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The Role of Administration and Board in Policy Development, Implementation, and Review

Boards involving lay people in the governance of Catholic schools in the United States began in the 1970s shortly after the end of Vatican Council II. Prior to that, lay involvement in the affairs of the Church was not welcomed. Within the “Church as the People



of God,” as proclaimed by the documents of Vatican II, early models of education/school boards, councils, commissions, etc., sometimes resulted in less than satisfactory experiences, especially for the lay people who volunteered to participate in good faith in the governance of their Catholic school. Roles and procedures were often not well defined, especially those surrounding the powers to recommend or make policy for the school.

Now in 2018, school governance bodies involving lay persons (collectively called “boards” in this *Letter*) have evolved generally into three major types: Consultative (Advisory) Boards, Boards with Limited Jurisdiction, and various forms of Corporate Boards. **These types of boards have the following generally defined characteristics regarding the policy function:**

1. **Consultative (Advisory) Boards:** Formulate or recommend policy. All policies require the approval or ratification of the pastor, (arch)bishop, or other owner.
2. **Boards of Limited Jurisdiction** (Alternate terminology: Boards with Delegated Responsibility or Specified Jurisdiction): Govern the school/make policy in specific areas subject to certain decisions reserved to, delegated by, or specified by the pastor, (arch)bishop, or other owner that require approval.

3. **Corporate Boards:** Organized by groups of individuals (sometimes religious orders) under the laws of a state seeking recognition from the local (arch)bishop as Catholic schools. The board is the ultimate governing authority in all policy areas with the exception of those (mainly doctrinal areas) reserved to the (arch)bishop by Canon Law.

Adapted and condensed from A Primer on Education Governance in the Catholic Church, 2nd Ed. 2009

It is the considered opinion of Catholic School Management that the most successful Catholic schools today have effective governance bodies that allow for **significant lay involvement** in the leadership and overall mission of the school. This is especially true in providing sound policy guidance for the school, a critical and normative function of a Catholic school board. A board's success will be influenced by its **policy actions** in support of the operation of the school and especially in shaping its future. Such actions must be based on **solid processes for developing, implementing, monitoring, and reviewing policies**.

DEFINITIONS

Policy is loosely described herein as the **formal actions of the board** within its operating framework: advisory, limited jurisdiction, or corporate. It can consist of formal policy resolutions, tuition rate-setting, budgets, initiatives, capital projects, strategic plans, etc. – all actions of the board. A policy is a brief declaration of principle that expresses the board's expectations. Policy is a general guide for discretionary action by the professional educational administrator. It must be sufficiently broad to allow for professional discretion, but narrow enough to give clear direction to the administrator. If a policy answers the questions: "what is to be done, who is to do it, and when," it is probably too narrow in scope to be a board policy. It is likely an administrative rule, regulation, procedure, or guideline. Ensuring clarity of understanding as to the difference between policy and rules, regulations, procedures, or guidelines is often at the heart of understanding the role of the board and administration in policy development, implementation, and review.

Policy formulation is a critical function of the board. Board policy formulation proceeds naturally from a good school improvement (accreditation) process and a strong strategic plan; therefore, effective policy formulation expresses the board's vision for school programs and aligns with a school's strategic plan. Ideally, board members listen to stakeholders and administration and reflect the needs or vision of the school community in policy.

Policy best practices:

- Policies are developed only for the school ministry.
- Policies must be aligned with parish, (arch)diocesan, or owner policies, church law, civil law; and (arch)diocesan, state, and regional school accreditation requirements.
- Policies should be forward-looking and designed to guide the future activities of the school, in keeping with the board's role in visioning the future rather than reviewing the past.
- Policies guide the administration in achieving the objectives of the strategic plan.
- The board advocates strategic leadership more than administrative detail in policies.
- Policies are monitored and reviewed by the board annually.
- The board advises and leads with policies; the administrator implements policies using professional discretion.
- Policies should not be made in reaction to crises.

Sample Board Policy Statement

Passenger vans designed to hold 15 passengers have been shown to have an extremely high propensity for rollover accidents. Therefore, schools are hereby prohibited from using 15-passenger vans for transporting students or other passengers.

