

" New-board member packet "

Business meeting held in public;  
not a public meeting (open mike)  
Check yourself before you wreck yourself.

**Idaho School Boards Association  
Summer Leadership Institute, 2016**

**POLICY: A Function of School Board Governance**

**How Does Policy Fit With**

**1. Eight Characteristics: Highly Effective School Boards?**

Each of the characteristics listed below should be reflected either directly or indirectly (inferred) within Board policies.

**Eight Characteristics of Highly Effective Schools Boards**

1 - Vision of high expectations	5 - Data savvy
2 - Strong shared beliefs	6 - Resources are aligned & sustained
3 - Accountability driven	7 - School boards lead as united team with their superintendent
4 - Collaborative relationships developed with staff & community	8 - School boards take part in team development and training

Spend more time on policy + student achievement

Characteristic #3 - Accountability driven

Effective school boards are accountability driven, spending less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.

Definition of an effective board: "Those operating in high-achieving districts, particularly those ... making significant strides despite serving large numbers [or percentages] of disadvantaged students" (Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011).

**2. Idaho School Boards Association (ISBA) Professional Standards?**

Standards 1 through 6: Since the work of the school board is authorized and directed through the structure and guidance of established policies, all six of the ISBA standards should be reflected either directly or indirectly within the policies adopted by each governing board.

**ISBA Professional Standards for Board Members**

1 - Vision & mission	4 - Accountability
2 - Continuous improvement	5 - Community engagement
3 - Advocacy	6 - Board operations and training

ISBA Standard 4 - Accountability. The Board supports alignment of all district **policies**, operations, and programs with the district vision, mission, goals, and strategic plan while meeting students' educational needs.

**3. Idaho Code**

- a. I.C. 33-506: Grants the Board power/duty to "to make by-laws, rules and regulations for its government and that of the district..."
- b. I.C. 74-201: Requires that policy formation be done in public meetings.

**Example:** School districts and charter schools usually have policies addressing student transportation.

- Procedures for those policies are developed by administration.
- Student handbooks will have specific guidelines that are site appropriate: Elementary school, middle school, high school, etc.
- Although some guidelines and their wording may be unique to the specific school or site, they should still be aligned within approved board policy and established procedures by the district and/or school site.

### **Summary**

- **Policies** represent official actions of the board: *the ways*.
- **Procedures** are *the means* to comply with approved Board policies. They tend to be developed by district and/or site level administration.
- **Handbooks** are site-specific guidelines and requirements that reflect *how the means are implemented*. Designed for use by employees and students, handbooks should be written specifically for a targeted audience: Staff and students.

## **Policy Insights From Research and Best Practices**

### **Delagardelle, 2008**

- There are not many studies featuring effectiveness of practices by governing boards. The Lighthouse Studies are the exception.
- Lighthouse II research found that school districts made gains when Boards focus on student achievement versus administrative issues. In those situations, Boards spent significant time working on their policies.

### **Dervarics & O'Brien, 2011**

- Case studies are available that document the Board's role in the transformation of low-achieving districts to high-achieving districts.
- The Board's work with and through the superintendent in crafting, revising, and implementing policy plays a significant role in the success of students within a school district.

### **Lashway, 2002**

- Alignment of policy with student achievement efforts is considered a reform (improvement) strategy.
- Boards often have a low-key, hands-off approach to student achievement based on rationale that professionals should be making the decisions. Consequently, Boards with a low-key approach do not spend significant time working with policies related to student achievement.
- Continuous improvement and/or strategic planning commitments within policy can further support and enhance student achievement efforts.

- **Policy patterns re: role of schools boards and superintendent**
  1. A strong superintendent, trusted by the Board, tends to play a dominant role in policy making as well as in administration.
  2. A strong board without a strong sense of trust in their superintendent tends to dominate in both arenas: policy-making and administration.
  3. Superintendent and board work in policy-making and administration.
  4. Each follows the textbook definition of the roles: Board role of making policy and providing accountability oversight; superintendent role as Chief Executive Officer.
- **Preference for local control.** Despite the ups and downs of politics intersecting with school district operations, general preference among the public tends to remain with local control. (Also: Schober & Hartney, 2014).
- **Teacher discretion.** Has also narrowed significantly in the classroom based on “the centralization of testing, curriculum, and instructional policy at the state and district level” (p. 49).

#### **Governance Challenges Involving Policies**

- Determining how a Board could improve their relationship and teamwork with the current superintendent *as a strategy* for increasing their policy focus within the district and its impact on student achievement.
- Identifying and understanding risk management inconsistencies or vulnerabilities that could arise when the board, the district, the schools, the employees, and/or the students fail to stay consistent with approved board policies and established procedures.
- Determining how or could a Board member or the Board address the perception by some people that the Board does not/can not impact or influence student achievement.
- Many times reviewing policy can seem boring, unnecessary, redundant, and an exercise in futility. How can a Board, working collaboratively with their superintendent, make the policy review and policy-making process meaningful and productive for the district, especially in the areas of safety and student achievement?

**Food for Thought:** “The relationship between the school board and the superintendent is the focal point for local educational policy making. . . . Key variables influencing this relationship include the following:

- Community characteristics
- Personal characteristics of school authorities
- School government characteristics
- School system characteristics
- Type of issue
- Relevant resources” (Cistone, 2008, p. 30)

2. **Issue:** Guiding the Board's work in policy development and supporting their role with policy development.

Question: How can a Board have its arms wrapped around the system/school district without having its fingers in the day-to-day operations? In responding to this question, consider the following:

- How can the Board use its policies to guide the role of the Board, the role of the superintendent, and the roles of other staff within the system?
- How can or should the Board use its policies to address concerns, complaints, conflicts, etc., that arise among patrons in relation to the school district or site-specific issues?
- How would a Board know if and when it is on the *right path* with its governance role based on:
  - Its use of policy to guide their work
  - Their collaborative work with the superintendent
  - Student achievement within the district.

3. **Issue:** Using and defending policy as the means to reaching or maintaining higher levels of student achievement.

Question: How does one address or explain to themselves and others that governing boards impact student achievement through the Board's relationship with their superintendent, especially when highly involved with policies?

In responding to this question, consider the following:

- a. How would you explain the research findings that the Board is most likely to positively impact student achievement through their work with the superintendent and board policies?
- b. If your constituents, including teachers or staff, feel that you are spending too much time on policies, are working too closely with your superintendent, are not paying enough attention to details, how would you respond?
- c. How could the binocular approach help Board members to know when and where to intervene when concerns are raised by others: students, employees and/or stakeholders versus continue moving forward with school improvement/student achievement efforts?
- d. How would one or more of the four targeted board member characteristics impact your ability to do this work?