PURPOSE OF LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD

Catholic school boards are advisory and consultative to the Principal/Pastor (parish schools) or to the Principal in Archdiocesan regional schools. Boards assist the Principal/Pastor (parish schools) or the Principal in Archdiocesan regional schools to recommend policy, identify and articulate the educational needs and aspirations of the school and school community. These goals become the basis for program objectives, policies, and action plans for the educational program.

MEMBERSHIP

Serving on a Catholic school board is a ministry. Members provide a service for the Catholic school community. Members should never be motivated to serve on a board for the purpose of accomplishing personal agenda items. A member who offers to serve needs to be open-minded, and use data to make informed decisions. The member must keep in mind the overall good of the school as the basis upon which to make decisions. A board member has no authority as an individual. Only when the Board meets as a group, does the person function as a board member. Board members do not serve as conduits to the administration for parents/guardians who have questions, complaints and/or concerns. Board members must always refer such calls to the appropriate person. An explicit chain-of-command must be followed or parents/guardians will not be communicating with the appropriate school representative.

Persons in the following categories may **NOT** be considered as candidates for the Board:

- Employees of the parish and school, whether teaching or non-teaching personnel;
- Spouses, children or siblings of employees of the parish/school;
- More than one member of an immediate family at a time;
- Board members or professional educators of another school or school system;

Membership of the Board should be at least five members and no more than eleven. The process of **discernment**, not appointment, should be instituted when choosing board members. The Board should reflect the cultural diversity of the school served. The Pastor, ex officio, is a member of the Board, and he possesses the right of approval (or the right of veto in parish schools). The Principal, ex officio, serves as the school administrator for the Board. In Archdiocesan regional schools, a minimum of one pastor selected from the supporting parishes serves as a school board member.

**Discernment** is a process associated with the virtue of prudence, by which we try to decide what God wills us to do in particular circumstances. Discernment should be used as an operating principle for boards. Discernment is the preferred method for making decisions such as major policy and new board members. Discernment is also a formal process for filling board seats whereby those with knowledge of the work of the Board and its long-term goals select the new members based on the school’s needs.
TERM OF OFFICE

Each selected member may not serve more than two terms of three years. The terms of the members should overlap so that a maximum of no more than one third are leaving the board at any one time. This allows for stability and continuity of the Board. A resigning member’s uncompleted term should be filled through discernment. First consideration to fulfill an uncompleted term should be given to prospective members previously discerned and favorably received, but not selected to serve. Board members who serve are subject to removal by the Pastor (parish schools) or the Archbishop, or his designee, in Archdiocesan regional schools.

OFFICERS

The officers of the Board should include a President, Vice-President and Secretary. Any member of the Board is eligible to hold office. The process of discernment is recommended for the selection of officers. A platform statement given by those interested in serving as officers may be beneficial to the discernment process. Officers are subject to removal by the Pastor (parish schools) or the Archbishop, or his designee, in Archdiocesan regional schools.

The President presides at all regular and special meetings, works with the Principal to prepare the agenda prior to all meetings, appoints all committees unless otherwise specified by the Board or the Pastor (parish schools) or the Principal in Archdiocesan regional schools, and performs all duties incident to the office of a President and such other duties as from time to time may be assigned to him/her by the Pastor (parish schools) or Board in Archdiocesan regional schools.

The Vice-President, in the absence of or at the request of the President, performs the duties and exercises the responsibilities of the President.

The Secretary is responsible for recording and distributing accurate minutes of meetings, posting the agenda, handling correspondence, preserving reports and documents and submitting to the Superintendent a current roster of local board members. Existing or revised by-laws and/or school board constitutions should be submitted to the Archdiocesan School Board for review.
COMMITTEES

Subject to the approval of the Principal/Pastor (parish schools) or the Board in Archdiocesan regional schools, the Board may provide for such committees, as it deems advisable and may discontinue committees at its discretion.

The Board may need only two or three “standing committees,” (e.g., finance, parent/student complaint and public relations). The Board may appoint “ad hoc” (temporary) committees when the need arises. Members of committees may be drawn from the board membership and from the community at large. The chairperson of standing committees must be a board member. The President of the Board and the Principal shall be ex-officio members of all committees.

