

School Commission Guidelines

September 2016

A Board Member's Prayer

I have been asked to serve, Lord, and I have agreed.

Help me to know my fellow board members in their gifts, their concerns, their lives. I am doing your work, Lord, and Your love for me and for them is, above all, personal.

Help me to welcome conflict as a sign of the diversity in the board and as an opportunity to reach for creative solutions. Help me to recognize this diversity as a sign of Your capacity to love us all and help me to cherish it as a great strength.

Help me to approach issues with an open, inquiring mind that is free from prejudice, with my spirit depending on Yours for the strength to make hard decisions.

Help me to listen and to know when and to whom I should listen.

Help me to learn to use my own gifts to promote thorough, thoughtful discussion of important concerns in our Catholic Community.

Help me to develop my skills as a peacemaker, to know when and how to mediate, to conciliate and to negotiate.

Help me to enjoy doing Your work and to remember Your promise: whenever two of us are gathered in Your name, You are with us.

Amen.



Our Mission

The schools of the Archdiocese of Seattle, in communion with the Archbishop, in collaboration with parents, parish leadership, and the community, and in the service of teaching Gospel values and the faith of the Catholic Church, educate students in grades K to 12 for leadership and service to the church and society through excellent religious, academic, and co-curricular programs that strive to be accessible to all.

School Commission /Board

Board of Directors of Catholic Schools

The life and words of Jesus make the mission of the Catholic Church clear:

- Proclaim the Good News of God's saving love for all people.
- Establish a prayerful community of believers.
- Give practical expression to the Gospel message by serving the needs of others.

Catholic Schools are an integral part of the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel message and translate this proclamation into action. They are faith-centered communities that encourage participation in liturgy and sacrament. They are engaged in addressing community problems and serving those in need.

The Second Vatican Council urged that agencies be established by which laity could be consulted about what concerns the good of the Church. Within the Catholic Schools, that agency is the School Commission or Board or Directors. The role as a member of the school board is more important than ever. As community leaders, you are responsible for patiently and conscientiously directing the entire range of educational programs within the catholic school. This service is essential to the mission of the Catholic Church.

“ These faithful are by Baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ, and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.

Thus every layperson, in virtue of the very gifts bestowed upon him, or her, is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church itself, according to the measure of Christ's bestowal.”

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
(Documents of Vatican II)

Canon Law and Catholic Education

CANON 803: 1. A Catholic School is understood as one in which a competent ecclesiastical authority or a public juridic person (arch/diocese, parish, or religious institute), directs or which ecclesiastical authority recognizes as such through a written document.

2. The instruction and education in a Catholic School must be grounded in the principles of Catholic doctrine; teachers are to be outstanding in correct doctrine and integrity of life.

3. Even if it is in fact Catholic, no school is to bear the name Catholic school without the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

CANON 804: 1. The Catholic religious instruction and education which are imparted in any schools whatsoever or are provided through the various instruments of social communication are subject to the authority of the Church. It is for the conference of Bishops to issue general norms about this field of action and for the Diocesan bishop to regulate and watch over it.

CANON 805: 1. For his own diocese, the local ordinary has the right to appoint or approve teachers of religion and even to remove them or demand that they be removed if a reason of religion or morals requires it.

CANON 806: 1. The diocesan bishop has the right to watch over and visit the Catholic schools in his territory, even those which members of religious institutes have founded or direct. He also issues rescripts which pertain to the general regulation of Catholic schools; these prescripts are valid also for schools which these religious direct, without prejudice, however, to their autonomy regarding the internal direction of their schools.

2. Directors of Catholic schools are to take care under the watchfulness of the local ordinary that the instruction which is given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that in the other schools of the area.

School Leadership

According to the Second Vatican Council, the Archbishop of each Archdiocese is the educational and spiritual leader of each parish and Catholic school. Because he cannot be everywhere, he appoints a pastor to oversee the ministries of each parish. The pastor is the chief administrator of all parish programs – including the Catholic School.

The principal, whose authority is delegated within his or her employment contract and job description, is primarily responsible for the operation of the school. That responsibility includes employing, supervising and evaluating the school's staff, establishing academic programs, and evaluating student behavior. The principal also serves as executive officer of the School Commission or Board of Directors and the parent organization.

