

THE JOURNAL OF

# ADVENTIST EDUCATION

December 1999/January 2000



## School Boards Issue

**BOARDSMANSHIP 101**

**TEACHERS LOOK AT THEIR SCHOOL BOARDS**

**BUDGETS AND BOARDS**

**THE BOARD'S ROLE IN TEACHER EMPLOYMENT**

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## School Boards— A Key Role

**HUMBERTO M. RASI**

**S**even groups are involved in the successful operation of an Adventist school, college, or university: faculty, students, administrators, support staff, pupils' parents or relatives, the constituency or stakeholders, and the governing board. Obviously, without the first two—students and teachers—there would be no school. But without the latter—the board—the educational institution's stability, continuity, and success are at risk.

School boards are elected directly or indirectly by the owners of the school—the constituency—to provide overall guidance and direction to the institution on their behalf. A basic axiom is that educational boards govern, while administrators (who are appointed by the board) manage the institution. These two roles—governance and administration—must be kept separate. When they are confused, the educational enterprise suffers.

The growing complexity of academic, financial, and legal issues involved in operating an educational entity, as well as the increasing number of government regulations affecting schools, and the higher expectations of parents and students require that boards be composed of individuals who are both knowledgeable in a variety of areas and have a strong commitment to the mission of the school. Thus, the constituency of every school must exert great care in selecting board members.

Traditionally, board members have been expected to provide wisdom, work, or wealth—and preferably two or more of the three! In other words, board members must bring the following qualities to their task: (1) seasoned knowledge about the operation of a school, in areas such as education, management, finances, marketing, development, and law; (2) willingness to devote time and energy before, during, and after board meetings to ensure the success of the school, and (3) a commitment to contribute from their own resources or secure funds from other sources to ensure the continuity and growth of the school. Care must be taken to ensure that board members represent the various sectors that make up the constituencies of an Adventist school, including church leaders.

The main duties of the governing board of an educational institution can be summarized as follows:

1. To refine, clarify, and define the mission of the school.
2. To select and appoint the principal/president and his or her associates in administration.
3. To provide guidance, counsel, and support to the principal/president.
4. To approve policies for the operation of the institution.
5. To approve institutional long-range plans and their timely implementation.
6. To approve or discontinue educational programs, as recommended by the administration.
7. To select, upon recommendation of the administration, new faculty and support staff.
8. To ensure the financial solvency of the institution, approving and monitoring its budget.
9. To protect and enhance the good name of the institution.
10. To interpret for the school administration the needs and expectations of

*Continued on page 47*

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# **Editorial** *Continued from page 3*

the constituency.

11. To serve as the court of final appeal in institutional matters.

12. To regularly assess its own performance.

Educational boards have various names in different institutions and countries, such as board of directors, governors, regents, or trustees. The latter designation perhaps defines more clearly than others the important role of its members—trustees.\* Indeed, they have been entrusted with the solemn responsibility of ensuring that the mission of the school, college, or university will be successfully carried out

and perpetuated, in order to serve current and future students and the church. This is a noble task, to be approached prudently, intelligently, and enthusiastically.—H.M.R.

\* The Education Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has prepared a model Handbook for College or University Boards of Trustees that can be adapted for use in different settings. It is available free of charge to board chairmen or college/university presidents who request it in writing from the department (12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.).

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# BOARDSMANSHIP

# 101

***Effective governance will help us operate the quality schools that our students deserve, our parents demand, and our church's future requires.***

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BY ED BOYATT

**T**om was one of our best board chairmen. A logger by trade, he was an educator at heart. There was no one more committed to the well-being of children and to quality Adventist education than he. One evening, after a heated school board discussion, he asked me wistfully: "Can you give our board some ideas about how to operate more effectively?"

Tom understood what professional educators have known for decades—a professional approach to board governance is one of our greatest needs. The goal of this article is to share with Tom and other board members "the generally accepted governance practices that effective boards have in common."<sup>1</sup>

## **Why Is Boardsmanship Important?**

Let's first review why quality boards are so important to Adventist education, and why boardsmanship training is essential:

1. *Effective leadership by the board and principal inspires the school staff to give their best.* When leaders create a climate of trust and confidence, the staff feel supported and positive about their work. And when teachers feel good about their work, students benefit.

2. *Quality boards elicit support from the constituency.* When the school board and staff act with integrity and show respect for each other, the constituency will have confidence in the governance process. When confidence is high, community support for the school will be strong.

3. *Effective boards ensure accountability.* True accountability is possible only where authority is clearly defined. When the board's roles and the staff's roles are clearly defined and understood, this usually results in positive and professional attitudes and behavior.

4. *Quality boardsmanship is vital because our school system is essential to the church.* Effective governance will help us operate the quality schools that our students deserve, our parents demand, and our church's future requires.

## **Roles and Responsibilities**

Boardsmanship is a term for the processes that effective boards use to govern a school or conference. While school board responsibilities may vary, there are at least four roles that are generally accepted as essential for effective boardsmanship:

## **Effective boards ensure accountability.**

1. First, the role of the board is to *establish a vision*. Of all the duties of boards, none is more central to the purpose of governance than ensuring that a long-term vision is established at every school. This task begins with a clear mission statement and a strategic plan for the school. This vision and plan reflect the consensus of the constituency, conference, board, and staff as to what students need in order to achieve current and eternal success. The vision sets the school's direction, and should drive every aspect of its program.

2. Next, the board is responsible for *establishing and maintaining an organizational structure that supports the vision*. The board establishes this structure by:

- developing policies,
- establishing budget priorities for both operating and capital improvement, and
- supporting and showing their appreciation of the professional staff.

3. Another major responsibility of the board is to *assess progress and ensure accountability* to the constituency. The school administration and the board evaluate the school's overall progress toward its vision. They assess student achievement and development. Along with the superintendent, they

monitor the completion of annual employee evaluations. This assessment process also includes participation in preparing the school accreditation report.

4. Finally, board members are *advocates for students and Adventist education*. That is why it is inconsistent for board members to enroll their children in public or other private schools. Loyalties cannot be divided. Board members should take every opportunity to communicate to constituents and community members the value of Adventist education.

These four roles represent the functions that are fundamental for school boards. They are the *what*, the *how*, the *how well*, and the *marketing* of Adventist education. Establishing a vision and mission is the *what*, maintaining an organizational structure to support the vision is the *how*, assessing the progress and ensuring accountability is the *how well*, and the communication of the importance of our youth and Adventist education is the *marketing* role of each board member.

