

*Guidelines - Parish School
Consultative Boards
Parish Consultative Boards of
Education (August 1994)*
(Department of Catholic Schools)

C-13

Guidelines

Parish School Consultative Boards

Parish Consultative Boards of Education

Archdiocese of San Francisco

**POLICIES GOVERNING PARISH SCHOOL CONSULTATIVE BOARDS
and/or PARISH EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE BOARDS**

Archdiocese of San Francisco

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Policies Governing Parish School Consultative Boards/Parish Education Consultative Boards

Archdiocese of San Francisco

Over a decade has passed since the Archdiocesan Board of Education published a document entitled Guidelines For Parish School Boards/Parish Boards of Education. The time has come then to re-examine the subject and to make appropriate revisions. These revisions reflect not only the changes which have taken place pursuant to the revised code of canon law but they also clarify the civil law relationship between these types of parish auxiliary organizations and the Archdiocese of San Francisco. Specifically, any Parish School Consultative Boards which are established must clearly reflect the fact that the Board is consultative only, that the Board exists at the canonical pleasure of the pastor, and that no amendments to the Board statutes may be made without the written approval of the pastor or the authorized corporate officials of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. The Parish Consultative Board should not use terms such as "Bylaws", "President", etc. in order to avoid potential confusion with the school authority granted through Corporate Boards, Bylaws and Offices. Model "statutes" or "procedures" for a Parish School Consultative Board are attached to these policies. No deviation from the provisions marked with an asterisk are authorized without the prior review and approval of the Archdiocesan Legal Office and the Superintendent of Schools.

August 1994

1.0 RATIONALE:

The Bishops clearly state in their pastoral, TO TEACH AS JESUS DID, that "planning and implementing the educational mission of the Church must involve the entire Catholic Community and that such involvement is achieved through structures and processes representative of the Community." (TTJD-139)

The basic principle underlying the Bishops' statement is that those responsible for the funding and administration of school and parish educational programs should provide a means for conferring with those members of the community who are in any significant way (1) affected by policy, e.g., parents with regard to tuition rates, or (2) responsible for implementation of policy, e.g., the principal or coordinator with regard to admissions.

2.0 TYPES OF CONSULTATIVE BOARDS

2.1 Parish School Consultative Boards

These guidelines are directed primarily to those bodies responsible for providing advice and assistance in connection with the well-being of a parish school. Titles for these bodies commonly used are: "School Consultative Board", "Parish Education Consultative Committee", etc.

2.2 Parish Consultative Boards of Education

In some instances, a parish may choose to combine the function of the school consultative board with a broader steering group. This might take the form of a Consultative Board of Education, which would have the responsibility for providing advice and assistance to the Pastor in regard to the total educational apostolate of a parish.

3.0 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CONSULTATIVE BOARD

3.1 Relationship to the Pastor/Parish Council

The Pastor in consultation with the Parish Council, is responsible for establishing goals and policies that give direction to, and assist in, the development of the parish as a whole. The Pastor does so in accordance with the provisions of Canon Law, Archdiocesan Policy, and the limitations imposed by the civil law corporate structures of the Archdiocese.

The School Consultative Board/Consultative Board of Education, as a subordinate auxiliary of the parish, would have responsibility for providing advice and assistance in the development of policy for school/educational programs. Its responsibilities, which are advisory only, would include:

- a. Providing advice and assistance in the development of policy for school/parish educational programs.
- b. Making recommendations to the Pastor/Parish Council concerning resources needed for the development of school/parish educational programs.
- c. Involvement in the hiring and periodic evaluation of the School Administrators. The School Consultative Board would assist in setting the criteria and be involved in providing advice on the hiring, evaluation and dismissal of the school administrators.

- d. Building a relationship of the parish school to the entire community, civic and cultural groups, and public schools of the area.
- e. Monitoring and evaluating programs in the parish school growing out of their policy recommendations.

3.2 Relationship to the Administrators

The Consultative Board is responsible, when called upon, for recommending Policy and Standards for School/ Parish Educational Programs. Policy gives direction; it does not tell how to get there.

Some examples of Policy would be:

- what type of educational program should exist in the School/Parish;
- what criteria should be followed in selecting staff.