TYPES OF BOARDS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Consultative Boards

A consultative Board is one which cooperates in the policy-making process by formulating and adapting, but never enacting policy. To call a group “consultative” does not diminish its importance; rather, it indicates that the body is inserted into the governance structure of the organization in a significant way.

The pastor or canonical administrator related to the school enacts policy developed by a consultative board before it can be promulgated and implemented.

Boards with Limited Jurisdiction

A Board with limited jurisdiction has authority limited to certain areas of educational concern. It has final, but not total jurisdiction. The constitutions of Boards with limited jurisdiction should clearly state the areas in which the Board has authority and those which are reserved to the Archbishop and/or to the religious congregation. For example, these Boards have no authority to change the diocesan philosophy of education or to formulate local policies which are not in concert with diocesan policies in religious education. Most religious congregations reserve such powers as approval to change the philosophy and mission of the school, approval of debts over a certain amount, ownership of property, and others as defined in the constitution.

**** We have resources in the Catholic Schools Department to help a committee write the constitution and bylaws for the Board.**

“What’s the Difference”

Public School Boards

Hires administrator

Evaluates the administrator

Enacts policy for system

Makes regulations regarding the running of the school.

Has the final word with respect to decisions regarding the school.

Catholic School Boards

May be asked to serve on Search Committee to recommend an administrative candidate to pastor (Archbishop) for hiring

May be asked for input regarding the administrator as part of the evaluation

May recommend policy to the principal. Is responsible for supporting the established policy.

May be asked for opinions and advice; the administrator makes regulations. Is responsible for supporting the principal's rules.

The principal in consultation with the Archbishop and Supt. of Catholic Schools has the final word regarding the decisions affecting the school. Directors are responsible for supporting the decisions made by the proper authorities.

The role of the Board, in either a consultative or decision-making capacity is to develop policies that the school administration and staff are charged with implementing. Although the development of policy rests with the Board, the principals or other chief administrator (president)) should play an integrated and informed role in this development because it is the administrator who will be responsible for implementing it.

The power of the Boards functions only when the Board is in session, and no power is vested in individual Board members. Therefore, principles of confidentiality and general support for Board decisions, even though a Board member may disagree, should be operative for all Board members.

*****Becoming involved in administrative-parent, staff-parent, or administrative-teacher disputes is not the role of a Board member, and weakens the authority of both the administrator and the Board**

What is in it for me to be a member of the Board of Directors?

By being mindful of the duties and responsibilities involved in Board service and by establishing policies and processes designed to help Board members fulfill those duties, Board members can strengthen their ability to provide responsive, responsible advice to school management, but also less the likelihood of a successful legal challenge to its actions.

Duty of Care

- Makes informed and responsible decisions
- Ensures that persons are hired who can enact the mission
- Sets policies and procedures – to avoid financial risks – to ensure the health and safety of students and staff

Duty of Loyalty

- Disclosure of any conflicts of interest
- Adherence to the organization's conflict of interest policy
- Avoidance of the use of corporate opportunities for the individual's personal gain or benefit
- Nondisclosure of confidential information about the organization -- confidentiality

Duty of Obedience

- Comply with applicable federal, state, and local laws
- Adhere to the organization's bylaws
- Remain a guardian of the mission

Personal Responsibilities of Individual Board Member

- Actively support and promote the organization's mission, services, policies, and programs.
- Attend all Board and committee meetings and functions, such as special events
- Review agenda and supporting materials prior to Board and committee meetings
- Serve on committees and task forces and offer to take on special assignments
- Make a personal financial contribution to the school according to his or her personal means.
- Suggest possible nominees to the Board who can make significant contributions to the work of the board and the school.

Eligibility Requirements for Board Members

As Board members, you know that the Archbishop places his educational aspirations in your hands and entrusts you with shaping the school's future. Board members should be chosen using the following criteria:

- Have a genuine interest in Catholic education.
- Be active within a parish and/or a parent of one of the schoolchildren.
- Be able to remain objective, but influence public opinion when necessary.
- Be able to maintain group confidentiality.
- Be willing to support Board decisions – even if they do not completely agree.
- Support the Archdiocesan/parish/school philosophy and mission. Work as a group member in a spirit of cooperation and consensus.