Sample Administrative Rules

1. Except as stated in administrative rule #2, no new or used 15-passenger vans are to be purchased, leased, rented, or otherwise used by the schools after the promulgation date of this policy at any time, for any purpose.
2. Schools that currently own or lease 15-passenger vans must eliminate the use of these vehicles no later than the end of the current lease or by August 0000, whichever is earlier.
3. Passenger vehicles purchased by schools after the promulgation date of this policy, should either be designed for 12 or fewer passengers or, preferably, qualify under state law as a bus....

THE PLANNING AND POLICY COMMITTEE

Most work of the board is accomplished more effectively in committees than by “the committee of the whole”; therefore, Catholic School Management recommends that boards have a Planning and Policy Committee that works to assist the administration in the formulation of a long-range strategic plan; to monitor the strategic plan and review objectives for possible policy; and to assist in the formulation of policy to guide the administration, especially in institutional matters: finance, facilities, development/advancement, and faith community affairs. Membership of this committee often includes individuals with expertise in the legal profession as well as those with experience in school administration. The Committee’s **policy responsibilities** include:

- To review with the administration the annual planning objectives for possible policy implications;
- To research and draft policy language to submit to the board;
- To conduct consultation on proposed policy as appropriate;
- To call for the evaluation of newly promulgated policy (usually 6-9 months later);
- To review **annually** with the administration all policies for timelines and appropriateness to the school program (typically in the fall, inclusive of all school handbooks).

POLICY: DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

Most policy begins with a resolution by the board.

A resolution is a formally written motion or recommendation for adoption that sets forth a concise statement of intent by the recommending administrator, committee, or member. Most resolutions to adopt or recommend a formal policy should have two or three “readings” before the board, allowing ample time for discussion and amendment before a formal vote or consensus is taken and the required approval is sought. Electronic communication can expedite such processes and should be provided for within the board bylaws.



Policy Model: Boards should adopt policy models that fit their local situations and governance framework and allow for effective promulgation. A sample model for a policy includes:

1. **General Policy Statement:** States the expectations of the board in broad, general terms (see sample).
2. Reference to the **Administrative Rules** to implement the policy: In general, the rules or specifics for implementing the policy should ideally be written in the same time frame as the policy and shared with the board before implementation. However, the reality is that many rules are implemented through handbooks, guides, contracts, budgets, plans, or other documents, and publication may not correspond to the policy time frame. The administration should always share the details of how a policy is being implemented with the board, and the board should monitor policy for this reason as well.
3. **Application:** This section lists the affected parties: persons, groups, entities to which the policy applies.

4. **History/Rationale:** This section references possible earlier versions of the policy and significant changes made, legal or canonical considerations, etc., and states why the board felt it was necessary to formulate the policy at this time.
5. Reference to **Policy Guidance:** This section may provide tips on how the policy is to be implemented by staff. Guidance may appear in faculty handbooks or other documents and may simply be referenced in this section. **The following example is part of the policy guidance for a policy and rules on “Photographs and Personal Information”:**

EXAMPLE: People may have legitimate concerns about disclosure of images. This policy and rules provide an opportunity for parents, staff, volunteers, etc., to allow the release of their likenesses in a general way (annual passive consent), meaning a person or parent [guardian] does not object to release of such images in writing. An example: A student is a member of the band. A school photographer takes pictures of the entire band. The group picture is then placed in a yearbook without any personal identifying information. This would be covered by passive consent and no separate release would be necessary...

An owner ratification process is recommended for all advisory boards and boards of limited jurisdiction. When an advisory board recommends a policy or a board of limited jurisdiction proposes action in one of the areas reserved to the owner (pastor, (arch)bishop, order, or other), the proposed policy should be sent to the owner in writing for formal ratification to avoid any misunderstanding. But, there should be no surprises. Owners should be consulted in advance on proposals, before they are asked to sign-off. Although, this may take time, especially if the policy proposal involves an (arch)diocese, order, or other off-site owner; procedures should be implemented and roles assigned to make certain the ratification process is completed in a timely and effective manner.

