

Sounding Board

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Promoting Quality Charter School Governance

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Board Policy Development and Policy Review Cycle

Introduction

School districts everywhere, including district and charter schools in Minnesota, exist in an environment that is regulated by state and federal statutes, U.S. Department of Education regulations, and, in the case of charter schools, contract commitments with their authorizers. Further, all schools develop their own policies to provide the framework of their educational enterprise and again, in the case of charter schools, a set of bylaws also helps to provide the boundaries of that framework. The topic of this *Sounding Board* is related primarily to the local school policy portion of the overall framework mentioned above, with some mention of policy requirements that are specified by other organizations (e.g. Minnesota Statutes, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), and Osprey Wilds' expectations).

What Do Minnesota Statutes Say About Charter School Policies?

Minnesota Statutes have several very specific expectations about particular policies that all schools' boards must adopt and implement, the frequency with which those policies must be reviewed by the board, and other requirements such as notification of parents and students about the policies. See [Osprey Wilds Required Policies](#) (in the Governance section on the Strategic Support page of the CSD website), which also includes Minnesota statutory and MDE policy requirements.



Having a well-thought out set of board-adopted policies documents the expectations of the board that guides administrators and other school staff. It also provides information to parents and students about the expectations the organization has regarding specific topics (e.g., student discipline). Board-adopted policies can be extremely helpful if / when disputes arise about the manner in which a school staff member has implemented or carried out a particular action covered by a board-adopted policy. School staff are obligated to follow board-adopted policies and if having done so, it allows the board to support their efforts if / when complaints arise regarding their interpretation of policies or actions taken. Failure of school staff to follow the board adopted policies subjects their decisions to scrutiny and perhaps reversal.

Specific Policy Elements

For ease of understanding and thus increased likelihood that accurate policy implementation will take place, policies should use simple language and be economical in words. To that end, policies should have an introduction that briefly describes the policy and its purpose. Then, the policy should be spelled out in terms of its expectations of those whose activities and behaviors are subject to the policy, including clearly stated timelines.

In some cases, a brief glossary or definition of terms section of the policy can assist in understanding the policy, since education has its share of unique jargon with which everyone, especially parents, students, and new staff members, may not be familiar.

The policy should include the date on which the board originally adopted the policy and, if being reviewed and/or revised, the date of the revision that took place at a public board meeting. This means that all policies adopted by the board, whether required or optional local policies, will indicate a "Date adopted," and when policies are reviewed in the future, in addition to the date adopted they will also have a "date reviewed" or "date revised" included.

Finally, all policies should have a section, usually at the conclusion of the policy, that lists any legal or other references that pertain to the policy (e.g. MN statutes or other regulations). (See [North Lakes Academy Policy 101: Graduation Requirements](#) for a sample policy format.)

Organization of Policies

A savvy school board understands the value and importance of the adoption and implementation in good faith of the above referenced policies. They also understand and take advantage of the opportunity to consider, deliberate, and approve additional policies that are not necessarily required by any outside source, but that when faithfully implemented and evaluated as to their effectiveness, can provide further support to the orderly, transparent, thoughtful, creative, and successful governance of the school.

Many Minnesota schools, including charter schools, use the system of policy development that is used by the Minnesota School Board Association (MSBA), among others. That system is comprised of nine categories into which a school's required and optional local policies can be divided for ease of reference and location. Those categories are numbered consecutively in 100 number increments and each is referred to as a "series." Thus, there are the 100 series policies, the 200 series policies, the 300 series policies, etc.

School Board Policy Numbering Scheme

- 100 School District Policies (Pertaining to the overall school district or charter school)
- 200 School Board Policies (Pertaining to the school board, its members, and its functions)
- 300 Administration Policies (Pertaining to day-to-day school administration)
- 400 Personnel Policies (Pertaining to individual and/or groups of employees)
- 500 Student Policies (Pertaining to students who attend the school, including enrollment practices and procedures)

600 Educational Program Policies (Pertaining to the educational program of the school including instruction, curriculum, teaching and learning, and evaluation/accountability)

700 Non-Instructional and Business Services Policies (Pertaining to transportation, food service, payroll, payables, receivables, cash flow, balance sheet and related functions)

800 Buildings and Sites Policies (Pertaining to the site and the physical plant of the school including custodial and utilities, maintenance services, building company, and related functions)

900 Community Relations Policies (Pertaining to childcare services, external relations with local organizations and related functions)

By using this system of numbering policies there is room for at least 100 policies or more within each series and few if any schools would actually have that many policies on any one particular topic so by using a scheme such as the one described, a school board can easily access and develop a plan for review and updating of its policies.



Policy Review Cycle

Some school boards, in order to facilitate an ongoing schedule of policy review / revision also include a notation on each policy as to its scheduled date of future review / revision. The board maintains a spreadsheet of those dates which is used to ensure that policies are reviewed / revised on a regular basis, as determined by statute, MDE, the authorizer, or the local school board.

In some specific instances charter school boards are required to review select policies on an annual or other basis, while for most school board policies the review / revision is determined by the board. A three-year review cycle is typical, but not required. This means that for specific policies the board and school leaders should plan in advance as to when the board will review and document that required review. See [Osprey Wilds Required Policies](#) (in the Governance section on the Strategic Support page of the CSD website.)

For a school's other policies, the board should establish a review cycle and then implement a plan to have policies reviewed and revised by the board as it sees a need to do so. For example, the board could establish a Policy Review Committee whose responsibility could be to review all of the policies within one of the categories (100's, 200's, etc.) each month and bring to the board each of the policies for official board review and approval, including any suggested revisions. Since some of the policy categories likely will contain more policies than other categories, the board can further space out the reviews by the policy committee to make the workload for all more manageable.

Summary

Minnesota charter schools, like public district schools, operate within a framework of laws, MDE required policies, bylaws, and optional locally developed policies. This framework supports effective governance and ensures that the board is operating within its legal parameters and, in all cases, with the best interests of the school, its families, and students.

Successful boards create a system for policy creation, policy review, and policy revision that ensures all policies are both compliant and up to date. Stakeholders of the school rely on the board's attention to policy development to provide them with clear and unambiguous direction, opportunities, and limitations. Policies also provide a means for school boards to successfully carry out their fiduciary obligations and responsibilities in an organized and transparent manner.

Experienced school board members and school leaders can affirm the value of well-thought out board-adopted policies, especially in situations wherein the decision or actions of school leaders or other school staff members are challenged by parents or students. Adherence to board-adopted policies affords students and parents transparency and fairness, and support to school leaders and staff. Failure of school leaders and other staff members to know and follow board adopted policies leaves them subject to challenges of fairness, inconsistency, and bias.

At times, policy reviews and revisions can seem less unimportant to board members and school leaders, especially when compared with some of the other governance functions they carry out, such as the school's finances, school leader hiring and evaluation, among others. However, savvy school boards invest their time and energy in establishing a policy creation, review, and revision scheme that allow it to both keep its policies up to date in a timely and economical manner and to tend to those other sometimes more pressing and public-facing responsibilities. Policy creation, review, and revision need not be a tedious task when it is well-planned and consistently carried out as planned. It just becomes part of doing business as a board!

More resources can be found on our [website](#)