On a personal level, it is important that all Board members recognize Catholic education as a ministry of the Church. As Board members, you represent the wishes of the Archdiocesan community. You must deliberate with justice and charity, serve willingly, and contribute your personal talents and expertise.

Board Meetings

The first and most important step in preparing for the meeting is developing an agenda. The agenda identifies the issues to be dealt with at the meeting and encourages orderly discussion. The principal and chairperson work together to prepare this document.

The agenda, and with other written documentation, should be disseminated far enough in advance of the meeting to allow you to come prepared. As a result, the meeting will run more smoothly and be more productive.

A standard Board meeting should last one and a half to two hours. At these meetings, policy and other decisions are reached. Although not all decision will be unanimous, it is important that each member publicly support the decision, even if he or she did not endorse the decision.

The Responsibility of the Board of Directors

The overall purpose of the Board is to advise and support the principal as they form policy and direct the ongoing development of the school. The Board is advisory in nature – the operating principle is that the school administrators accept the advice of the Board when given, especially when consensus is reached. When the advice is not taken, it is customary, but not required for the administrators to let the Board members know the reason.

The advisory process is collaborative. The Board's role is to make the principal as effective as possible, giving him or her the benefit of the Board's collective wisdom. The areas of responsibility may include:

1. Establishing a mission statement and strategic plan:

A mission statement identifies what the Board is called to do by the Archdiocesan Church. By carefully drafting this statement, you can work together with this group toward providing a quality education for your school's students.

The mission statement should be complemented by a long-range plan. The long-range plan is a set of goals and objectives that identify the overall direction for the school during the next few years. The mission statement and long-range plan provide a blueprint for the school to follow toward its long-term objectives. Together with the principal the Board works toward implementing these goals.

2. Recommending and defending policy

Board Directors are also charged with recommending general policies for the school. Policies must not be overly specific – it is up to the principal to carry out and implement the policy guidelines. Policy is a guide for discretionary action; it tells people what is expected, but not how to accomplish it. It could be a solution to a problem, such as use of the Internet, or the opportunity to set guidelines for a new program, such as technology, or a response to Archdiocesan or state requirements, such as seismic retrofitting or the required weapons policy. The guidelines below should be followed when implementing policy:

- Response to or anticipate the educational needs of the school community.
- State the policy's thought in clear, simple, non-technical language.
- Archive policies in a permanent place that is easily accessible.
- Index the policy systematically.
- Communicate the policy to all the Commission's publics – especially those who are directly affected.
- Evaluate the policy regularly. Then the policy is placed in the handbook.

3. Developing a plan and means to finance school programs:

The principal works with the Board's finance committee to prepare the expenditure side of the budget and Board members are responsible for developing a plan to generate revenue. This includes setting tuition, negotiating subsidy, determining development and fundraising revenues, as well as allocating resources to the budget. Board members assist in the budget process as follows:

- Analyze and discuss the proposed budget.
- Identify funding resources and the total amount needed from tuition, fundraising, the archdiocese and the development office.
- Monitor the budget on a regular basis.
- Adopt the balanced budget.
- Present the budget Principal and Board for approval

4. Providing optimal public relations:

As leaders of the school community, the Board is the school's greatest advocate in the community. Board members must understand the school's mission and vision. They are committed to its success. The Board must listen to the needs of the school's constituents and effectively communicate on behalf of the school.

5. Evaluating your own effectiveness

Periodically, the Board is responsible for evaluating their relationships with the principal (or president) and determining their effectiveness in achieving the set goals. The Board is also responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of the Board as a whole, but not responsible for evaluating individual Board or staff members.

6. Participating in the selection and evaluation process of the principal

The Board may serve on the search committee when a new principal needs to be hired. It is this search committee, assisted by the Catholic Schools Department, which makes a consensus recommendation to the Archbishop and Superintendent of Catholic Schools as to who should fill the principal's position. The Board may participate in the evaluation of the Principal under the guidance of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools direction.

Assessing the Three Duties: Questions the Board should ask in evaluating their role.....