### **Board Members as Individuals**

The effectiveness of a board depends upon the values, skills, and wisdom of each member. Therefore, the personal

attributes of board members are essential to the board's success.

First, *being a trustee (one who holds the resources and youth of the constituency in trust) involves a certain disposition or attitude, not a personal agenda*. Unfortunately, not everyone who is elected to a board assumes the disposition of a trustee. Some members never make the transition from being an individual with narrow interests or agendas to being part of a governance team. Only when board members see themselves as stewards of the constituency's youth and resources will the board be highly effective.

Second, *trustees understand that their personal success as a board member depends on the effectiveness of the board as a group*. They understand that a board member's authority is vested in the board as a whole. Boards govern; individuals do not.

Third, *a trustee knows that how a board member governs is as important*

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**Of all the duties of boards, none is more central to the purpose of governance than ensuring that a long-term vision is established at every school.**

*as what he or she contributes.* A trustee builds trust with other members and with the school staff by treating them as he or she wishes to be treated. That is why trustees always keep sensitive information confidential.

Next, *trustees are aware of and respect the diversity of perspectives and styles on the board and in the con-*

*stituency.* They learn to work with and value these differences as they build strong consensus in their deliberations.

Finally, *trustees see themselves as learners.* They want to become familiar with the policies and guidelines of Adventist education, as well as the components of excellence in teaching and leadership.

#### **Board Members Are Part of a Team**

Board members must learn that power does not reside in individuals. Power is exercised only through the authority of the entire board. Thus, every member must enter board service with the idea of building consensus among fellow board members. For the board to demonstrate genuine leadership, each member must learn how to work effectively as the member of the team.

*Maximizing School Board Leadership*<sup>2</sup> identifies certain qualities that facilitate teamwork on the board. Effective team members:

- have a positive, supportive attitude;
- are receptive and respectful listeners;
- possess integrity and thus are worthy of trust;
- are able to communicate well with others and do so openly, honestly, and clearly;

- display a high level of professionalism; and
- operate with fairness.

#### **The Glue for the Team**

Trust is the most important quality for leaders and their boards. It is the “glue” that facilitates effectiveness. And this trust is earned action by action, meeting by meeting, and year by year.

A high-trust environment exists:

- when members exhibit high standards of integrity and personal ethics;
- when policies and board procedures are consistently followed;
- when board members trust one another; and
- when members trust the expertise of the professional staff, principal, and superintendent.

When this kind of confidence exists, board members believe that their colleagues have the best interest of the students and the school in mind when they vote. Also when there is high trust, members believe that the information given them by the principal or subcommittees is accurate.

Trust fosters the best in others. The professional staff must feel empowered to try creative and innovative instructional methods without the fear of being judged a failure or penalized for taking risks. Teachers expect to be held

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accountable, but a high-trust environment enables everyone to work professionally without the “damper of fear.”

When there is a lack of trust in the principal and teachers, this often creates a situation where boards meddle in areas of the school’s operations that are not appropriate board responsibilities. When roles are clear and trust is high, micro-management of the school by the board will seldom occur. Boards set direction and policy; principals and teachers implement those directions.

### **Stopping the Leaks**

School boards should establish strict guidelines that prohibit disclosure of sensitive information to non-board members. Breach of confidentiality usually takes place in connection with a closed or executive session of the board meeting. These sessions can include such topics as a student discipline appeals, personnel action, and potential litigation. In executive session, only board members are allowed to attend, to ensure that no one else hears about this sensitive information.

Confidentiality is important for a number of reasons. First, the privacy rights of employees and students must be respected. Second, nothing undermines trust relationships more rapidly than having confidential information leak to persons outside the boardroom. When such leaks occur, members may not be certain who violated confidentiality. Suspicion and speculations can eventually undermine trust and make it difficult for members to work together.

Finally, when items relating to potential litigation are discussed, it is in everyone’s best interest to not jeopardize the case by spreading potentially damaging information.

In my professional career, I have witnessed far too many breaches of confidentiality. These incidents resulted in reputations being unfairly destroyed, the climate of trust between board members and the constituency being undermined, and the attorney/client privilege breached. These unprofessional acts offer a painful lesson about how difficult it is to maintain personal reputations and corporate trust once a member acts inappropriately.

### **High Level of Professionalism**

Since Adventist education is of vital interest to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, board members must act with this in mind. Both voted actions and personal behavior of board members set a tone for the school that communicates the importance and seriousness of the mission of Adventist education. Board members should treat teachers and administrators as people of high value who have professional expertise and a special ministry to students.

When board members act unprofessionally, this affects the behavior and morale of the staff. How can the board expect appropriate behavior from the employees if they do not practice it themselves? Too often, unprofessional behavior by the board erodes confidence in the school and the conference office of education.

**Board members should take every opportunity to communicate to constituents and community members the value of Adventist education.**

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**Board members should be advocates for Adventist education.**

### **Who Speaks for the Board?**

Chairpersons or board members are occasionally asked to speak on behalf of the board or are requested to characterize the “thinking of the board.” New board members need to learn that the correct question is not who speaks for the board, but what speaks for the board. The actions of the board are the voice of the board. They are the policies and vision of a school and provide the framework for all future actions.

Items typically voted by the board

include tuition collection policy, student handbook regulations, rental agreements, or suggested changes in the school constitution. Since developing policy is one of the main roles of the board, and its actions constitute the true and official voice of the school, a summary of all voted policies should be available to new board members when they become trustees.

### **No Surprises, Please!**

Board chairs and principals do not

like surprises during a board meeting. Likewise, board members do not like to be surprised by a fiscal crisis or news that a teacher is using a controversial instructional method that board members learned about only after parents lodged a complaint. Open and timely communication is essential for efficiency and for trust to develop between boards, educators, and parents.

Board members should notify the principal when major questions or concerns are likely to be raised at a board meeting so that he or she can respond. Board members are also critical “reporters” of information to school leadership. When members hear concerns or rumors about the school, this information needs to be communicated to the principal so that the school team can anticipate problems and respond to emerging developments. Board members must serve as eyes and ears for school leadership.

Using appropriate procedures for placing items on the agenda is another safeguard against surprises. Each board should develop a process (which may be described in a bylaw of the constitution) that is clearly understood by the board and constituency. Since the first step in making a change is getting an item on the agenda, each board member must feel that he or she has the right to do so. If an important item comes up during general questions and answers, it is generally accepted procedure to place that issue on the agenda of the next meeting. It is wise to vote only on official agenda items, which allows time for school administrators to provide necessary information to the board before decisions are formalized and entered in the minutes.

