accuracy of your paraphrasing. A small amount of practice will improve your skill, but it also will demonstrate that paraphrasing is possible *only if you are actually listening*. Therefore, focusing on paraphrasing eliminates the need to focus on listening as a skill. Listening becomes a byproduct of paraphrasing.

Listening for feeling. It is important to recognize that feelings are communicated just as ideas are, although not always with words. Facial expressions, gestures, body language, and voice tones as well as words are clues to a person's feelings. When impressions of a person's feelings are received, they can be checked out with such statements as:

"You seem upset by what I said. Are you?"

"Am I correct that you are disappointed in our decision?"

It is important that your perception of someone's feelings be expressed as a question, not as a statement of fact.

Many times feelings are obvious but never acknowledged by either party—even though we know that these feelings are as important as thoughts or ideas. The significance of listening for and acknowledging feelings is that it is an excellent way to dissipate or prevent conflict. When negative feelings are identified early, they can be dealt with before a major explosion occurs. Checking out feelings also allows us to correct any misconceptions we might have about a person's feelings before we act inappropriately.

Giving feedback. The ability to communicate our own ideas and feelings to others, particularly when these feelings are negative, is an important skill for board members. Most often, feedback is intended to change someone else's behavior. Therefore, feedback must be presented in a non-threatening manner. If feedback produces a defensive reaction, little behavior change will occur. On the other hand, the feedback cannot be so subtle that it passes unnoticed. The difference between feedback that generates a defensive reaction and that which creates a more favorable response is not the frankness of the comments. Being "politely frank" with a person can be just as unproductive as being blatantly obnoxious. Another pitfall to avoid is to remain silent when asked for feedback on an issue. The danger in that is the chairperson may believe everyone agrees with what is being discussed, and it may not be the case. Silence is not consent.

Perhaps the most important feedback skill is the ability to use descriptive feedback as opposed to that which is judgmental. Almost without exception, a judgmental statement intended to change another person's behavior will create resistance to change. For example, it is assumed that rudeness will not be tolerated, but on the occasion that it is portrayed, to attack the person's character is not acceptable.

A more productive approach is to describe the impact the undesired activity has on you. This

descriptive feedback is presented as one's person's observation and reaction. The statement leaves the recipient free to accept or not accept your feedback. The main thing to remember is not to be judgmental.

2. Dealing with conflict

Each board member is a product of his or her own unique experiences in life, but the commonality is that all board members of a Catholic school are united in their responsibility to act as Christ as they work to fulfill the missions of the Church and school. Two challenges for the school board are to recognize that although conflict will be inevitable, it also has many positive aspects, and to learn how to deal with conflict so that negative features are minimized.

One positive feature of conflict is that it results in better decisions because individuals are forced to defend their positions. Open discussion allows many members to influence the decision. Conflict also stimulates people to get involved. This involvement not only improves the decisions, it gives members a chance to express any negative feelings.

It is important to recognize the positive values of conflict, because a feeling that conflict is undesirable may result in avoiding disagreements and inviting resentment and non-collaborative behavior.

Board members must learn to bring differences out in the open early and interact in a respectful, productive manner. As the board is assembled as a body within the meeting itself, it is also important that conflicts be resolved during the meeting and are not continued outside the board room.

It bears repeating that a key to conflict resolution is to keep all discussion non-judgmental.

Keeping the mission in the forefront, as well as a general respect for the other person, will help avoid the following behaviors:

- Holding “parking lot meetings”—continuing discussions after the meeting is adjourned
- Making attacking or accusatory statements
- Interrupting
- Withdrawing from the discussion following a difference of opinion

Instead it is advisable to:

- Be prepared before the meeting
- Listen and try to understand
- State your own ideas, opinions, and feelings

3. Working with an uncooperative member

Passing judgment on the behavior of others is an unproductive and unacceptable practice. An attempt to change that behavior is also difficult. Most of us generally behave as we do because 1) we are not aware of how our behavior is being perceived, and 2) we are acting out some basic need, such as the need for belonging or status within the group.

In considering ways to deal with the uncooperative board member, one thing is worth remembering: we can only change our own behavior, not the behavior of others. If we expect others to do something different we must ourselves do something different first. For example, *telling* someone that they need to prepare for meetings, consider all the options before deciding, avoid becoming involved in micromanaging, or speak respectfully to others will not have much impact. However, *doing* those things ourselves may have an impact.

Sharing your negative feelings in a positive way rather than giving advice may motivate an individual to reconsider his behavior. Keep in mind that many times behavior can be improved by meeting an individual's basic needs for belonging and recognition and status within the group. Some of the negative behavior can be prevented by educating new board members.

4. Helping the new board members

Newly appointed board members come to their first meetings with ideas to share and a desire to belong. They often have been a parish member for many years, and are familiar with the school. They or their children may have attended the school or are currently attending.