- ❖ Is information adequate without being overwhelming? Is it available when needed? Is it accurate?
- ❖ Does the Board have a consistent and effective process for making major decisions?
- ❖ In addition to finance, public relations and planning, are there other areas of responsibility the administrator has asked the Board to address?
- ❖ Does the Board have a Conflict of Interest Policy?
- ❖ What is the process for updating or amending existing policies?
- ❖ What areas do policies cover?
- ❖ Is there an archdiocesan policy manual? Are we in compliance with archdiocesan policy?
- ❖ Does the Board meet regularly, have a quorum at meetings?
- ❖ What do the bylaws say about missing meetings?
- ❖ Do members regularly receive and read information in advance of Board meetings?
- ❖ How does the Board work with the parish and school administration?
- ❖ How does the Board work with other parish and archdiocesan board and committees?
- ❖ Can every Board member recite the school's mission statement without any hints?

Conflict of Interest Policy

- Each member, by acceptance of his or her appointment to the Board, assumes the responsibility to conduct him or herself in accordance with the **highest standards of personal integrity, organizational loyalty, and Christian ethics.**
- This responsibility demands that each member, in the performance of all Board duties and functions, **act from a position of both independence and impartiality**, in fact as well as in appearance. To meet this responsibility, each member must avoid situations which place that member **in a position in which the member's judgment may be biased, or appear to be so, due to any past, present, or currently planned interest, financial or personal, that is related to the performance of such members duties as a member of the Board.**
- **No member may utilize, directly or indirectly, the status of member, or confidential school information learned as a member, in a manner that either seeks, or appears to seek, individual economic gain** in any respect, or preferential treatment by the Board, the school management, administration or employees, regardless of whether such gain or preference is sought for him or herself, or for any of the member's relatives or affiliates.

Roles:

Archbishop

As the canonical administrator of the Archdiocese, the Archbishop is the Board's pastoral and spiritual leader. He may delegate the supervision of the school and Board to the Superintendent of Schools in the Catholic Schools Department. He (or his delegate) must be informed about Board concerns, activities and plans. The Archbishop (or his delegate) provides leadership to the Board based on his knowledge of the school and archdiocesan community, etc. The Archbishop (or his delegate) may be involved in all policy discussions and given the opportunity to share his insights. Even if he is unable to attend meetings, the Board should keep him informed in a timely fashion – especially when it is considering a change in policy. The Archbishop is the employer of the principal, responsible for hiring, supervision, evaluation, and contract renewal. All final decisions are his.

Principal / President

The principal is the education leader and executive officer of the Board. He or she is the link between the Board and the school with the staff, students and parents. He or she shares information from these constituencies with Board Directors, as well as current educational trends, assessment results, and federal and state programs. The principal's perception of the school's needs is a driving force behind all Board decisions. The principal will keep you, as a Board member, informed about the operation of the school and about Archdiocesan policies and procedures. Conversely, you should provide the principal with any grass roots information about your area of expertise that can help the principal respond to various school needs and issues.

Faculty

The Board is responsible for communicating with the faculty through the principal. Teachers and staff should feel comfortable approaching a Board Director regarding policy issues. It is important to remember that Board Directors have no authority outside of the School Board meeting. If a staff member approaches you with a grievance, you should refer them to the appropriate party.

Parent Support Organizations

The parent organizations are responsible for maintaining good communications between the home and school, for providing a vehicle through which parents can provide service to the school (for example volunteers and fund-raising), for offering a mechanism for parent education, and for serving as a structure for political action when needed (for example, letter writing, phone calls, and visits to legislators).

The Board supports and works with the officers of the parent organizations in order to more fully understand parent needs and concerns. It is common practice to have an officer from a parent organization to serve as an ex officio member or as a consultant to the Board to insure both good communication and commitment.

The Board works with the parent fund-raising groups as a part of their task of coordinating the overall financing of programs for the school. It uses the communication mechanism of the parent organizations to report Board activities to the school families.

Community

Because of your unique role in knowing the school, the opportunity to promote the school to various groups is always there. Although there should be a standing committee for public relations, all Board Directors should be encouraged to promote the school whenever possible.