Each Parish Board of Education and Archdiocesan Regional School Board shall establish a standing student/parent complaint committee for the purpose of hearing student/parent complaints. The standing complaint committee should consist of three people who are appointed for a one-year term and approved by the Principal and Pastor. School employees are not eligible to serve on this committee.

The Principal in consultation with the board finance committee will prepare a balanced school budget in terms of expenditures and revenues with a rationale that justifies any item required or requested. A copy of the budget will be sent to the Superintendent for review. School accounting requires a separate school bank account from the parish account. The Principal and Pastor (parish schools) or Principal and a school board member in Archdiocesan regional schools will be the authorized school check signers.

MEETINGS

Meetings should be held at a regular time and place each month except for July, in which there is no meeting. Meetings should last no longer than one or two hours. Special meetings may be called only by the Pastor, Principal or President with the approval of the Principal/Pastor (parish schools) or Principal in Archdiocesan regional schools.

The agenda should be made jointly by the Principal and the board president. Board members should contact the principal ten working days prior to the schedule meeting to include agenda items. The secretary of the Board should send the Agenda and all related information to the board members seven to ten working days prior to the scheduled meeting. It is suggested that procedures for board meetings follow Robert’s Rule of Order Revised.
Anyone may address the Board provided he/she has given a written request to the Principal ten working days prior to scheduled meeting. Presentations to the Board should:

- Have a time limit.
- Nothing of a confidential nature should be addressed such as discipline problems or personnel issues. The President or Pastor may at any time stop the presentation if it is of a sensitive nature.
- No discussions will follow the presentation.
- Response will be given in writing by the Board President within five working days.

If a topic of a confidential nature is allowed by the Pastor or Board President, the regular meeting is adjourned, all guests are asked to leave temporarily and the meeting is re-opened in an “executive” or “closed” session. Anything said in the executive session is confidential and is not subject to disclosure unless required by law. Any breach of confidentiality may result in a member being removed from the Board. When the executive session is adjourned, the open meeting is then begun anew. The minutes, as recorded by the Board’s secretary, simply reflect that a discussion was held in an executive session. The specifics are not listed in the minutes. Agendas and previous meeting minutes should be readily available at the school and/or on the school Web site.

**DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Members of an education board shall show their acceptance of responsibility as members by regular attendance and participation at meetings and activities sponsored by the Board. Members shall furthermore participate in at least one training session a year that is specifically designed by the Galveston-Houston Archdiocesan Board of Education for local boards. The Board chair must provide an orientation detailing the work of the board for all new members.

It is extremely important to understand that Catholic school boards are NOT like public school boards. Public school boards hire and fire, approve expenditures and mandate the implementation of procedures and programs. Catholic school boards assist the Pastor (parish schools) or the Superintendent in Archdiocesan regional schools in hiring the Principal. It is important for board members to understand that a board member’s assignment is to give advice and not to become involved in the day-to-day operation of the school.
Boards must strive to reach **consensus** on all issues, and voting should not occur. However, healthy discussion on issues can and should take place.

**Consensus** does not imply one hundred percent agreement, instead consensus means that all members will support the decision reached by the Board as a whole. When consensus is attained, everyone agrees to the decision and is willing to take ownership of that decision. Consensus is achieved when there is general agreement or accord among the members of the group. This is an approach to group decision-making. It presents an opportunity for all to be heard and avoids a “win/lose” posture that voting promotes. Consensus results in growth and is instrumental in building community within a group.

**FINANCES**

A major task for the Board is to provide advice and guidance in the area of finances. Approving tuition rates and salary increases for the staff is the pastor’s (parish schools) decision, but the Pastor will rely upon solid information provided to him by the Principal and the Board to make the most prudent decision. The finance committee will work closely with the Principal to create budget drafts for the Pastor (parish schools) and the remainder of the board. Once a final draft of the school’s budget is prepared, all of the board members must support the draft being presented to the Pastor, Parish Council or in an Archdiocesan regional school the Superintendent. All questions from the committee members should have been asked at the meeting where the budget draft was finalized.

