Guidelines for Board Committees

1. Establish committees when it is apparent that issues are too complex and/or numerous to be handled by the entire board.
2. For ongoing, major activities establish standing committees; for short-term activities, establish task forces that cease when the activities are completed. Standing committees should be included in board policy.
3. Committees do not supplant the responsibility of the board; they assist the board in doing its job and report directly to the board. They do not direct or supervise staff. They do not speak or act for the board except when formally given such authority for a specific and time-limited purpose.
4. The role of a board committee can be to prepare recommendations for the board, to decide that a matter doesn't need to be addressed by the full board if given the authority to do so, and/or in some cases, to take on a significant project.
5. The full board is responsible for decisions; board members rely on the diligence and thoughtfulness of committee recommendations. Anyone on the board can object, and the board can reject the recommendation or ask the committee to revise it.
6. Committees may meet monthly, every two months, or less frequently. Standing committees should establish a regular meeting schedule.
7. Committee recommendations to the board should be made in writing and distributed prior to the relevant board meeting for review by board members.

Terms of Reference for Board Committees and Task Forces

Board committees are to help the board do its job, not to help or advise the staff. Unless the purpose of a board committee can be stated in writing, the committee is probably unnecessary. If a committee is proposed, the following questions should be answered to develop its charge and established in writing as Terms of Reference for that committee or task force:

1. What is the purpose of the committee?
2. What is the authority and if a task force, duration, of the committee/task force?
3. What are the specific tasks?
4. Who is the committee chair or how is that to be determined?
5. How is the committee membership decided?
6. What is the term of office for members and method of filling vacancies?
7. What "deliverable" is expected?
8. By when?
9. How does the committee reach decision about what to recommend to the board?
10. If relevant, what resources are authorized (budget, support staff, etc.)?

based on Vermont School Boards Association guidelines