

Background Information

INTRODUCTION TO POLICY GOVERNANCE

Policy Governance®, authored by John Carver, PhD, applies a specific set of concepts and principles to the leadership role of boards and the board-management partnership. Under this model a board of directors, acting for its constituents:

- **Clarifies the Role of the Board...**The purpose of the board of directors, acting as the district's primary link with its 'owners', is to set policy which ensures the district achieves desired results while avoiding unacceptable conditions.
- **...and that of the Superintendent.** The Superintendent's role under Policy Governance is to achieve desired ends as defined in policy, while avoiding means (also defined in policy) which the Board considers unacceptable.
- **Follows a Disciplined Process to Balance Board/Executive Authority.** Policy Governance follows a set of principles* (written into policy) which ensure an effective balance between board and administrator authority.
- **Defines Ends for the District.** Under Policy Governance, desired results are written in policy as Ends to be achieved (accomplishing a good, for beneficiaries, at a measurable cost).
- **Delegates Authority to the Superintendent.** Unlike traditional forms of school district governance, the Policy Governance model delegates to the Superintendent all 'means' questions (how the district will get where it needs to go) which have not been limited by written policy.
- **Exercises Self-Discipline.** The board can change its policy at any time, as it has ultimate authority for the district, but it has an obligation to follow a disciplined process in carrying out that authority. Board members exercise no authority as individuals, and the board 'speaks' only via written policy, directing only the superintendent.

THE TEN PRINCIPLES OF POLICY GOVERNANCE IN A SCHOOL DISTRICT:

1. The Board stands in for constituents, those who morally 'own' the district.
2. The Board speaks with one voice, or not at all.
3. The Board directs the Superintendent via policy, expressing in writing the values of the community.
4. The Board instructs no staff except the Superintendent.
5. Policies are written for Ends (what is to be achieved) and Means (all other issues).
6. Ends policies are defined positively (telling the Superintendent what is to be achieved).
7. Means are defined negatively (what means are unacceptable, and should therefore be avoided).
8. The Board sets expectations first in terms of broadly expressed values, then through progressively more detailed policies.
9. The Board may change the level of specificity in its policies at any time.
10. The Board evaluates the Superintendent only against criteria written in policy.

These ten principles offer a simple but elegant way for a board-superintendent team to avoid problems:

- Role confusion with the boundary between responsibilities of the board and the superintendent.
- Unclear expectations by the board toward its superintendent, and vice versa.
- Lack of clarity between functions of governance, management, and leadership.
- Board decision-making at the operational level rather than at the policy level.
- Overlap between policy (presumably the board's domain) and procedure (the superintendent's).
- Tension between board and superintendent over authority reserved by the board to itself and that which is delegated to the superintendent.
- Tension among board members springing from differing perceptions about the roles of boards, superintendents, and staff and the prioritized goals toward which the district applies resources.
- Superintendent evaluation based on unknown criteria, unrelated to overall district success.

For more information on this model, see www.carvergovernance.com