The Administrators are responsible for developing methods and programs to implement policy, i.e., how it is to be done. Some examples are:

- selection and development of staff;
- selection of curriculum and related materials;
- development and administration of budgets. (cf 6.2 for further examples of the delineation of responsibilities between the Board and the Administrators.)

3.3 Relationship to the Parish Community

"The Parish School Consultative Board", through its word and actions, must seek to represent the full spectrum of the parish community. Its deliberations should be marked by a spirit of "Catholicity" which works to break down barriers, displaying a sense of concern and compassion for all, especially the most needy. In a very real sense, the Board should see itself as both conscience and voice of the full faith community as it seeks to realize, through education, the ministry of Christ.

4.0 MEMBERSHIP:

The parish school board/board of education should be large enough to include a variety of opinions and abilities, but not so large that discussion would be hampered. The general recommendation is that there be no more than eleven members, nor less than five.

4.1 Pastor and Administrators

The pastor and educational administrator, as ex-officio members of the school board, are non-voting members. The principal of the school or religious education coordinator may be designated as the "Administrator" of the school board/board of education.

4.2 Lay Members

It is recommended that the lay members of the parish consultative board be elected, not appointed. In the initial years of establishment and orientation of the board, it might be well to adhere to the appointive procedure in order to promote greater stability and quality of representation than might result through an uncertain electoral process. Despite difficulties, some type of election procedure should be decided upon following the initial years of operation of the board. The increased acceptability of elected members and their sense of obligation toward the electing body make this method preferable to the appointive process. The size of the parish and local circumstances would dictate procedures. The Pastor must always reserve the right to dismiss members of the board, exercising of course prudence and wisdom in doing so.

No board member should have the legal right or authority to represent the Board except when so delegated.

It is recommended that no one whose exclusive work is subject to the board be proposed for board membership. This could set up a conflict of interest.

4.3 Appointments

If all or some of the lay members of the board are to be appointed, care should be exercised that the one appointing, terms of membership, and constituencies are specified in the By-laws.

4.4 Nominations and Elections

If an electoral process is established, it can be handled in a number of ways. The following procedures are samples for consideration and are not presented as models to be adopted. One possibility, when establishing a new board, is to have the pastor nominate three people, the educational administrators three, and the parish associations five. Another possibility is to have completely open nominations: all parishioners or all parents suggest names, and those who are suggested most often become the nominees. Persons should be nominated who have a vision of the total educational apostolate of the parish. The names of the nominees, information about them, and notice of elections should be given to the parishioners. Parishioners should not be asked to vote on the same day that they receive the list of nominees. The election procedures may be handled by mail or by distributing ballots at the Sunday Masses at least one week after the list of nominees has been circulated. Voter eligibility should be specified in the By-laws of the board.

4.5 Term of Membership

On many boards, members hold a two-year term, renewable once. A one-year term does not allow a person to become knowledgeable and/or effective. A term longer than two years might deter prospective board members. Some boards prefer the three-year term. Terms of members should be staggered so that at no time will every member of the board be newly elected or appointed. Members of a newly established board might draw lots for one, two, or three-year terms.

4.6 Attendance

A member absent without cause for three meetings in the course of a year should cease to be a member and be so notified.

4.7 Vacancies

In the event of a vacancy of an elected member of the board, the remaining members shall fill the vacancy by appointment for the rest of the term. In the event of a vacancy of an appointed member of the board, the person or association appointing shall fill the vacancy by appointment for the rest of the term.

5.0 LEADERSHIP:

A general rule is to have only officers that are needed. For most boards, a chairperson, a vice-chair and a recorder suffice.

5.1 Chairperson

The chair plans meetings with the administrator and the pastor, guides meetings so that issues are discussed adequately and decisions reached without undue delay. The chair will be called upon periodically to represent the total board. It is the duty of the chair to see that the board fulfills its responsibility of policy-making, budget decisions and other specified functions. It is the responsibility of the administrators, not the board, to see that the educational programs function well and that board policies are implemented, but it is the responsibility of the chair of the board, not the administrators, to make sure that the board operates well.

