

The Christian Board Policy Handbook

We have been in several Christian schools where the Board Policy Handbook is a significant work of literature. The record so far is 262 pages but others have been over 200 pages – it doesn't seem unusual. What is interesting about these Handbooks is discovering that no-one has actually read them. Who can get through Section 1000 Foundations and Basic Commitments; Section 2000 School Board Governance; Section 3000 General School Administration, each with a multitude of sub-sections 3110, 3120, 3130, 3130 etc. (an actual example).

As consultants, we assiduously read everything – finding in one Handbook, for example, two completely different sets of Parent Association by-laws in different places – and thus become the de facto experts when partnering with the Board of Trustees/Directors. And we always make the same recommendation:

Throw out your Board Policy Handbook.

That doesn't mean throw out Board policies, but the sheer effort required to keep such Handbooks up to date and consistent with a constantly changing environment is just too much and has little return on investment. I have not yet met a Board member who takes on the annual review of the Handbook with glee, excitedly anticipating a month of painstaking editing.

What is the intent of the Handbook? Clearly, to guide the Board, ensure you are not reinventing the wheel, and to have processes that have been tested. There is also a liability aspect to it – did we have policies in place and were they followed?

There are two further aspects to the Handbook:

Stability

Our schools are rooted in our faith commitment, the purposes of the Founders, the unchanging nature of God's purpose (Hebrews 6: 17). That is represented by the school's mission statement, the constitution, and the by-laws. While these can change, they tend to stay the same for decade/s at a time and for good reason. The mission is the school's identity and should not sway with the wind – we should know who we are and be that excellently over time. The Board's organization is similarly a fairly static set of roles and responsibilities that are laid out in the by-laws. They provide stability, assurance, and allow a continuity of governance that is critical to the stability of the school.

Dynamism

Our schools are also part of the eschatology of God's Church – we are moving towards a destination that we perceive through a glass darkly but shall see face to face (1 Cor. 12: 13). To

that end our faith and the expression of that faith in our Christian education must be dynamic to meet the needs of different cultures and different times (1 Corinthians 9: 19-23). This is our freedom under Christ’s law to message our faith in a way that can be heard by 5 year olds and 15 year olds, by millennials and by boomers, by Caucasian and African American and Hispanic and Asian and native American alike, in the 20th century and in the 21st century and in centuries to come.

This dynamism is reflected (from a Board’s point of view) in the Parent/Student Handbook, the Employee Handbook, the minutes of the Board’s Committees and the minutes of the Board itself. These are in constant motion, adapting to circumstances and changing needs. Ten years ago, we didn’t have an IT Policy – now we do. Ten years ago, we thought lice was catching – now we know it’s not. We learn. We grow. We adapt. We innovate. Our academic programs continually evolve. Pedagogies become complex. All of these kinds of things are reflected in documents that change on an annual basis.

Intentionality

Finally, the Board Handbook also represents vision, planning, and forward motion. This is reflected in the Board’s Strategic Plan and Strategic Financial Management. This representation of discipline and patience over time under prayer provides clarity to the Board’s actions and makes foresight concrete in the strategic actions of the Board and the daily operations actions of the Principal, the administration, the faculty, and the staff.

We can therefore throw out the bureaucratic and impossible to maintain Handbook and replace it with a ‘new’ one that allows for stability, dynamism, and intentionality:

Stability	Dynamism	Intentionality
Mission Statement	Parent/Student Handbook	Strategic Plan
Constitution / Incorporation	Employee Handbook	Strategic Financial Management
By-Laws	Board minutes	
	Board Committee minutes	

In the end, whether you have a singular Board Handbook or you move to a Board Handbook Collection, you are trying to do the same thing – good order, good governance, good results. Trying to corral everything into one place is, in our experience, an exercise in frustration. Try thinking about your “Handbook” in this more proactive way and you will also think about your role in a more proactive way, recognizing the need for stability, dynamism, and intentionality.

CSM Mission: For Jesus; Through Mission; With Students

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