#### **Only a “Rubber Stamp”?**

Board members have often told me that they feel the board “is just becoming a rubber stamp!” This concern is usually expressed by a member who desires additional rationale for a certain proposed action or wants to be assured that other options were considered in the decision-making process.

It should not seem surprising that there is often only a short discussion before voting on an agenda item. If a rec-

ommendation supports the mission of the school and the proposal was developed according to standard policies and with counsel from the board and its subcommittees, it should be approved by a large majority vote. If the appropriate “homework” was done, many actions will be unanimously approved. This homework should include a clearly stated rationale and a list of additional options that were considered.

#### **Commitment of Time and Energy**

One evening, a veteran board mem-

ber reminded me that serving on the school board is just as much a ministry as teaching a Sabbath school class. I agree. When board membership is taken seriously, members must dedicate sizeable blocks of time to becoming an effective trustee of the school.

Regular attendance and participation in board meetings are important, but not sufficient for effective boardsmanship. Effective members are also readers and listeners. They familiarize themselves with current issues in education and listen to the concerns of par-

## **CODE OF ETHICS**

**A code of ethics is an expression of those personal ideals that should guide an individual's daily activities.\***

**In all my actions as a school board member, my first commitment is to the well-being of our youth. My primary responsibility is to each child—regardless of race, creed, color, sex, or national origin.**

I also have other major commitments to:

- the philosophy, mission, and goals of Seventh-day Adventist education;
- the teachings and standards of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; and
- the constitutions of my nation and state, the union education code, and the established policies of the school board.

**Understanding and accepting the foregoing commitments, I shall:**

- consider my position as a board member as a trust and not use it for private advantage or personal gain.
- be constantly aware that I have no legal authority except when I am acting as a member of the board. I shall present my concerns and concepts through the process of board debate and, if in the minority on any decision, I shall abide by and support the majority decision. When I am in the majority, I shall respect divergent opinions.
- encourage ideas and opinions from the constituency and endeavor to incorporate their views in the deliberations and decisions of the board.
- devote sufficient time, thought, and study to proposed actions to be able to base my decisions upon all available facts and vote my honest convictions.
- remember that the basic functions of the board are to establish the policies by which the school is to be administered and recommend to the conference office of education the principal and staff who will implement those policies.
- recognize that the deliberations of the board in executive session are not mine to distribute or discuss. They may be released publicly only with board approval.
- avail myself of opportunities to enlarge my potential as a board member through participation in educational conferences and training sessions.

\* This Code of Ethics was adapted by Ed Boyatt from the Pacific Union Conference Education Code and the Riverside (California) Unified School District bylaws of the board.

ents and students. They visit the school occasionally to assist in school projects and attend its public programs.

Being an effective board member requires a major commitment of family, career, and discretionary time to the church's educational ministry. Board members with tact, intelligence, professionalism, and a sense of team membership can be a credit to the board, the conference, and the constituents.

### Keeping Board Members Informed

Many schools find it useful to prepare a three-ring notebook for each board member. The school secretary or administrative assistant should keep these reference notebooks current. Dividers are helpful in referencing the board minutes, financial statements, operating budget, school handbook, school constitution, sub-committee minutes, and the recommendations of the last accreditation committee. A school map may also prove useful in discussions of the physical plant.<sup>3</sup>

### Board Self-Evaluation

In the board's haste to evaluate school employees or educational programs, it often neglects to evaluate its own work. A self-evaluation can be as simple as asking two questions:

1. What are the strengths of this board?
2. What areas of improvement should be addressed?

Some boards ask teachers to complete a similar form so that their perceptions can be included in the evaluation.

### A Challenge to Conference and Union Leadership

We can learn much from many public and private agencies about the importance of providing continuing education programs to train new members in the knowledge and skills of boardmanship and to polish the skills of those who have served for longer periods of time. Most public school board members in California choose to attend workshops sponsored by the California School Board Association. This organization provides eight seminars over a two-year period that cover the duties and responsibilities of boardmanship.

At the completion of 56 hours of instruction, participants receive a "Master's in Governance" certificate that testifies to their new competencies and knowledge.<sup>4</sup> We could learn valuable methodologies from these models of excellence for our own board in-services.

### Summary

Church leaders appreciate the many hours of service that lay board members provide each school year. But as schools plan ways to provide the best professional growth experiences for our school employees, they need to remember that boards, too, need to grow professionally. This needs to be an ongoing commitment.

If time is devoted to understanding the roles and functions of effective boardmanship, everyone concerned can work together to provide the very best for our youth. ☞

*The coordinator for this issue, Dr. Ed Boyatt is Associate Professor of Education at La Sierra University in Riverside, California. He has served as a secondary teacher, academy principal, college dean of students, and union associate director of education. Before moving to California in*

### Guidelines for Productive Board Deliberations\*

- Listen with respect,
- Listen to more than is being said,
- Share information calmly,
- Express differences kindly,
- Look for common ground,
- Raise a hand or follow a procedure for speaking up,
- Have a time limit for monologues,
- Allow several others to speak before one member speaks again,
- Be open-minded,
- Learn from others, communicate rather than argue, and
- Allow time for all viewpoints to be expressed.\*

\* Based on Loofbourrow, p. 29.

# A trustee builds trust with other members and with the school staff by treating them as he or she wishes to be treated.

1998, he was Superintendent of Education for the Oregon Conference. Dr. Boyatt has served as a member, executive secretary, or chairman of more than 30 different boards. The editorial staff of the JOURNAL expresses appreciation for his enthusiastic support, advice, and hands-on assistance in preparing this issue.

### REFERENCES

1. Sherry Loofbourrow, *Boardmanship: Maximizing School Board Leadership* (West Sacramento, Calif.: California School Board Association, 1996), p. 2.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
3. *Guidelines for School Board Members* (Portland, Oregon: North Pacific Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1990), p. 8.
4. Davis Campbell, "Effective Governance Model," *California Schools* 57:3 (Spring 1999), p. 29.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

If you are a board member, you should seek information first from the principal and superintendent. They can help you obtain a copy of the guide for board members that most union offices of education produce for their region. They also have access to a computer PowerPoint presentation originally produced in the North Pacific Union that is an excellent resource for a board in-service.

