Criteria for Board Policies

Definition of School Policies

School Policies are broad guidelines which create the framework within which the Director can discharge his/her duties consistent with the values of the school and expectations of the board.

Criteria for Policy

1. The policy is consistent with the mission and identity of the school;
   Policies should serve as the road map for fulfilling the mission in accordance with the values and principles the school community holds dear. How the expectations of the board are expressed reveals the school culture that is desired.

2. The issue is within the scope of the board's authority, reflects the board's roles and responsibilities as governing body of the school, and/or describes what the board itself will do/decide;
   By law, charter, and accreditation standards, the board is the ultimate authority over all school matters, but the board cannot have a policy for EVERYTHING. However, the board should have policies for issues which are only their job (e.g. hiring the HoS), for issues where confusion could exist regarding authority (e.g. financial controls), for "hot-button" or critical issues (e.g. national quotas), and for internal board operational issues (e.g. recalling a board member).

3. The board really want this on its plate;
   Establishing a policy specific and prescriptive in content means the board owns that issue and understands that they are the "deciders;" does the board really want to be dealing with those issues??? (e.g. dress code policy)

4. It is distinct; it does not exist in the school's Charter, Bylaws, or elsewhere in the Policy Manual - and it is needed; absent this policy, confusion and questions would abound
   Redundancy with the Charter and Bylaws is unnecessary and can lead to confusion (i.e. the board can change policy but the Association changes the Bylaws). Care should be taken to ensure consistency across sections of the Policy Manual. Finally, many "policies" (lower-case "p") are operational and do not belong in the Policy Manual but should be written in other official publications (Handbook, Regulations, Protocols, etc.).

   Policies serve a need - addressing expectations that are important to clarify. Policy Manuals should not be cluttered with codification of what is patently obvious and clear anyway.

5. It cites only the barest essentials needed to describe the board's general expectations, expressed in clear, simple language - a succinct expressions of "what," "why," and "to what extent;"
   "What" describes the expectation; "Why" explains why that expectation is held, helpful in interpreting how to implement it; and "To what extent" sets the bar. "How," "when,"

"where," and "when," etc. to meet that expectation are decisions best left to the Director's judgment.

Wordy narratives can be prescriptive, limiting, confusing, and simply too much to wade through. Frugality of verbiage cuts to the chase.

6. It is broad and general, dealing with values, principles, and results rather than specific actions or situations - not prescriptive; refraining from dictating how, who, when, and where;

"Broad and general" keeps the board out of the weeds; "values and principles" keeps the issue consistent with the identity/culture of the school as the board wants it; "results" establishes the basis for holding the Director accountable, and "situations" provides some flexibility.

For most issues, the Director is far better positioned to determine implementation than is the board. Further, dictating specifics can be demotivating and, in some contexts distrustful to the Director.

7. The wording provides sufficient latitude in implementation to allow for unanticipated changes in circumstances - the board is comfortable with the Director acting based on any reasonable interpretation of this policymaking.

Another reason to keep policy broad and general is that situations change, and the Director and his staff are best positioned to respond to those unanticipated or murky situations if he/she has some latitude for exercising judgment. The scope of that latitude should be implied, however, ultimately, it rests in the professionalism of the Director.

Different issues and contexts warrant different levels of specificity in policy. Policy should be only as explicit as the board feels is necessary to set the boundaries for interpretations that the board can live with ("reasonable").