5.2 Vice-Chairperson

The vice-chairperson assumes the duties of the chair in case the latter is temporarily unable to perform such duties. The vice-chair is often called upon to take over special duties, e.g., parliamentarian, chairperson of important committees, etc.

5.3 Recorder

The recorder of the board should handle board business. A non-board member should be designated to take the minutes to allow the recorder to participate fully in discussions.

5.4 Nomination and Election of Officers

Officers should be elected by the full board membership. No elective officer should be elected to the same office for more than two consecutive terms. The practice is discouraged of having a nominating committee suggest prospective officers, one candidate for each office. This practice allows a small group, rather than the full board, to elect the officers, because a board rarely rejects the recommendations of its nominating committee. The Rules of Procedure should stipulate that officers be elected by ballot rather than by voice or hand vote. These stipulations will guarantee that each board member will be able to vote freely for the person he/she considers most qualified.

5.5 Pastor

Because of his other duties and special relationship to different educational programs and parish, and because of the importance of the lay involvement issue, the pastor should not be an officer of the board.

5.6 Administrator

The Principal of the school, or the Religious Education Coordinator of the parish, or other designated administrator with broad responsibility for implementing board policy, should be designated "Administrator" in accord with 9.0 of these guidelines.

6.0 COMMITTEES

As with officers, committees should not be multiplied needlessly. It is useful to keep in mind the difference between ongoing (standing) committees and temporary (ad hoc) committees. The chair of the board ordinarily appoints all committee members.

6.1 Effectiveness

The primary responsibility for committee effectiveness lies with the committee chair. If he/she fails to exercise this leadership, the board president should tactfully but firmly apply pressure. Implementation steps and evaluation process should be part of each committee recommendation to the board.

6.2 Responsibilities

A common mistake of boards and board committees is to become over involved in what is essentially staff work. For example, the finance committee should analyze the budgets of each educational unit in every detail and advise the board, but it is not their responsibility to prepare the budgets. That is the responsibility of the administrators. Another example is the collection of tuition and fees, which is the function of the administration, not the board. (For further information concerning the responsibility of the board, confer 3.2 of these guidelines.)

6.3 Committee Membership

A board committee may include people who are not board members. Certain members of the parish may have expertise in areas such as finance or maintenance, and they could certainly be members of appropriate committees, though not currently members of the board.

7.0 MEETINGS

Generally, the Board should meet every month except July or August, or both. The meetings should be scheduled on the same day of the month, e.g., the third Tuesday, and at the same time, so that board members could plan ahead and parents and parishioners would always know when the board was to meet.

7.1 Open Meetings

All meetings of the board should be open unless the chairperson feels it necessary to call an executive session to discuss personnel matters or the pastor otherwise determines that special circumstances warrant a closed meeting. The statutes or procedures should contain a definition of "open meetings" and clearly state the condition justifying "executive sessions". No member of the board should be excluded from executive sessions unless the matter under discussion directly affects him/her, e.g., the renewal or non renewal of the contract of an administrator who is an ex-officio member of the board.

All voting should be done in open sessions. Notice of board meetings should be given through the parish bulletin and/or a bulletin sent home to parents.

7.2 Responsibility for Planning

Meetings should be well planned before the day of the meeting, preferably by the executive secretary in consultation with the chair and the pastor. They should decide what issues are to be placed on the agenda and in what order of priority. Board members should have the right to request items be placed on the agenda by contacting the chair. A specific amount of time should be allocated for each item.

7.3 Agenda Materials

Agenda and other pertinent materials should be sent to the members of the board at least one week prior to the meeting. This is especially important when there are major decisions to be made on policy or budget.

7.4 Length of Meetings

It is the responsibility of the chair of the board to see that each meeting is well planned, and to have some idea of the amount of discussion time to be given to each agenda item, and thus to know the overall time of the meeting. The chair should keep the meeting moving rather than allow it to drift into long discussion of little value. He/she should not be afraid to take a strong hand in cutting off lengthy and/or irrelevant discussion. If the agendas are well planned with an eye to total time, and if the chair runs the meetings well, there should be no concern about the length of the meetings.