The National School Boards Association conducts regional and national conferences on boardmanship, as well as publishes the *American School Board Journal*. Check it out at <http://www.asbj.com>.

Many states have a school board association. They conduct board member institutes and usually publish a journal or newsletter. The California Web site is a good place to begin: <http://www.csba.org>.

# TEACHERS LOOK AT THEIR SCHOOL BOARDS

**B**oards provide guidance and control to most group ventures in the world today. All professions have one or more boards that monitor the quality of their performance. Historically, American K-12 schools and teachers have been managed by school boards whose membership represents their community's "lay people." This local control has generally worked well.

Since the very beginning of the United States, its citizens have felt that the genius of American education is that local community school boards provide guidance, as contrasted with centralized control by more distant bodies like national accrediting agencies or the federal government. The rationale has been that "local boards know the needs of the community, and they can be held accountable."

This noteworthy strength of local responsibility can at times also become its weakness. When we survey the history of locally controlled education, we find horrifying tales of micromanagement and intrusion into the private lives of teachers. The early history of Christian schools contains stories of rules and board conduct that were intrusive and inappropriate. Two areas are most notable: (1) school board directives that defined who and when

***Of all the boards and committees formed by the church, the school board is the single body that most directly affects the professional life of any church employee.***

teachers could date (this was especially true when nearly all teachers were female); and (2) school boards' failure to pay their teachers in a timely manner.

All that has changed as the church school system of education has developed and become more systematized, which has included the crafting of procedures and policies that create specified limits and required accountability for board members. We now know that strong schools with strong school boards, properly guided by appropriate guidelines, ensure successful education.

Today, K-12 boards generally receive high marks from the teaching staffs they serve. This article examines what educators, especially teachers, think about how their boards function. Information and ideas for this article were shared by a random group of teachers, principals, superintendents, board members, and one

conference president who responded to an open-ended survey about school board impact on church school educators' professional lives. Interestingly, the concerns and suggestions cited by survey respondents were quite similar.

Ninety-five percent of the respondents said they "fully agree" or "agree with reservation" that their school board is supportive of their school's faculty and their work. By

BY CLARENCE U. DUNBEBIN

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contrast, 78 percent of the respondents said they “fully agree” that their board is supportive of them personally and of their work.

### Identified Problems

While the respondents said their boards supported them, they also offered suggestions that they believed would enhance the board’s performance. Because the survey was open-ended, we did not offer possible problem areas for the respondents to check. The suggestions that follow came directly from the teachers’ experiences.

The following four problems surfaced as the most frequently listed concerns of the educators/teachers:

- a. Poor communication skills that affect interaction between board members and education employees;
- b. Inaccurate understanding of their board-member role;
- c. Poor selection processes; and
- d. Lack of in-service education for board members.

### Poor Communication Skills

Teachers and principals are greatly

concerned about the poor interpersonal communication skills demonstrated by many board members. They are especially alarmed that board members often listen to parents and students, then discuss their complaints during board meetings without first talking with the teachers to verify the accuracy of the reports. Teachers also believe board members should visit their schools to learn firsthand what is going on.

The teachers suggested that board members and parents follow the principles of Matthew 18:15-17 when dealing with them. Here is an adaptation of the Scripture that clarifies teacher concerns:

*“If you believe one of your teachers performs unprofessionally, go to that teacher and share the concerns you have about his or her conduct. Be sure to do this in private. Keep it between just the two of you. If the teacher listens and corrects the problem, you have saved a valuable minister of children. But, if the teacher refuses to listen, talk with him or her again, but this time invite the superintendent of schools to go with you, for the Bible teaches that every com-*

*plaint must be proved true by two or more witnesses. If the teacher refuses to listen, report the matter to the school’s personnel committee for discussion. Be sure the superintendent is present when you do this”* (adapted by Clarence Dunbein from Matthew 18:15-17).

Closely related to this concern is the belief held by many teachers that board members do not try to know them or see them as individuals. Several respondents wrote: “We want board members to take the time to talk with us and get to know us as people who love their children. We also want them to visit our classrooms and see how our school works.”

Teachers find it difficult to understand how board members can be effective in their work if they do not visit to see what educators and students are doing. They also want them to visit the classrooms and playgrounds to make sure they are in good repair and safe for children. This experience will give them some insights into the kinds of problems teachers handle on a daily basis.

From the teachers’ perspective, schools are bound to have a serious

**While the respondents said their boards supported them, they also offered suggestions that they believed would enhance the board's performance.**

communication gap when educators are excluded from communication and decision-making. They understand that there must be a school board to assume the legal and ethical responsibilities of the school's operation; however, they do not understand why their ideas and per-

spectives are not given a place in the decision-making process.

**Misunderstanding the School Board Member's Role**

Many of the responding educators strongly believed that board members do not understand what a board is supposed to do. They felt that school boards should receive regular in-service orientation to help them understand the limits of their roles and to identify responsibilities that are often overlooked. The educators also suggested that board members should become better acquainted with the union and conference education codes so their agendas and local policies will comply with the guidelines given to them for operating schools.

One of the biggest concerns expressed by the educators responding to the survey was board members' belief that their role includes micromanaging the school's daily program. One respondent wrote: "The board chair took it upon himself to have the board vote that the teacher must keep the desks lined up in neat rows. Classroom organization is clearly a teacher responsibility."

A related concern is board members

who come into the classrooms intent on supervising the program. Generally accepted guidelines for boards state that members hold authority collectively during board meetings, but this does not extend to individual members having power over the day-by-day activities of faculty and administration.

**The Selection Process**

Educators who responded to the survey expressed concern about the process for identifying and selecting potential board members. While it is true that smaller congregations have a finite number of candidates for boards and committees, teachers believe the process for selection could be improved. For example, nominating committees could use the job descriptions provided in the union education code book and in the board member's manual as the basis for identifying possible candidates. They also could use a short outline format to ask for a brief summary of the candidate's talents and interests that would qualify him or her to serve as a board member.

Teachers suggested that nominating committees avoid asking more than one family member to serve on the school board. They give two reasons for this: If the two members are husband and wife, one or the other typically stays home to take care of the children, thus denying the board the benefit of the absent parent's ideas. The second concern is that family members could create a block voting problem that could damage the functioning of the board.

There is also a sense among observers that some people aspire to become board members to push their own agendas. The Board Member Code of Ethics developed by the Columbia Union Conference declares that board membership should be used to enhance ministry to the children of the community and not to provide a platform for a personal agenda.

