COLORADO
Department of Education

Board Review of Operational Policies

Guidance for Boards Using the Policy Governance Framework



Boards using the Policy Governance framework can still review and comment on operational policies while maintaining the governance–management boundary. In this model, the board governs through policy while the superintendent manages operations.

Operational procedures and administrative policies therefore belong to the superintendent unless they conflict with board policy. The board's role is to define desired outcomes (Ends) and establish limitations, not to manage day-to-day work.

Common Ways Boards Interact with Operational Policies

1. Information Item Review (Most Common Practice)

Superintendent shares proposed updated policy or revisions including their reasoning for the update. The Board members can then ask questions or offer their perspectives including concerns. Resultant feedback is advisory; the superintendent determines whether to incorporate suggestions. Example agenda label: "Operational Policy Update – Information and Board Feedback." Per CASB, PG-EL-3, language would include: T*he Superintendent will consult, when appropriate and at his or her discretion, with staff, students, parents, and other community members in the development of administration policy. The Superintendent will provide copies of all newly promulgated or revised administration policies to the Board and all administrators with instructions to distribute to staff and students'*.

2. Alignment With Board Policy

Boards may review operational policies to ensure alignment with board-level policies such as: Ends policies, Executive limitations (ELs) and/or Governance process policies. If a board believes an operational policy conflicts with board policy, the board does not rewrite the operational policy. Instead, the board may clarify or amend its own policy or request explanation of how the operational approach complies.

3. Superintendent Consultation, Study Sessions and Workshops

Superintendents sometimes seek board perspective on sensitive operational topics such as student discipline approaches, community relations policies, and/or major procedural shifts. The board may provide perspective, but the final operational decision remains with the superintendent. Operational topics may also be discussed during study sessions, board workshops, and/or governance committee discussions. These settings allow discussion without formal board action.

4. Monitoring Reports

Operational practices may appear in monitoring reports demonstrating compliance with Executive Limitations. These reports describe procedures or safeguards used to meet board expectations.

Colorado Statutory Context

Colorado law assigns certain responsibilities directly to boards of education, including adoption of specific policies and governance oversight of the district. As a result, districts using Policy Governance often retain some statutory policies in the board policy manual while delegating most operational procedures to the superintendent. Examples may include student conduct codes, grievance procedures, or other policies required by state statute.

Common Mistakes Boards Make

Common mistakes boards often make include editing administrative procedures instead of focusing on clarifying board policy, directing staff members rather than working through the superintendent, confusing monitoring reports with approval of operational decisions, and allowing operational concerns to dominate board agendas. When these situations occur, the appropriate response is usually to revisit the board's Ends or Executive Limitations (Els) policies to ensure proper governance focus is maintained.

If a board finds itself wanting to edit operational language, this often indicates the board policy itself may need refinement.

Example in Practice

Situation	Policy Governance Response
Board wants input on discipline procedures	Superintendent shares operational draft for feedback
Board disagrees with a provision	Board asks how it aligns with executive limitations
Board wants a different approach	Board revises its ELs related to student treatment

Key Takeaway

Effective Policy Governance boards stay informed about operational practices while focusing their formal authority on defining results, setting limitations, and monitoring district performance.

References

- Carver, John. Boards That Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations.
- Carver, John & Miriam Carver. Reinventing Your Board.
- Carver Policy Governance Model – PolicyGovernance.com resources.
- Colorado Revised Statutes §22-32-109 (Board of Education – specific powers and duties).
- Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) Policy Governance resources.

Acknowledgement: CDE thanks the Colorado Association of School Boards for their input during the development of this resource. For additional information regarding CDE available supports please visit: https://ed.cde.state.co.us/cdeedserv/board-of-education-supports.