

## POLICY

Mission-directed governance encourages the school board and school head to lead the Christian school with joy and confidence as they share vision, unity, and accountability. They work together to ensure students have a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord and are trained to advance Christ's kingdom in their personal lives, families, churches, and communities.

Policies provide clear criteria and directions for actions and decisions. Some policies are established by the school board and some policies are established by the school head as administrative policies. There can be confusion as to what policies are appropriate for each to make. Let's try to clarify these issues.

### Purposes of Board and Administrative Policies

The major principle to understand is that whoever establishes a policy is authorized to change that policy. A board policy is established by the board and can be changed only by the board. An administrative policy can be established or changed by the school head.

The school board establishes policies available in a board policy handbook in the following categories:

1. Board policies reinforce the positions agreed upon in a covenant with the owners, whether a church, an association, or an individual. These policies should include the mission statement, nonnegotiables of the school, and other basic components of organization and authority.
2. Board policies delineate the school's statement of faith, philosophy, and core curricular principles that define the goals of student learning. Board policies describe what to measure.
3. Board policies define how the board governs itself; for example, they list the minimum criteria to serve on the board. Board policies define the relationship of the board with the school head.
4. Board policies give direction to the school head for operations, management, and expectations for leading the school.

The school head establishes administrative policies to ensure the operations of the school align with board policies. Administrative policies generally constitute the family

handbook and employee handbook, and are evident in various documents related to employment or admissions.

### Should the Board Write Policies That Direct the School Head?

Some boards are very hesitant to establish policies that direct the school head. The assumption is that the school head can be free to lead with vision and action only if the board is passive. To avoid the accusation of micromanaging, the board restricts its oversight to making sure that school head actions are legal, ethical, and in accordance with common industry or professional standards. This view tacitly assumes the board should stay out of education and concern itself only with issues such as facilities, finances, school image, and holding the school head accountable.

Under mission-directed governance, board policies directing the school head will clarify expectations. The board gives the school head freedom to establish administrative policies that describe the methods and processes for the implementation and management involved in achieving the mandates.

### The Board Needs to Govern Education

Mission-directed governance uniquely expects the school board to lead in achieving the school's philosophy of education by establishing policies and defining the goals of student learning. Education is not neutral or assumed. The purpose of Christian education is to nurture and train students to become mature disciples of Jesus Christ, prepared for works of service. The curriculum should be deliberately designed to influence and deepen student vision, worldview, discernment, and critical thinking, as well as shape relationships. Therefore, the board should establish policies that define the core curricular principles, approve standards of measurement, set standards for school head accountability, and practice strategic planning.

The school head will provide administrative policies and work with the faculty to design the details of curriculum—scope and sequence, lesson plans, measurement strategies, and educational experiences—that will effectively produce the student characteristics articulated by the school board policies.

### Necessary Board Policies for Christian Schools

In addition to directing student learning, the board should establish policies that define the overarching direction for

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personnel, student life, finance, admissions, and facilities/health/safety to ensure each category is accomplishing the school's philosophy. The school head then establishes administrative policies that direct employees.

Remember, if there is no board direction, the school head may make unaided decisions. Here are a few examples of decisions made without board approval by various school heads who thought these actions were in the best interest of the school:

- Modify the school's statement of faith
- Sell a portion of the school property
- Change the school's mascot
- Hire a teacher who did not agree with all of the articles of the statement of faith
- Give an individual teacher a higher salary than peers
- Invest the school's money in hedge funds and short sales
- Reduce the tuition of an individual family
- Change the school's annual calendar to accommodate year-round classes

### How to Prevent Misunderstandings

Here are a few suggestions to prevent overlap, gaps, or conflict between board policies and administrative policies.

1. The board should make policies that give overarching direction. The administrator will make administrative policies directing the staff in complying with the board direction. The board needs to ask, "Is this an area in which the school head should have the freedom to establish administrative policies alone, or should the board provide an overarching policy?"

2. Board policies that affect the management and goals can be written addressed to the school head, like so:

903.1 The school head shall establish rental requirements and fees including the following....

3. The board may find it wise to establish some board policies with further detail.

For example, the school's position on human sexuality and marriage has implications in curriculum, admissions, and employment. It can even impact facility construction and rental. Keeping these controversial issues under board control allows the board to take a thoughtful position that protects the head as well as the school.

903.1.1 Any rental use of the facilities must be compatible with the mission and identity of the school.

903.1.2 No activities or use of \_\_\_\_ school facilities or grounds is permitted on Sunday except for religious services, programs, religious outreaches, or church activities.

4. Board policies should specify proposals the school head is required to submit to the board for approval: for example, the annual school calendar and the annual budget.
5. The board should specify the reports and information the school head should regularly submit to the board, such as financial documents. The board should require reports on school programs to demonstrate how these programs meet designated measurement standards and are in compliance with board policies.
6. The board should discuss proposed board policies with the school head before adoption. This allows the head of school and the board to consider the implications for the school program and what administrative policies may be needed to comply with the board policy.

In these times of dramatic change, it is necessary for school leaders to work together to purposefully advance Christ's kingdom through Christian education.

**Leonard Stob**, having retired from 40 years of leadership in Christian schools, continues to be involved in education by helping Christian schools to articulate their mission and produce consistent, purposeful, and mission-directed programs. Len is recognized for designing the mission-directed governance model that allows boards to lead with vision, unity, and accountability. He and his wife, Sharon, love to visit their married children and their families, including Len and Sharon's 15 grandchildren.

How does a school identify and protect its foundational beliefs? How does a school develop and promote its vision and mission? How does a school identify the roles of those in authority, determine the process for decision making, and ensure accountability? Leonard's book, *Mission Directed: Governing Your Christian School with Purpose* introduces, describes, and advocates for the mission-directed governance model. It is available at [purposefuldesign.com](http://purposefuldesign.com).