7.5 Structure of the Meetings

It is strongly recommended that board meetings be divided into two main sections, action items and information items, with action items placed first on the agenda. The agenda should approximate the following model:

- I. Call to Order
- II. Action items
 - A. Approval of Minutes
 - B. Decision on Preliminary Budget Proposal
 - C. Decision on Policy Proposal (second reading)
 - D. Decision on Policy Proposal (first reading)
- III. Reports
 - A. Finance Committee
 - B. Administrators
 - C. Other Board Members
- IV. Board Member Items
- V. Comments From the Floor
- VI. Adjournment

Items requiring board decisions should be placed first on the agenda when there is flexibility of time, the important decisions preceding those of lesser importance. Some boards proceed through a long series of reports and miscellaneous discussion, and after nearly two hours come to the most important issues. Board members are tired and some may have to leave early.

7.6 Method of Procedure

A regularly established set of procedures, e.g., Roberts' RULES OF ORDER should be adopted. Although a very informal decision-making process is adequate much of the time, there are cases when the process needs to be more formal. The statutes should state clearly the normal parliamentary procedures and the operating procedures, e.g., whether policy proposals must be introduced at a meeting prior to that which the final vote is taken. They should also state that ordinarily only matters on the prepared agenda be considered. The statutes must provide that the pastor reserves the right to modify the procedures if he determines that special circumstances warrant as such.

8.0 ROLE OF THE PASTOR

The pastor is vitally important to the effective functioning of the Catholic Parish School Board/Board of Education. The pastor should support the board in every way possible, attend all meetings, and is an ex-officio member of the board. Experience suggests that the school board/board of education is successful in direct proportion to the positive involvement of the pastor.

8.1 Veto Power

If the jurisdiction of the board and its relationship to the pastor/parish council are properly understood and respected, the "veto authority" referenced throughout these policies and the model statutes, should be avoidable, especially if the planning and documentation of the board agenda are in accord with the guidelines (7.2 and 7.3). In the most vexatious areas - employee terminations or student expulsions, sacramental/liturgical practices, admissions criteria - sections of Archdiocesan regulations (e.g., Administrative Handbook for Elementary and Secondary Schools, directives of the Liturgical Commission, etc.), if properly used and understood, should minimize the hazards.

9.0 ROLE OF THE ADMINISTRATOR(S):

The Administrators are responsible for identifying policy issues and presenting policy proposals, entering into discussion of issues before the board, reporting to the board on program operation, and implementing board recommendations that are approved by the pastor. As in the case of the pastor, it is important that the administrators work closely with and support the board. Occasions may arise when the board makes recommendations which are contrary to the recommendations of the administrators, but the administrators are obligated to respect them while deferring to the pastor. The administrators make administrative decisions within the policy, program and budget limitations recommended by the board and approved by the pastor.

The principal of the school, the religious education coordinator, or another administrator would normally be appointed the "Administrator" of the parish school consultative board/parish education consultative board. In this role, the person would be responsible for planning board meetings together with the chairperson. The person who is the administrator must remember that, in this role, he/she is responsible for the total educational program, not just the areas in which he/she works.

10.0 STATUTES OR PROCEDURES:

Every school board/education board should have written statutes or written procedures incorporating these policies. Sample statutes are appended.

11.0 PARISH SCHOOL CONSULTATIVE BOARD/PARISH EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE BOARD AND ARCHDIOCESAN BOARD OF EDUCATION:

The Archdiocesan Board has the responsibility to formulate policy recommendations governing all matters falling under the jurisdiction of the Office of Catholic Schools. These policy decisions affect individual parish educational programs and parish school boards/parish education boards. These policy decisions affect individual parish educational programs and parish school board/parish boards of education. Policy decisions of the Archdiocesan Board cover broad areas where policies are needed for all programs within the educational system. It is the responsibility of the parish school board/parish education board to set specific policies for its parish educational programs, e.g., tuition, uniform, etc.