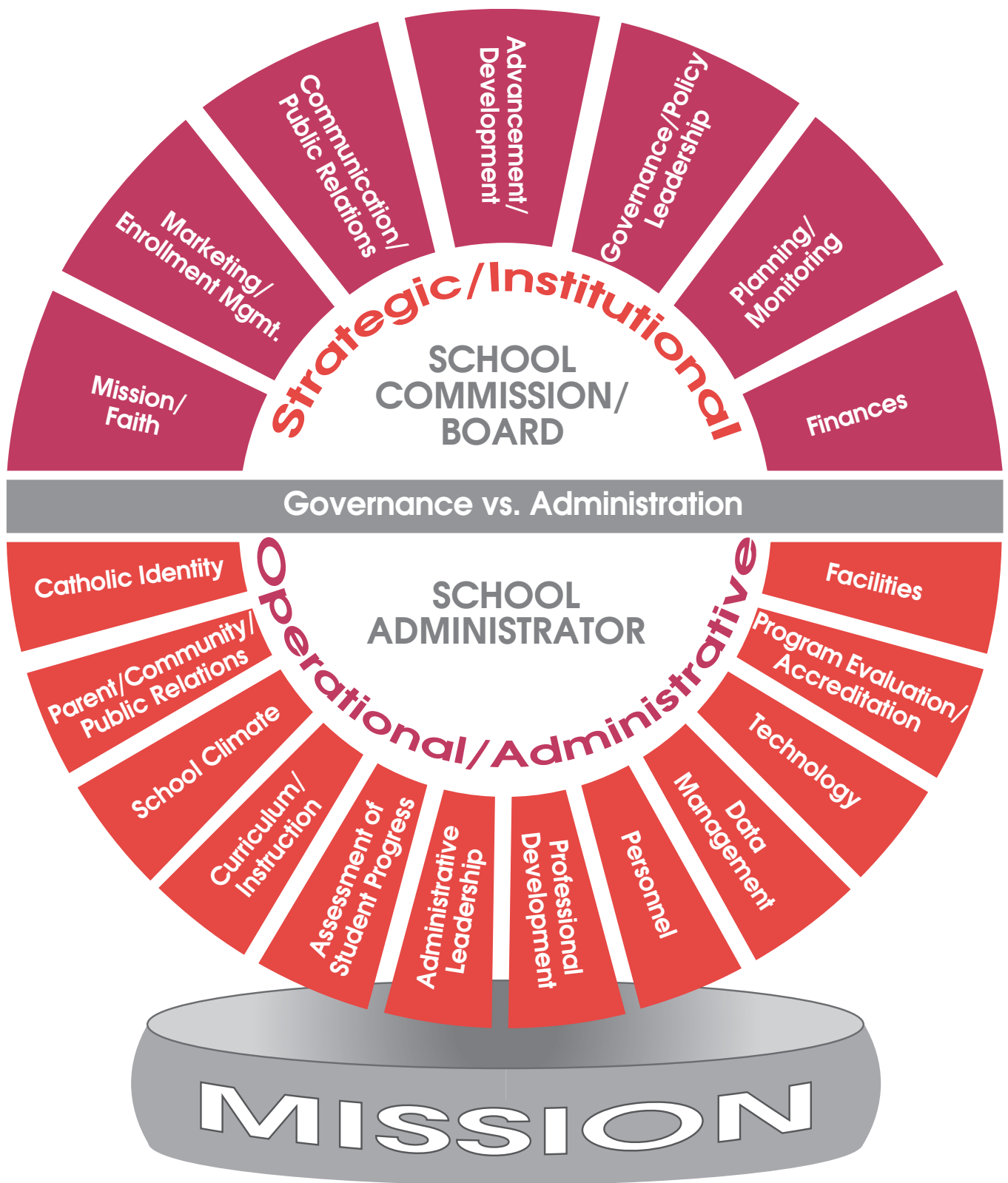
POLICY: MONITORING AND REVIEW

A **combination of ongoing monitoring and annual reviewing of policies** on the fall board calendar may be the best way to ensure that policies remain relevant. Depending on the content and scope of the policy, monitoring and review may involve the committee meeting with administration, affected faculty and staff, parents and other stakeholders, and even older students in some cases. The committee should assess impact and relevancy of the policy as well as whether it is meeting its intended purposes and bring recommendations for change to the entire board. Many policies are routine and, therefore, easily reviewed. Others such as budget and tuition proposals/policies will receive immediate review and evaluation from many sources if financial processes are truly transparent. It may be that the annual parent satisfaction survey is also an appropriate vehicle through which to monitor and assess the implementation of new policies within a school community.