Each new member must first understand that their role includes:

- Forming, not implementing policy
- Planning for the future
- Selecting and supporting the principal
- Marketing the school
- Evaluating
- Perpetuating the vision

All this needs to be accomplished **with the mission in mind**. The mission must be integrated into every aspect of the board's actions. Current board members have the responsibility of orienting new members to the board and its procedures. Examples include:

- The mission statement should be present on all documents as a reminder of the board's focus. This includes the agenda and minutes of the meetings.
- Following prayer at each meeting, the mission statement should be recited aloud.

In reaching a comfortable level of mutual trust, each member's attitudes and skills are important. The goal is to lead the new member to a sense of personal responsibility for the performance of the total board.

Part of this task is accomplished by providing the new member with information and opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills. The rest of it depends on patience, understanding and involvement.

5. Encouraging evaluation of the meetings

A Catholic school board that regularly conducts a self-evaluation will have a better chance at keeping the vision and mission alive. A few

minutes of discussion before the final prayer can alleviate many potential problems. Talking about how the meeting went can help all members, particularly new members.

It is far better to discuss these items as a group than it is to talk about them as you leave the meeting or complain to your spouse when you get home. From time to time a written self-evaluation may also prove to be invaluable.

These five steps should help any group of Catholic board members work together in Christ more effectively.

Appendix D

Board By-laws: The Key to Productive Meeting

Catholic school boards are not required to follow any particular rules of procedure in the conduct of their meetings, except those stated in their board by-laws, it is strongly suggested that a board utilizes *Robert's Rules of Order*. The bylaws must be written and distributed to all members of the school board and to committee members. They are necessary for productive meetings because they allow all members of the board, even the newest members, to understand how the board has agreed to operate as a unified body.

In addition, these written procedures allow the board to focus on board work – the ends, not the administrative means. A board that follows clear, written procedures is able to fulfill its important leadership role by focusing on mission, values and beliefs, and high priority goals, thereby creating a clear vision for the future of the school as stated in the six Foundational Principles of Effective Governance (see Appendix A).

To assure that board meetings are productive and that the board focuses on its governance work, every board should have by-laws addressing operating procedures in the following areas:

Agendas

- **Who is responsible for developing meeting agendas?** Usually this duty is assigned to the principal in consultation with the board chairperson.
- **Will the board use a consent agenda to address items such as approval of agenda, approval of minutes, and second readings of policy updates that require no discussion on the part of the board?** Many boards find that using a consent agenda leaves more time for governance work.
- **How do board members suggest inclusions for the agenda?** Policy should give clear guidance.

- **How and when will copies of the agenda and supporting materials be distributed to board members?** This must be done in a timely manner, at least ten days in advance of meetings, so

that board members arrive at the meeting prepared to have meaningful discussions about the matters at hand.

Voting

- **Will the sequence for casting votes be rotated, or will the board follow another sequence such as by rank according to office, or by length of service?** In groups as small as school boards, it is not necessary that the board chairperson vote last, or only to break a tie.
- **Will board members be allowed to request that their vote be recorded and to append a statement to the minutes explaining the vote?** If the board allows this privilege, it should be clearly stated in policy so there are no misunderstandings.
- **Will board members be allowed to change their votes before the chairperson announces the results?** If the board allows this it should be clearly stated in policy so that each member knows that he or she has the option to change his or her vote after further consideration of the matter.

Communications

- **How will board members respond to questions and complaints from staff members, parents and community members?** Board policy should direct members to refer the person to the appropriate level of authority.
- **How will board members communicate with one another between meetings?** E-mail messages

between and among board members must be limited to disseminating information. Such messages must not involve discussions of school business.

- **Who will the board designate as its spokesperson?** This duty is often, but not always, given to the board chairperson. The principal is the spokesperson for the school, but the board should agree upon who is designated to speak for the board itself.

Other areas that should be addressed in the board by-laws include the following:

- **Membership:** The number of members (appointed and ex-officio), the nomination and acceptance process, eligibility, length of term of office, number of times term may be renewed, loss of membership, resignations, and vacancies.
- **Authority:** The school board as consultative advisory to the pastor and principal.

- **Officers:** The number of officers and their titles, length of term, eligibility, the process and timeline to appoint the officer, and their duties.
- **Committees:** Executive, standing and ad hoc, function, meetings, membership
- **Conflict of interest**
- **Indemnity**
- **Amendments:** Procedures
- **Relationships to other groups**
- **Meetings:** How often, where, when, notification, open or closed, how community members address the board, special meetings, rules of procedure, order of business, quorum.

Well considered board by-laws that are clearly written and easily accessible to board members and committee members will assure that board meetings go smoothly and that the board has ample time to attend to its governance duties.