12.0 PARISH SCHOOL CONSULTATIVE BOARD/PARISH EDUCATION CONSULTATIVE BOARD AND PARENT-TEACHER GROUPS:

The function of parish Parent-Teacher Groups is to provide opportunities for parents to meet together and to become involved in the educational programs of the parish. Parent-Teacher Groups are parish/school auxiliary organizations which build unity among parents, foster relationships between faculties and parents, and support the educational programs financially and in other ways. These organizations under the civil and canonical auspices of the parish serve at the pleasure of the pastor and the corporate authorities of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. It is not the purpose of the Parent-Teacher Groups to recommend policy decisions about the educational program. That is the duty of the parish school board/parish education board. The Board and the PTG perform different but complementary roles. Because the two organizations are and should be distinct, it is not recommended that the PTG be considered as the parish school board/parish education board. It is important, however, that there be communication between the board and the Parent-Teacher Groups.

13.0 ORIENTATION/IN-SERVICE TRAINING:

It is strongly recommended that all members of parish boards of education be assisted to understand their roles through annual orientation/in-service workshops. These workshops would focus on such topics as:

- a. The Type of Board (cf. 2.0 of Guidelines)
- b. The Jurisdiction of the Board and its relationship to the Pastor and Administrators (cf. 3.0, 8.0 and 9.0 of Guidelines).
- c. The structure and conduct of meetings (cf. 7.0 of Guidelines).
- d. The structure and direction of the parish educational apostolate.

MODEL "STATUTES" or "PROCEDURES" FOR A PARISH SCHOOL CONSULTATIVE BOARD

Article I Title

The name of this body shall be _____ Parish School Consultative Board, hereinafter referred to as the Board.

Article II Purpose and Function

*Section 1 The purpose of the Board shall be to provide advice and assistance to the pastor in establishing goals and defining policies which shall govern the operation of _____ School, subject to such rules and regulations that precede from the Archbishop through canon law and the corporate structures of the Archdiocese and the Archdiocesan Superintendent of Schools and the Archdiocesan Board of Education. The Consultative Board can be discontinued at any time at the prudent wisdom of such authority.

*Section 2 The Board, functioning as an advisory body, shall be guided by the following responsibilities:

- A. to recommend policies to the School Administrator and the Pastor governing operation of the school;
- B. to create a better understanding of Catholic education in the community by fostering a relationship of the school to the entire community, both civic and cultural groups, and the public schools of the area;
- C. to analyze the school budget to determine if it realistically reflects the general financial and physical needs of the school;
- D. to discuss and evaluate reports presented to it by professional staff members;
- E. to recommend resources needed for development of educational programs;
- F. to monitor and evaluate programs which were established as a result of the pastor's policy decisions;
- G. to suggest criteria and provide counsel to the Pastor in the hiring, evaluation and dismissal of school administrators;
- H. to suggest criteria for the selection of school staff.

Article III Membership

Section 1 Members of the Board shall consist of the Pastor of _____ Parish and the School Administrator of _____ School as ex-officio members, and nine elected lay representatives of the parish. The school administrator shall be referred to hereafter as the "Administrator".

*Section 2 Each elected member shall serve a term of 3 years. One third shall be elected each year. All shall serve at the pleasure of the pastor.

Section 3 No lay member shall serve more than two consecutive terms or a total of six years.

*Section 4 No board member shall have a legal right or authority to represent the Board.

Section 5 Ex-officio members are non-voting members.

Section 6 Vacancies -

If a vacancy occurs in mid-term, the Board will appoint the candidate who received the next highest number of votes in the previous election to fulfill the unexpired term.

Section 7 Attendance -

A member absent without cause for 3 meetings in the course of a year shall cease to be a member and be so notified.

Section 8 Nominations -

A. All adult members of the parish in good standing shall be eligible as nominees.

B. The nominating committee shall be composed of two members of the Parish Council, two Board members, the Pastor, and the Administrator.

Section 9 Elections -

A. An election committee appointed by the Board chair will conduct the elections, tally the votes, and be responsible for resolving any difficulties in procedure.

B. The slate of candidates for election and accompanying profiles shall be published with the two Sunday bulletins preceding the May Board meeting.

C. Election of candidates shall precede the June Board meeting. The newly elected members shall take office in the September following election.

Article IV Officers

Section 1 The officers of the Board shall consist of the chairperson, the vice-chairperson and recorder.