SAMPLE BYLAWS FOR SCHOOL COMMISSION

The Catholic school is an expression of the educational mission of the parish. The parish school commission serves as an advisory body in support of the ministry for the good of the school community.

The pastor is responsible to the Archbishop for the administration of the total parish, including the parish school.

The principal serves as the chief administrator of the parish school and is responsible to the pastor.

Article I. Name of the Organization

The name of this body shall be _____ Parish Elementary School Commission.

Article II. Purposes and Functions

The commission is established by the pastor, in accord with archdiocesan policy, to assist the pastor and principal in policy development and long-range planning for the school. When the commission meets with pastor, principal and members and agree on a policy matter, the decision is effective and binding on all. The commission will be consulted prior to decisions being made in its areas of responsibility.

The commission responsibilities are in the following areas:

A. Planning

- Establishing a mission statement for the school
- Establishing commission goals for the school
- Establishing future plans for the school

B. Policy Development

- Recommending policies that give general direction for the school to the pastor and principal.

C. Finance, which includes

- Developing a plan and means to finance school programs, including tuition, development and fundraising;
- Allocating resources according to the budget;
- Monitoring the budget.

D. Public Relations, which includes

- Communication with various public groups or interested persons about the school;
- Listening to the needs and concerns of the school community through appropriate forums set up for this purpose;
- Recruiting students;
- Promoting the school to the parish and parents.

E. Evaluation, which includes

- Determining whether commission goals and plans are being met;
- Evaluating the commission's own effectiveness.

Article III. Membership

The membership of the parish school commission shall consist of seven to nine members in addition to the pastor and principal. Members ordinarily serve for three years, renewable once and staggered so that council membership can rotate.

Nominations and Selection

A committee of the school commission would seek and prepare a slate of prospective commission members by nomination either by self or others. The nominees would meet the following criteria:

- Interest in and commitment to Catholic education and to this school's philosophy and mission;
- Availability to attend meetings and periodic in-service programs and to participate in committee work;
- Maintain high level of integrity and confidentiality;
- Deal with situations as they relate to the good of the entire school community,
- Be a credible witness of the Catholic faith to the school community and the other publics the school serves. (A non-catholic parent of child/ren enrolled in the school may be a member of the commission.)

Ineligibility

A person currently employed by the parish or parish school or a close relative or in-law of or living in the same household as a parish or school employee.

Selection

Whatever method(s) a pastor uses to choose commission members of parish commissions should be used to determine new membership. The process should promote a sense of ownership throughout the school and parish community.

The selection of new member should begin in February. Selections should be made by March or April and new members should attend several school commission meetings for orientation purposes prior to beginning their term on July 1st.

The school commission should participate in a public commissioning service in September.

Article IV. Officers

The commission should select members to serve in the positions of chairperson, vice-chairperson and secretary. The officers are selected by the commission and serve one-year renewable terms. The duties are those ordinarily performed by such officers.

The above officers, pastor and principal form the executive committee. The executive committee may be called to meet and make decisions if necessary in the absence of a full commission meeting.

Article V. Meetings

The chairperson and principal should meet to plan the agenda for the commission meetings and the agenda and written committee reports should be available to members at least one week prior to regularly scheduled commission meetings.

The school commission meets every month beginning in August. Standing committees meet at other times. If commission meetings are open to the public, there should be a provision in the operating procedures of the commission in regard to executive sessions covering either personnel issues or other confidential matters.

(A commission could meet every other month with standing committees meeting in the other month.)

A member who is absent from two regular meeting of the School Commission during one academic year (August through and including June) shall, unless excused by action of the School Commission, cease to be a member.

Article VI. Standing and Ad Hoc Committees

Standing Committees will be named and a chairperson delegated. The committees will address the current and future needs of the school and may include the following:

- Annual Operating Plan and Budget
- Budget Oversight
- Tuition and Parish support rates
- Major Capital Projects
- Public Relations and Development
- Selection of new principal
- Long-range plans
- Review of school policies and procedures
- Maintenance and Operation of the school facilities
- Representative to Parish Council, Finance Council and/or Parent Club
- Development and Endowments
- Alumni Relations