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## KEY QUESTIONS ON POLICY

### Why do we need policy?

- “Good boardsmanship holds true to the principle that the board must be in charge and must always get what it wants.” Written policy increases the likelihood of the board getting what it wants.

### What is policy?

- A written policy statement is an expression of the board’s view of what it wants to happen.
- A policy statement is the means through which the board directs the resources of the school district to meet its predetermined goals.
- A policy tells what is wanted and may also include why it is wanted and how much is wanted.
- Policy gives direction and clears the way for the administrators to take action. “Those who make policy are in control.”

### Where do policies come from?

- Policies come from the community as represented by the board of education.
- Most often school board members are elected because they represent the majority’s view of the values, beliefs, and style of the community.

### Who can suggest policies?

- Policy suggestions may emerge from a number of avenues. The suggestion of a school board member, an administrator, a teacher, a parent, or a student may point out a policy issue.

### What are the four purposes of written policy?

- The first is to conserve school board time and effort by freeing it from routine action.
- The second purpose of written policy is to provide for consistency.
- The third function of written policy is to give the board’s representative, the superintendent, guidance and direction during its absence.
- The fourth is to serve as a legal record.

## **How can we make better policy?**

- If we define better policy to mean that it lasts longer, that it better uses the district's resources to meet the needs of the future, and that it's more representative of a broader based of the community's values, then better policy is the result of the decision-making process.
- The raw material of the decision-making process is information.
- The more people included in information gathering the more likely the policy will be more meaningful to a larger group, which means it will probably last longer and be easier to implement.

## **What is the legal authority for policy?**

- The responsibility for the quality operation of the school district rests largely on the school board.
- The powers and functions of a school board may vary from state to state or vary within a state, depending on the size of the school district. However, to the school board alone is delegated the responsibility either through implied powers or state law to provide for public education.
- Board members serve as both state officials and representative of their local communities.
- School boards alone are given the responsibility for making the will of the people felt as it is expressed in state laws and local priorities.

## **How is policy related to rules and regulation?**

- Generally speaking, a "rule of thumb" suggests that the school board establishes policy and the superintendent develops the rules and regulations that put the policy into effect. The procedure varies from community to community, depending upon the importance of the policy and its supportive rules and regulations. In the case of economic, social, or political issues which are sensitive, the school board may want to review and approve the rules and regulations. Under the same circumstances the superintendent may want the school board to approve the rules and regulations. It should be noted that if the board approves the rules and regulations it narrows the operational authority of the superintendent. Sometimes this is desirable and at other times it is undesirable.

## **Who implements policy?**

- The board employs a superintendent to put its policy into effect. Generally speaking, the school board sets policy and the superintendent develops the rules and regulations that will put the policy into effect.

## **Who evaluates the effectiveness of our policy?**

- The school board should develop a policy that calls for regular and systematic review of all the board's policies. The superintendent should provide the procedures that require a yearly review and evaluation of all the board's policies.

### **What power do policies have?**

- Policies in effect have the power of law. Policies are the ultimate authority of the school district. Everything that takes place in a school district should be derived from the authority of a policy. Of course, all the policies of a school district should be congruent with state law.

### **When is a policy needed?**

- A policy is needed whenever the school board wants to give direction to the superintendent. Policies are also needed in order to provide directions for routine action, such as guest speakers and the use of building, etc. Establishing policies to deal with routine action will allow the board to spend more of their precious time in other more important areas, such as curriculum.

### **Who approves policy?**

- Only the school board acting as a legislative body can approve policy.

### **Who should write policy?**

- Often the school board will assign the task of writing policy to the superintendent or one of his or her administrative team. However, an increasing number of school boards are writing their own policy. No matter who writes the policy, the school board is responsible for it.

### **Where should the policies be located?**

- All of the school district's policies should be located in one central file – often a notebook. The policies should be filed according to a central filing scheme. The most popular filing scheme appears to be one developed by the National School Boards Association.

*Reprinted from "Keys to Boardsmanship" developed by the National School Boards Association. For further information, contact the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education.*