Section 2 All officers shall be elected annually by the Board membership in secret ballot at the last regular meeting of the school year. All shall serve at the pleasure of the pastor.

Section 3 No member shall serve as chair for more than one year.

Section 4 Duties

A. The chair shall preside at all regular and special meetings of the Board. He/she shall plan the agenda in consultation with the Administrator, appoint all Board committees, ensure that all committees are functioning effectively, ascertain that Board policies are implemented and make an annual report to the parish.

B. The vice-chair, in the absence of the chair, shall perform all duties of the chair.

C. The recorder shall conduct, receive and dispose of all correspondence as directed. He/she shall prepare and issue all recommendations of the Board. The recorder shall serve as the custodian of the Board's records and documents. (A non member of the Board shall be appointed to record the minutes.)

Article V Meetings

- Section 1 All Board meetings shall be open to the members of the parish, unless the chair calls an executive session to discuss personnel matters or unless the pastor shall otherwise determine that special circumstances warrant a closed meeting.
- Section 2 The Board shall meet at the same time and the same day of the month during the school year.
- Section 3 A quorum consisting of a majority of the members shall be necessary for the transaction of official business.
- Section 4 A special meeting may be called by the Pastor or the chair, or upon request, by four or more members of the Board, by personal notice to each member at least 24 hours in advance of the meeting.
- Section 5 A simple majority of Board members present and voting shall carry a motion.
- Section 6 The right of non members to address the Board shall be limited to those whose petition has been approved for the agenda in advance of the meeting, or at the discretion of the chair.

Article VI Committees

- Section 1 The chair shall appoint all committees.
- Section 2 Each committee shall have such powers and shall perform such duties as may be assigned to it by the Board, insofar as they are consistent with the advisory role of the Board.
- Section 3 A Board committee may include people who are not Board members.
- Section 4 The standing committees of this Board shall be the Nominating Committee and the Finance Committee.

Article VII Parliamentary Authority

Robert's Rules of Order, newly revised, shall govern all meetings of the Board unless the pastor should determine that special circumstances warrant otherwise.

*Article VIII Amendments

These statutes/procedures may be amended or repealed in whole or in part by a vote of at least two-thirds of the total voting membership of the Board, if also approved in writing by the Pastor, Archdiocesan Legal Counsel and Archdiocesan Superintendent of Schools. The amendment must have been presented in writing at the previous regular meeting of the Board.

ETHICS CODE

Being a member of a local school board involves new kinds of responsibilities and relationships. The information that is shared demands a professional ethic that should be understood by all. Board members must be clear on how they will handle confidences, what posture they will take when dealing with complaints and how they will relate to their many publics. Policy and procedure with regard to a code of ethics should be adequately discussed with new board members and periodically reviewed by all concerned.

Such a code would include the following:

1. A school board member must give the necessary time, thought and study to the work of the school board, so that he may render effective service.
2. A school board member must base his personal decision upon all available facts in each situation, voting with honest conviction unswayed by partisan biases.
3. A school board member must be able to abide by and uphold the final majority recommendation of the board regarding how he/she voted.
4. A school board member must work with his/her fellow board members in a spirit of harmony and cooperation in spite of differences of opinion.
5. A school board member must realize that as an individual he/she has no legal authority, therefore he/she must conduct his/her relationships with school staff, the local citizenry and all media of communication on the basis of this reality.
6. A school board member must keep all confidences shared with him during closed meetings of the board.
7. A school board member must realize that the welfare of the school children comes first in all decisions.
8. A school board member must never use his position on the board to benefit either himself/herself or any other individual or agency apart from the total interest of the school.
9. A school board member must keep in mind that while the primary function of the board is to assist and advise the pastor in establishing the policies that will give direction to the school, the administration of these policies is the function of the principal and his/her staff.
10. A school board member, if he/she is approached with a problem which is of an administrative nature, must refer the person to the proper administrative officer, the principal, and must never attempt to form functions that are out of his/her field.

Mary-Angela Harper, Ascent to Excellence in Catholic Education (Waterford, Connecticut: CROFT-NEI Division of Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1980) p. 256, Appendix M, "A Code of Ethics for Board members" (Diocese of Mobile).