In Archdiocesan regional schools, the final draft of the budget will be finalized by the Board and Principal, with the approval of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.

**Note:** All proposed school budgets must be balanced.

Following certain guidelines will make the budget process much easier for all. Income (tuition and fees) from parents/guardians should at least cover the cost of employees’ salaries and benefits. Following this guideline, an overestimated fundraising year will not result in payroll not being met.

Board members need to understand the importance of the per pupil cost (PPC). PPC is the amount of money needed to educate one child. The PPC is derived from dividing the total costs to run the school on a yearly basis (building additions and renovations are not figured into these costs) by the number of students enrolled in the school. Once the PPC is determined, other funds are considered to balance the budget.

Tuition should be raised a minimum of three percent per year. Raising the tuition any less than three percent will risk not having sufficient revenue to cover expenses.

While care must be taken to understand the financial plight of parents/guardians, the needs of the school and school staff must also be considered and discussed. Staff members should be given at least cost of living raises each year. The Archdiocese provides a minimum salary scale.
Boards should also assist the principal in providing communication to parents/guardians about the financial status of the school, as well as emphasize to parents that tuition and fees paid do not cover the entire per pupil cost (PPC). The difference between actual tuition and PPC will demonstrate the amount of financial aid that each family is receiving. Each school should provide tuition assistance for families that demonstrate a need.

When building a budget, begin by reviewing the vision of the school first then start with expenses. Project all possible increases for utilities, operational costs and instructional materials. Project different raises for staff members, including health costs and other benefits. Prepare two or three different expense statements based on different percentage increases in staff salaries. Next, provide a conservative number of potential students. Experiment with different tuition increases to assess the income needed to meet the various expense drafts of the budget. If the tuition gets too high to balance the budget drafts, then the salary increases will need to be less generous in order to provide for an anticipated fund balance.

**SCHOOL ACCOUNTING**

Financial Responsibilities of the Principal include ensuring that:

- The school is required to have a separate school bank account;
- School accounting is kept separate from parish accounting;
- Principal and pastor (parish schools) are the only authorized school check signers;
- Principal and a school board member in Archdiocesan regional schools are the only authorized school check signers;
- School board member(s) are assigned to offer financial advice and to review monthly bank reconciliation;
- Use pre-numbered purchase orders;
- Principal initials and dates all purchase orders, indicating approval;
- Bookkeeper matches packing slips to purchase orders;
- Bookkeeper compares invoice to purchase order/packing slip for accurate price and quantity;
- Bookkeeper prepares checks including supporting documentation for principal’s signature;
- Principal verifies accuracy of payroll including time cards for hourly employees;
- Principal ensures accurate and timely deposits of payroll withholding tax;
- Principal ensures compliance with accounting procedures of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston;
- Principal is responsible for the budget preparation, beginning in September of each year, with assistance from the board finance committee;
- Budget is finalized by January 1 of each year, and a copy is sent to Pastor (parish schools) and the parish council for review;
• Archdiocesan regional schools will send the final budget to the superintendent for review; and
• School sets and publishes a tuition rate for the next year.

SHORT AND LONG-TERM PLANNING

The various committees and the board as a whole should be actively involved in assisting the principal in the role of short and long-term planning. The Texas Catholic Conference Education Department requires each school, under the direction of the local governing body and leadership, to have a written site-based long-range strategic plan. An outline of this plan follows:

Long-Range Strategic Plan

• Is a process to develop both long-term vision and goals for the school with specific interim steps to reach these goals;
• Flows from the school’s mission statement;
• Encompasses a period of 3-5 years;
• Outlines realistic operational and strategic goals;
• Addresses areas such as Catholic identity, enrollment, personnel, curriculum, facilities, development (including marketing and public relations), ownership, governance, administration, finances, and any other needs specific to the school community; and
• Involves an annual review of the school’s mission statement, philosophy, goals and objectives as well as a review of the plan’s goals and action steps, with any necessary adjustments being made including goals. These plans will provide a road map for all involved in the parish/school community.

PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL GROWTH PROCESS

The Principal will provide the Board with the Archdiocesan Professional Growth Process and review the document with them. The timeline should be followed carefully. The Professional Growth Process has been designed to assist principals in growing professionally, spiritually and personally.