POLICY: ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES, AND COMMUNICATION

The chart on the next page illustrates the preferred relationship between the board and the chief school administrator (board administrative officer) concerning their respective responsibilities and roles especially regarding policy. **The board should be mainly concerned with the strategic and institutional side** of the educational mission and **the administrator should be mainly concerned with the day-to-day operation, policy implementation, administrative and educational tasks** of the school.

The “divide” in the model indicates an understanding that **the roles of governance and administration are complementary, but not interchangeable**. Therefore, especially in those policy areas that lie closer to the “divide,” the board and administrator must “cross over carefully” and work closely and collaboratively together to address issues of mutual interest and concern.* Board members should not be involved in curriculum and instruction, assessment of student progress, or hiring of personnel, etc.



*An EXAMPLE of working across the “divide”: In the area of program evaluation and accreditation, the board may formulate a policy calling for an evaluation and/or invite an accrediting agency to visit the school. While the board should participate and be interviewed by the visiting team, the bulk of the preparation for the evaluation will normally be performed by the administration and internal staff team. When the results of the evaluation or accreditation are presented, the board should work closely with administration to address any findings that may have policy implications while exercising great caution to not dictate any procedural or administrative rules for implementation of policy.



About the author ...

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G. Joseph (Joe) Peters has most recently served as Associate Executive Director for Catholic Education in the Archdiocese of Indianapolis.

Mr. Peters also headed a three-year project with Catholic School Management that resulted in the restructuring of the governance and administration of six interparochial high schools. During the project, high school enrollment grew by 14 percent and with capital campaigns, the schools realized over \$11.6 million in development revenue. The schools' aggregate development income rose by 555 percent.

Mr. Peters holds a Bachelor of Science and a Master of Education in Administration from Ohio University and has done extensive post-graduate and certification work.

Mr. Peters has served Catholic School Management and its clients since 1998 providing direct guidance in the areas of school administration, administrative structures, administrative span of control, team-building, ownership, governance, private school law, clinical supervision/performance appraisal, and school safety.

The chief administrator of the school is normally the administrative officer of the board and is the only administrator who is required to report to and consult directly with the board. **The administrative officer provides professional leadership to the board** and should be expected to support or oppose board policy actions based on professional grounds and guide the board to appropriate solutions. The administrative officer may also suggest policy direction to the board based on the needs of the school. It is the responsibility of the chief administrator to be aware of all (arch)diocesan, state, or owner policies and rules and to share these with the board as necessary in the process of formulating policy. The administrative officer formulates administrative rules or regulations as necessary to implement policy (i.e., in a school handbook or other documents). This is an administrative prerogative, but it should not be done in a vacuum. Like policy, such rules and regulations must align with board, (arch)diocesan or owner policies, church law, and civil law.

Effective, ongoing, two-way communication between the board and administration about policy, procedures, rules, and regulations is extremely important as is a healthy respect for and understanding of appropriate roles and responsibilities. In the most effective Catholic schools, administration and board work within a collaborative spirit based upon the religious mission of the school. At the most basic level, it is through policy that a school protects the students entrusted to its care as well as protecting itself from various potential threats to its long-term viability. Therefore, a proactive approach by the board in collaboration with school administration is imperative in order to fulfill this duty of care for a school's legacy as well as its future.

This *Catholic School Management Letter* is based mostly upon the *Catholic School Commission and Board Guide* as revised, rewritten, and promulgated in the fall of 2016 for the Catholic schools of the Archdiocese of Indianapolis by a team of writers and reviewers. Used with permission.



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