

Policy Governance

In 1998, the Board adopted the Carver Policy Governance model to govern the school.

What is the Policy Governance model?

Policy Governance is a framework of principles designed by Dr. John Carver that:
provides exceptional clarity to the role and functions of the board vs. the administration and staff;
organizes and aids development of board policies in a useful, clear, and consistent way;
facilitates the board's complete accountability for their organization, while simultaneously enabling maximum freedom for the staff to do its job.

Basic Principles of Policy Governance

Policy Governance. Policy Governance emphasizes vision and values, the empowerment of both Board and administration, and the strategic ability to lead leaders. Because policies permeate and dominate all organizational life, they present the most powerful lever for exercising Board leadership. Using the Policy Governance approach, Boards lead by setting policy in four areas, described below. Designed as a total system to encompass all expressions of Board wisdom, the policy categories are: Ends, Executive Limitations, Board-Executive Relations, and Board Process.

Policy Definition: Policy is a value or philosophically based guide for discretionary action and serves to prescribe the ends and limit the means.

A. ENDS

The Board's most important job is to devise a mission and mission-related statements, which clearly set out what the desired results -the Ends of the Academy's actions are to be. What human needs are to be met, for whom, and at what cost? How will the world be different because of the Academy's actions? Including, but not limited to the mission statement, Board-generated ends are further defined at all levels of organization. They comprise the organizational vision. The Board leaves it up to the administration to decide on the means by which to achieve these ends, and evaluates administration performance based on how well the results of the Academy's actions match the desired ends.

B. EXECUTIVE LIMITATIONS

While the Board prescribes what ends (what results for whom at what cost) it wants to achieve, it only sets limits on the means with which the administration operates. These limits are principles of prudence and ethics that form a boundary on administration practices, activities, circumstances and methods. In Executive Limitations policies, the Board states clearly what the Board will not allow, but it is otherwise silent in directing administration actions. This empowers the administration to use their full creative powers while at the same time safeguarding against potential abuses, enabling the Board to concentrate its energies on ends issues.

C. BOARD-ADMINISTRATION LINKAGE

In addition to providing the Academy with a vision and defining what constitutes inappropriate administration practices, the Board must set policies about how it relates to administration-for example, the Board's approach to delegation, its view of the Head of School's role, and how it will assess administration performance. The Policy Governance model envisions the Head of School as a link between the Board and the administration. In essence, the Head of School is the Board's sole employee. The only specific duty of the Head of School is to be accountable to the entire Board for the performance of the Academy-on how well the Board's ends are being met and the limitations not violated. This maintains accountability while allowing the Head of School a great deal of latitude to act and to empower others to act.

D. GOVERNANCE PROCESS (The Board's Job)

The Board must also set policies for its own internal workings- how meetings will be conducted, what topics will be addressed, the role of officers and committees, how the Board will discipline itself. An effective design of Board process ensures that the Board fulfills its three primary responsibilities:

1. Maintain links to the ownership, that is, a grouping that is equivalent to stockholders in an equity corporation. For a school board, for example, students and their parents/guardians are the owners.
2. Establishing the four categories of written policies as defined by the Policy Governance approach, so that everything the Board has to say is included in their encompassing framework.
3. Assuring executive performance.

The Board, and only the Board, must assume full responsibility in these areas. By setting clear Board Process policies, the Board develops a consistent plan for how it will operate compelling it to remain focused on the critical challenges of providing vision and leadership.

Except for what belongs in bylaws or enabling state statutes, these categories of Board policy are exhaustive, that is, they contain everything the Board has to say about values and perspectives that underlie all organizational decisions, activities, practices, budgets, and goals. These policies should be succinct and few.

The purpose of policy governance is to free the Board to be visionary and forward thinking, while permitting the administration to fully utilize their gifts of management to run the Academy on a day-to-day basis. The Board's involvement in day-to-day operations of the Academy is limited to the policies set out in Executive Limitations. This allows the Board to set out what should not occur, while permitting the administration to use their gifts and abilities to select the best method to accomplish the End without violating an Executive Limitation.

An analogy to illustrate is very simply a person walking down a hallway. The room at the end of the hallway is the End (or goal). The walls of the hallway are the Executive Limitations as established by the Board. The person walking down the hall is the administration. The person (administration) is free to move toward the room (End) in the best and most efficient manner it may choose, provided he does not run into the walls (Executive Limitations).