While the respondents to the survey did not use the term "servant-leadership," their descriptions of appropriate board decision-making indicate that school board members should see themselves as serving the students, the school, and the church. Servant-leader-

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ship contrasts greatly with leadership that seeks to push one's own agenda.

Robert K. Greenleaf writes: "The most important qualification for trustees [board members] should be that they care for the institution, which means that they care for all of the people the institution touches, and that they are determined to make their caring count."\* When educators see board members giving this type of leadership, they are reassured and give a sigh of collective relief.

### **In-service Opportunities for Board Members**

Responding teachers repeatedly mentioned the need for conference offices of education and the board itself to provide in-service activities for members. They urged that superintendents of schools meet with the board more frequently than they currently do.

Kent Cabreira, an educator and graphic artist, included with his response a list of journals specifically published to help school board members enlarge their knowledge of excellent boardsmanship. (See the box on page 14.) Boards may wish to order one or more subscriptions to allow members to become acquainted with current information about board leadership.

### **Characteristics Educators Want to See in Board Members**

Integrity was the number one characteristic. One teacher said: "Elect people to our board who will stand behind their word at all times." Another was emphatic in his observation: "Board members should stand by the promises they make when interviewing us and not change their minds after we sign our contracts."

"Board members should really care about the school," said another teacher. An important part of that caring atti-

tude is supporting their teachers and principal. One teacher told of an encounter with her board: "I had a student who was a behavior problem for several years. Each time I took the matter to the board, all they did was to ask me to keep trying to work with him."

The teacher added this word of advice: "When a teacher takes a behavior problem to the board, the board members should recognize that she has already done all she knows how to do." She suggested that the board chair and members who visit the school become personally acquainted with what is happening so they will be better able to show caring concern for both students and teachers.

Responding teachers said they wished for more support from their boards. Publicly supporting a teacher or

**Teachers and principals are greatly concerned about the poor interpersonal communication skills demonstrated by many board members.**

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principal does not mean that the board chair should not meet in private to discuss problems with him or her. At the heart of Matthew 18 is the principle that all of us will sometime behave in an inappropriate manner. When that occurs, while being publicly supportive, the board may find it prudent to hold

the person accountable privately.

Teachers responding to the survey also asked that board members be interested enough in their school to serve as recruiters within the congregation. Failure to enthusiastically recruit students frequently denotes a board member's lack of interest in the school generally

# **Teachers find it difficult to understand how board members can be effective in their work if they do not visit to see what educators and students are doing.**

and his or declining support for the its program.

## **Understand School Board Processes**

Teachers and principals understand well the need for boards to follow due process in order to protect both them and their students. Unfortunately, many have experienced situations where school boards met and took actions without having a quorum or without the superintendent present. Other boards have failed to follow the steps of due process outlined in the union and conference education codes. Decisions have been made without prior discussion with teachers and without the conference superintendent present.

Personnel management problems sometimes create impossible situations. One such problem was identified by a conference president who described a board meeting when he was an intern. "As a young pastor sitting on a local school board, I was unsure how to respond when the chair asked: 'Do we wish to continue Mr. M\_\_\_\_\_ at the school for another year?'"

"This question is usually asked innocently with the assumption that the response will be a resounding 'Yes!' But it invites perceptions, rumors, or angry reactions that are sometimes helpful—

but too frequently hurtful," the president wrote.

He clarified his concern as follows: "School boards should confront their role and responsibility regarding the performance of teachers. The teachers are not their employees. They work for the school system and are evaluated by the conference office of education."

## **Conclusion**

Of all the boards and committees formed by the church, the school board is the single body that most directly affects the professional life of any church employee. Educators and board members alike seek fulfillment of a single goal—"Introducing students to Jesus Christ as Friend and Saviour." It is tragic when poor communication or a misunderstanding of roles creates a short circuit in the process.

The strong foundation of trust that a large majority of educators have in

their boards combined with appropriate in-service and orientation activities—and keeping in mind the definition of their jobs—should produce boards whose talents, aptitude, and desire to be servant-leaders will benefit students, teachers, and the church at large. Indeed, effective boards are an invaluable part of effective schools. ✍

*Dr. Clarence Dunbebin served for many years as a teacher and principal, and is currently Associate Superintendent of Education for the Potomac Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Staunton, Virginia. In this capacity, he regularly attends and consults with K-10 school boards, and frequently provides orientation and service programs for them.*

\* Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), p. 55. (Italics in original.)

## **RESOURCES**

The following sources will provide school board members with information about their roles. Kent Cabreira, a graphic artist/Web designer and educator who lives in La Selva Beach, California, provided these recommendations when he responded to the survey.

### **Journal**

*The American School Board Journal* was founded in 1891. The subscription price is \$54 for 12 monthly issues. You'll receive four bound-in issues of *Electronic School*, the quarterly technology magazine for K-12 school leaders. For information, write to: *The American School Board Journal*, 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet address: <http://www.asbj.com>.

### **School Board Association**

Write to: National School Boards Association (NSBA), 1680 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Phone: (703) 838-6722; Fax: (703) 683-7590. Internet address: <http://www.nsba.org>.

### **Book**

Gerald Bailey, Dan Lumley, and Deborah Dunbar, *Leadership and Technology: What School Board Members Need to Know* (1995). ISBN 0-88364-196-8. Available from the National School Boards Association. This is a special report done by the NSBA's Institute for the Transfer of Technology to Education (ITTE). Internet address for ITTE: <http://www.nsba.org/itte/>.

### **Adventist Resources**

Check with your conference office of education to learn if it has a school board manual. Most do have one.

# THE BLESSINGS OF SERVING ON A SMALL SCHOOL BOARD

**W**hat was my first experience at a small-school board meeting like? Well, have you ever started playing a game, only to realize that you have no idea what the rules are?

After teaching at the same academy for almost 12 years, I fully expected my first elementary school board meeting to be just like a faculty meeting. However, the differences were as great as the changes our family had just experienced as a result of the move from San Diego, California, to southern Oregon—quite a culture shock!