The Professional Growth Process should affirm and validate what the Principal is doing well, and the process should pinpoint areas where improvement could and should be made. When completing the Professional Growth Process form, a board member should not base his/her opinions on single or isolated incidents.
Rather, the board member should look at patterns and attempt to accurately gauge the principal’s effectiveness during a given period.

Board members should always provide very specific examples when highlighting a principal’s strengths or when listing areas where improvement is necessary. Generalities do not provide someone with a basis for continuing positive behavior or for correcting areas where improvement is necessary. Only when specifics are shared, can a principal truly gain by the Professional Growth Process.

The Principal Professional Growth Process affirms and validates the principal’s areas of strength and assists him/her in identifying areas of growth. The process aids the principal in establishing goals for the school year and fosters ongoing dialogue between the principal and pastor and/or in an archdiocesan regional school between principal, school board and superintendent. The Pastor, as the employer, is solely responsible for contract decisions. In an Archdiocesan regional school, the Superintendent is responsible for contract decisions.

Each board member completes the Principal Professional Growth Form and submits the form to the Principal. The Principal and Pastor meet to review these forms, as well as faculty and staff forms.
### SAMPLE: SCHOOL BOARD PLANNING CALENDAR

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>July</th>
<th>Aug</th>
<th>Sept</th>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting optional</td>
<td>Planning meeting</td>
<td>Budget committee</td>
<td>Budget report</td>
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<td>Budget report</td>
<td>Catholic School Week</td>
<td>Principal Growth Process</td>
<td>Discernment Planning</td>
<td>Strategic Plan Review</td>
<td>New Board Members attend</td>
<td>Goal setting</td>
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<td>Budget committee</td>
<td>Development Marketing committee</td>
<td>Area review/ Teacher presentation</td>
<td>Area review/ Teacher presentation</td>
<td>Social</td>
<td>Finalize budget and set tuition for next year</td>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Policy review</td>
<td>Discernment implemented</td>
<td>Selection New Officers</td>
<td>Planning and Committee assigned</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plan for Catholic School Week</td>
<td>Development Marketing Committee Report</td>
<td>New board members – Search committee</td>
<td>Board Self-evaluation</td>
<td>Principal Annual School review</td>
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### Monthly

1. Reports from Principal, Pastor, finance, development, and marketing committees.
2. Assign different members to provide monthly opening prayer.
GENERAL POLICY AREAS

A. Finance and financial reports.
B. Use of the school or parish facilities.
C. Maintenance of facilities.
D. Uniforms.

GUIDELINES FOR POLICY WRITING

A. A policy is a guide for discretionary action.
   1. The issue should be clearly identified.
   2. Brainstorm for solutions so that choices are not limited.
   3. Clear guidance and room for action should be evident.

B. Policy development rests with the Board.
   1. Although the principal usually recommends development of policies, anyone may recommend that a policy be considered.
   2. All persons affected by the policy will be consulted.
   3. All policies should include clear and concise language.
   4. All factors for evaluation will be identified.

C. Local school board policies cannot conflict with Archdiocesan policies or regulations.

D. The administrator (principal) is accountable to the Board for the implementation of policy.
   1. While the board does not tell the administrator (principal) how to implement policy, it is the responsibility of the administrator to keep the Board informed on how the policy is being implemented.
   2. The Board may review policy and make suggestions for adjustments.
POLICY VS. REGULATION

A. A regulation is a specification of a required action (rules) to implement the established policy.

1. A regulation is the responsibility of the principal and relates exactly what procedure will be used to implement the policy.

Example of Policy: *School uniforms will be required for all students attending Houston Catholic Elementary School.*

Example of Regulations: *School uniforms will consist of...color, style, etc... School uniforms will be purchased at ... School uniforms will be worn each school day beginning ...*

B. In contrast to regulations, policies are broad, general, and direction-setting statements. Regulations are specific written rules for implementation. Ideally, regulations contain few loopholes. To determine whether or not the statement is a policy or a regulation, ask: “Does this statement leave room for discretionary action on the part of the administrator (principal)?” If the answer is “yes,” the statement is a policy. If it is “no,” the statement is a regulation.