It took time, but I discovered that in most small communities, a sense of “family” replaces the businesslike atmosphere normally found in a school boardroom. As I moved from board member to interim chairman and eventually to teacher, I learned at least four valuable lessons:

## **1. The school board is like a family.**

Small-school board meetings often take much longer than other boards and committees. This is because of all the non-agenda items such as often-repeated recitations of historical facts, anecdotes, and detailed stories about members’ experiences. Also, some members feel the need to tell everyone exactly how each board action will affect his or her children. For some members, the board meeting becomes a social gathering as well

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as a business meeting. However, the time “wasted” when the board strays from the agenda can help create an atmosphere of caring and loyalty among its members, somewhat like a family gathering. As a result, the board in a small-school setting often shows devoted support, protection, and dedication to those (often including teachers) whom they have “adopted.”

While this lack of discipline can frustrate the “professional” board member, it’s possible to build efficiency into the meeting format while not neglecting social interaction. The chairperson can allow some time during each meeting for these kinds of experiences, but also make sure to let new members or visitors in on the stories and jokes,

when appropriate. Then he or she can gently steer the conversation back to the agenda.

## **2. Getting things done is more important than getting credit.**

I never feel prepared for a board meeting unless I have a written agenda to follow. During my first board meeting at my present school, I had my agenda, gleaned from information I had asked about the meeting, neatly typed and ready in front of me. To avoid seeming too anxious or giving the impression that I was “taking over” the meeting, I waited for the chairman to ask me for any new ideas. When he noticed I had typed out the agenda for the meeting, he asked if I could give him a copy. Of course, I obliged. Later, a new pastor mentioned that he had not received a copy of the agenda. When other members told him that the board had never used a written agenda, he responded, “Well, couldn’t we all have a copy?” Fortunately, I had made enough for every member.

Now, this is a small thing, but since that meeting, the board has run much more smoothly, and it seems easier for the members to stay on task. I suppose I could have simply asked the chairman if he preferred to type his own agenda or would like me to prepare one. But I found this method a much less threatening way to get the point across. Sometimes letting things speak for themselves and not seeking the credit can make all the difference.

BY JOY BRUNT VEVERKA

I also found this approach helpful during another meeting when I felt the status quo needed to be questioned. Our aging printer (donated by a community friend) simply did not do justice to the beautiful documents the new computers were able to create. When I suggested buying a new color printer, the response was far from encouraging. But since I felt this was an important issue that needed to be discussed further, I simply waited for another opportunity to bring it up. After board members saw several examples of what I had been discussing, they decided that I had a legitimate concern. When the time came to make recommendations, what did they suggest? A color printer, of course! My patience and low-key approach had paid off.

### **3. Everything I know I learned from my students.**

Ask any teacher what's so enjoyable about teaching, and at least one of the answers will be how much he or she learns from students. This is particularly important in the small-school situation, which places teacher and student together for longer periods of time. For example, I now have students I have been teaching for several years who are a tremendous source of good, forthright ideas.

During our board meetings, the children of the members often study or play in the classroom while we meet in the library. One February, at the annual personnel meeting, I followed the board's usual procedure, exiting the library and waiting in the classroom while the

board discussed my employment. I sat down near a student, who asked me: "Is the meeting over already?"

"No, they just asked me to leave."

"What did you do? Something bad?" the student asked, incredulous.

"Oh, that's not it. I just left so they could talk about me."

"Well, that's not nice!" she replied, indignantly.

Before I could explain that this was a normal practice for boards and committees, I was asked to return to the library.

The following year, as I prepared to leave the room at the annual personnel meeting, I shared with the board what had happened the previous year. The members responded: "You know, that really isn't nice. Why don't you stay while we talk?" The student had innocently taught the entire school board an important lesson!

### **4. It's the thought that counts.**

While some rural areas are poor in terms of financial resources, numbers of people available to help, and fancy facilities, they may be very rich in the number of dedicated supporters of the school. I am always amazed how the church and school budgets are enhanced by consistent giving and commitment. Before the children's story at church each Sabbath morning, the tots collect an offering in "the little red schoolhouse" to support the local school. While the weekly total of three, five, or 10 dollars doesn't sound like a lot, these offerings provide funds for needed items that the budget does not stretch far enough to cover. For example, one year's offering purchased a 50-volume set of Eyewitness books. Another year's contributions provided a new computer.

### **Conclusion**

Working with boards in small schools can be a tremendously rewarding experience if one is willing to work with the community, listen carefully, gather support, and appreciate God's blessings. ✍

**Joy Brunt Veverka** is Head Teacher at the Milo Elementary School in Days Creek, Oregon.

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# THE BOARD'S ROLE IN TEACHER EMPLOYMENT

**A** school's reputation is built upon the quality of its teachers. Since every superintendent and school board want to find and hire the "best teacher or principal," we need to be clear about the role of the local school board and conference office of education in this most important process.

Who has the official authority to hire and fire certificated teachers in the Seventh-day Adventist school system? (See the box on page 18.) According to the North American Division Working Policy (and the individual union education codes as well): "The employment, assignment, transfer, retirement, non-renewal of contract or dismissal shall be by the authority of the Conference K-12 Board of Education."

This means that teachers are employed by the conference, not the local school. There are a variety of legal and professional reasons for this. Teachers and administrators need the assurance of professional treatment in harmony with fair employment standards and practices, uniform salary and benefits packages, retirement service credit, medical coverage, educational allowances, and professional development opportunities. The local school does not have the legal authority to employ education professionals and often lacks the professional expertise to do so.

Although the conference office of education is the official authority for teacher employment, it still

**Who has the official authority to hire and fire certificated teachers in the Seventh-day Adventist school system?**

works closely with the local school boards in hiring and placing teachers. To ensure a good working relationship, it is essential that the office of education or conference K-12 board not place, assign, or reassign teachers without first consulting with the local school boards involved. It is also important for local school boards to understand that, while they have substantial opportunity to participate in the decision-making, they do not have the legal authority to make binding commitments with or to terminate certificated educational

personnel without the approval of the conference office of education. However, the local school board can make recommendations about such employees to the office of education and the conference K-12 board of education through official board actions.

Of course, it is in the best interest of both the conference office of education and the local school boards to cooperate in teacher recruitment and placement. In order to accomplish this, many educational professionals have found the following information helpful. It covers the general policies and guidelines that define the appropriate balance between the needs and interests of the local school board and the interests of the conference as it seeks to coordinate the total personnel structure of the schools.

## **The Dynamics of Teacher Placement**

Teacher hiring, placement, transfers, and requested changes involve

**BY GILBERT L. PLUBELL**

# **It is in the best interest of both the conference office of education and the local school boards to cooperate in teacher recruitment and placement.**

sensitive personnel issues and generally cause at least some stress for everyone involved. This article will focus specifically on issues pertaining to teachers, local school boards, and office of education personnel. Though the issues may be slightly different for each group, all three will be affected by the dynamics of the process.

## *The Teacher's Perspective*

When a teacher's contract is not renewed or he or she is asked by the school board to transfer (as agreed upon and arranged by the conference office of education), the teacher may experience a variety of frustrating and sometimes conflicting emotions. These may include a sense of loss, grief, upheaval, anger, separation, and anxiety. Some may even perceive the request as an attack on their self-esteem, professionalism, and the value of their teaching ministry. The teacher's family may also feel disconnected, lonely, worried,

or even angry at the prospect of moving.

Even teachers who have requested a transfer may experience some of these emotions, although they are likely to feel a sense of anticipation and excitement in looking forward to new challenges. Teachers seeking new positions may have difficulty adapting to a changing placement system where they must "sell" themselves through an interview process in order to be considered for another position.

It is important for school boards to keep these things in mind as they work with the conference office of education to deal with sensitive personnel issues that affect a teacher's employment status.

## *The School Board and Teacher Selection*

The local school board plays a vital role in teacher selection. While the conference K-12 board of education actually employs the teacher, it is important for the local school board to feel comfortable with the person selected. The office of education personnel will identify candidates they perceive to be an appropriate fit for the school and arrange for one or more interviews with potential candidates.

## *The Dual Role of the Office of Education*

The conference office of education personnel usually must perform a dual role. Superintendents work on behalf of both the local school board and the candidates during the placement process. Balancing local school board desires with the needs of prospective teachers is often a difficult and delicate process. In addition, the office of education must coordinate personnel changes with its master plan for the conference teaching staff, which includes previous commitments, appropriate placement, and available funding. It also needs to ensure opportunities for teachers who have gained experience but not name recognition to be considered for openings within the conference school system.

With this in mind, the office of education personnel work closely with local

## **CATEGORIES OF EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL**

### ***Credentialed or Certificated Employees***

- Employees who are required by the conference and/or state to hold teaching credentials—includes teachers and most administrators.
- Under contract with the conference.
- Local boards recommend their hiring and termination to the conference.
- Conference K-12 board has final word in their employment.
- Salary and benefits determined by the union educational code.
- Conference does reference and criminal background checks.

### ***Classified Employees***

- School employees who are not required to hold teaching credentials, such as secretaries, custodians, bus drivers, instructional aides, and some substitute teachers.
- Under contract with the local school.
- Salary and benefits set by the local school according to union guidelines.
- Employment policies found in union educational code.
- Local school does reference checks and criminal background checks; although in some cases, conference may do criminal checks.

### ***Volunteers***

- Parents or friends of the school who work without pay as instructional aides or supervisors on field trips.
- Standards of conduct that apply to classified employees are usually enforced.
- Local school does reference checks and criminal background checks; although in some cases, conference may do criminal checks.

school boards to strike the appropriate balance between the needs of the school and those of the teaching candidate. The office of education facilitates the reference research on each candidate and collaborates with the local school board on the logistics of the interview.

#### **Teacher Selection Overview**

When a local school board anticipates that a certificated teacher will need to be added or replaced, the following steps should be taken:

1. The principal or board chair should contact the conference office of education to begin the selection process.

2. The school board should determine the qualities and qualifications they are looking for in the prospective candidate. Since the “perfect” teacher may be hard to find, the board should try to agree on more realistic expectations. The board must consider the school’s “personality”—its unique needs, assets, and liabilities. They should already have set short- and long-term goals and generated a vision statement for the school. This will make it easier to decide what talents and qualifications the new teacher needs to possess. It will be helpful to the conference office of education if the board provides a profile of the attributes they desire in each teacher candidate.

3. After the superintendent reviews the names of potential candidates, they are presented to the school’s personnel committee for evaluation. Then an interview with one or more prospective candidates is scheduled. This interview may involve the school board’s personnel committee or available members of the entire board.

4. The school board (or its personnel committee) conducts an interview with the candidate or candidates (see information below). A representative of the conference office of education should be present unless other arrangements have been made.

5. Within a specified time after the interview and upon the recommendation of its personnel committee, the local school board makes a recommendation to the office of education about the acceptability of the candidate. Hence, the final decision is made by the office of education upon the recommendation of the local school board. The selected candidate then will be granted a specified time period to decide whether to accept or decline the invitation. The office of education should inform the board chair and/or principal of the candidate’s decision as quickly as possible.

6. If the candidate accepts the position, his or her employment must be af-

**Superintendents work on behalf of both the local school board and the candidates during the placement process.**

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firmed by the conference office of education and voted by the conference K-12 board of education at its next regularly scheduled meeting. (K-12 boards generally empower the superintendent to proceed with contracts between official board meetings.) An employment packet is sent to the teacher so that he

or she can begin the process of transition.

#### *Preparing for the Interview*

1. In coordination with the office of education, the board should determine the best date and time for the interview. They should choose a time when as

# **Since the “perfect” teacher may be hard to find, the board should try to agree on more realistic expectations.**

many members as possible of the school board or personnel committee can attend. Early evening is usually a good time.

2. Before the interview, copies of the candidate’s résumé should be given to the school board chairperson and/or the principal.

3. The board members should prepare questions in advance that they would like to ask the candidate(s). It is a good idea to ask the same basic questions of each candidate. The school board may want to divide up the questions so no one dominates the interview.

4. Before or immediately after the conclusion of the interview, the board chair should ask for the report on the candidate’s references and background check that has been done by the conference office of education.

## *The Interview Format*

It is recommended that the interview proceed as follows:

- The superintendent or associate superintendent of education introduces the candidate to the school board members.
- The school board members introduce themselves to the candidate.
- The school board chairperson and/or the office of education representative leads out in the interview process and opens the floor for questions.
- The candidate responds to the questions and is allowed to ask ques-

tions of the school board.

- After the question-and-answer session, the candidate should be given further opportunity, if desired, to talk about his or her personal philosophy, interests, and/or concerns before leaving the interview room.

- If he or she has not already done so, the office of education representative provides the reference research findings to the school board.

## *Appropriate Questions for the Interview*

The interview may involve questions relating to:

- philosophy of education
- work experience
- educational attainments
- professional certification
- teaching style
- organizational skills
- innovative practices
- computer literacy
- communication skills
- interpersonal skills
- curriculum
- classroom management, climate
- grading policies
- field trips
- personal talents, hobbies
- professional goals
- spiritual life
- church involvement

## *Inappropriate Questions or Comments*

The interview should not include inappropriate or illegal questions (age, marital status, financial condition, medical history, race, mutual acquaintances, or family background). The board should not make any premature commitments or promises to candidates; their recommendation must first be reviewed by the conference office of education.