C. Some policies require regulations, and other policies exist primarily to set a tone or to establish the school’s position (for example, a personnel policy calling for nondiscrimination in hiring practices). By this analogy, not every administrative regulation has to flow from policy. Some arise out of practical concerns of the need to implement applicable state or federal law; others are an outgrowth of the school or parish philosophy or tradition.

Examples of what a policy can do:

- Provide general direction to the administration.
- Anticipate and avoid crises.
- Clarify expectations for students, parents/guardians, teachers, and others.
- Reduce subjectivity, inconsistency, and arbitrariness.

Examples of what a policy cannot do:

- Control or supervise administration.
- Resolve specific problems after the fact.
- Address isolated cases or petty item.
- Substitute for programs.
Attributes of good policies are:

- Responsive to or anticipate needs of the staff, parents/guardians or students;
- Brief and to the point;
- Available and promulgated;
- Stable for long periods of time;
- Understandable;
- Systematically indexed and placed in a notebook;
- Evaluated regularly; and
- Communicated effectively and disseminated.

PROCEDURES FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT

A. The initiator of the policy, in consultation with the Principal, presents the recommendation in writing. The recommendation includes:

- A statement of the expressed need in clear and concise terms;
- A recommended solution in the form of a simple policy statement; and
- The rationale, which includes the relationship of the need, the implications and some timeline for implementation.

B. The recommended policy with the above rationale is sent to all board members before the meeting so that it can be reviewed.

C. During the meeting.

- The initiator of the policy introduces the issue;
- The chairperson assumes the members have studied the material;
- Time is given for questions and discussion; and
- The principal makes plans to survey the audiences who will be affected by the policy;

D. At the next meeting, the board has a more in depth discussion of the policy proposal, including:

- The feasibility of the policy, pros and cons are considered;
- Alternate solutions are presented and discussed;
- The Board considers who will be affected by the proposal; and
- Gather feedback from stakeholders.
E. The policy statement is now written and submitted to the Board and analyzed:

- Does the statement make sense?
- Is it clear, simple, brief and to the point?
- Does it state what is to be done?
- Is there any conflict with Archdiocesan policy? All Archdiocesan policies are automatically policies of every school and religious education programs.
- What adjustments are appropriate? and
- Can the Board reach consensus?

F. The policy statement is then given to the Pastor (parish schools) or Superintendent (Archdiocesan regional schools) for approval and signature. The signatures make the statement a policy.

G. The policy is recorded and given to the Principal to implement through regulations:

- The principal will distribute the policy and regulations to all persons affected by implementation; and
- Evaluate the policy and its implementation. Present results to the Board.

ARCHDIOCESAN GRIEVANCE ISSUES

A. Student/Parent Complaint Process

Although the Archdiocese endeavors to establish a harmonious Christian atmosphere within the schools, the Archdiocese recognizes that misunderstandings or differences of opinions sometimes occur. Ideally, such matters can be resolved informally by a parent or guardian meeting with the immediate authoritative person. If, however, the matter is not then settled to the parent or guardian’s satisfaction, the parent or guardian may make a formal complaint. A formal complaint form will be obtained from the Principal.


Employees may grieve any dispute pertaining to the application or interpretation of policies relating to employment, including any dispute pertaining to the application or interpretation of a formal employment contract, if one exists. Nothing contained herein shall be construed to vary the terms of any such employment contract or the employment-at-will relationship.
The intent of this policy is to resolve employment disputes at the lowest possible administrative level and in a cooperative Christian atmosphere. The process is not intended to be adversarial in nature. To that end, prior to using the steps set forth, the employee shall meet with his/her immediate supervisor to discuss the dispute and attempt conciliation, if at all possible. Additionally, neither the employee nor the employer shall be represented by legal counsel during any phase of the conciliation or grievance process. An Archdiocesan Uniform Appeal Process Form may be obtained from the principal.

C. Private Catholic schools in the Archdiocese shall adopt a grievance or appeal process which addresses the problem situations in an equitable and expeditious manner in keeping with the Archdiocesan Appeal Process. A copy of this process shall be sent to the Superintendent of Catholic schools.