## **Other General Points to Remember**

1. Taking into consideration specified criteria for eligibility, preference should be given to teachers within the conference who have expressed interest in a position that becomes available.
2. When requesting the placement of a teacher with three or more years of satisfactory experience, the school board should recognize that the appointment will be for more than one

year. Even though the *employment contract* is for one year, a teacher on professional status must be given ample opportunity to correct concerns of the local school board or superintendent. While the teacher is subject to annual review, he or she is protected by procedural guidelines and policies. If a change in the teacher’s employment status is considered necessary, the procedures outlined in the union education code must be carefully followed.

3. The local school board may not take any action affecting the employment status of certificated educational personnel without a conference office of education representative (the official employer) present.

4. The office of education will usually pay or assist in paying the travel-related expenses for the teacher candidate(s) to be interviewed, providing that proper procedures and processes have been followed and the office of education has arranged or approved the trip.

5. The conference K-12 board of education is the final authority in all teacher hiring, placements, discipline, or firing. The local school board may recommend a change in a teacher’s employment status, but the superintendent and K-12 board of education must agree in a formal action. As in the hiring process, the local school board can only *recommend* termination or discipline of a conference employee. This recommendation must then be formally accepted by the superintendent and K-12 board of education. That is the main reason a superintendent should be present at a local school board meeting when such recommendations may be voted. Generally speaking, if the superintendent does not approve the local board’s recommendation, neither will the conference K-12 board of education.

## **Teacher Transitions**

### *Saying Farewell*

It is important for members of the school board and school families to say a formal “good-bye” to a teacher and his or her family and to provide recognition for the teacher’s efforts and accomplishments in the educational ministry of the school. This is a time to deal

with the emotions that members of these groups and the teacher (as well as his or her family) might have. It is as important to celebrate the past as to look with anticipation to the future.

Be sure to provide as much help as possible with moving and making the transition to the new school.

#### *After Hiring a New Teacher*

Now that a new teacher has been hired, here are a few suggestions for the school board greeting and assisting him or her:

1. Write a welcoming letter and send a fruit basket (or floral arrangement) to the teacher and his or her family. It is important from the very beginning for the teacher's family to have a feeling of acceptance and warmth from their new school and church families.

2. Designate a contact person to assist the new teacher in finding housing and becoming acquainted with the community. If possible, arrange a church potluck to introduce the teacher to the church members.

3. Ask the teacher about his or her plans for the classroom (painting, desks, tables, etc.).

4. Make sure the school board and/or administrator is available to help the teacher as much as possible!

5. Provide the new teacher with a church directory so he or she can become acquainted with the church leadership and members.

6. Make sure the teacher is not pressured to accept heavy church responsibilities during the first year.

7. Within the first three months, revisit the school board's expectations of the teacher and the teacher's expectations of the school board. This will help to keep the relationship on track and the school moving in the right direction.

#### *Making the Teacher's Move Easier*

The physical process of moving is often stressful. Here are some helpful hints to provide assistance for arriving and departing teachers:

1. Provide moving day meals. A box lunch often works better than a hot meal on moving day. This allows the teacher and his or her family to work, take breaks, and eat on their own

schedule. Include lots of fluids.

2. Offer help in loading or unloading the moving van. Often the teacher is expected to find able-bodied individuals in the new community to assist in this process. Let the teacher know where to look for help so he or she won't waste time calling around for assistance.

3. Remember the teacher's children. The teacher's family is often overlooked in both the arrival and departure process. Childcare on moving day can be a lifesaver. Include the new teacher's children in church and community activities, and introduce them to their peers. Welcome and farewell gifts create warm feelings and good memories.

#### **Summary**

The reputations of the conference office of education and local school board are built on the constituency's and teachers' perceptions of how well school personnel are treated. Even though the local school board only recommends to the conference office of ed-

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ucation concerning the hiring, transfers, discipline, or termination of conference employees, their careful attention and professional conduct are an essential part of the process. It is hoped that this article will assist local school boards in clarifying their role and responsibilities in this most important process of hiring teachers and educational administrators. ✍

*Now "retired" after 42 years in education, **Gilbert L. Plubell, Ph.D.**, served most recently as Director of the Office of Education for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists. He has also worked as a teacher, principal, superintendent of schools, and union director of education. He currently operates the Professional Educational Research and Consulting Services in Boring, Oregon.*

Acknowledgments: Special thanks to the Georgia-Cumberland and Florida conference offices of education, and to Ed Boyatt for sharing information for this article.

# LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES *of Board Members*

**A**dventist schools are blessed with a core of dedicated lay people who contribute their time and skills to the task of governing their local school. Those who serve in this capacity need a basic overview of the legal responsibilities of school boards and their individual members. This article will offer a brief overview of some areas that are of particular concern for Adventist school boards.\*

## **Conflict of Interest**

Each year, board members should be required to sign a form stating they have no conflicts of interest with their relationship to the school. Avoiding conflicts of interest means that personal preferences and commitments must not prevent the member from acting in the best interest of the school. In general, this means that members must disclose conflicting interests and refrain from voting on any item in which they have a personal financial interest. They should also refrain from accepting any gratuities from entities that do business with the school. For example, if a board member runs a local office supplies store and sells copier paper to the school, he or she should disclose that fact to other board members and re-

**Board members must take an active role in the protection of students. This means that they must ensure adequate supervision, maintain a safe plant and equipment, have a current disaster plan, and protect students from sexual misconduct.**

frain from voting on a motion to establish an account with a mail-order discount office supply company.

Serious and continuing conflicts of interest may make board membership unethical. Employees (except the principal and business manager) generally are not voting members of the school board for this reason. A thorny problem is the choice of board members with relatives employed by the school or already elected to the board. Ideally, no immediate relative of such a person should serve as a board member.

However, in smaller communities, it may be difficult to find enough people willing to serve on the board who do not fall into one of these categories. In that case, at minimum, the fact must be made known to the board, and the member must refrain from voting on any action that directly affects the relative (such as an employment recommendation). The board chair should

take care in making committee assignments to avoid situations where relatives could become "voting blocs."

## **Protection of Students**

Board members must take an active role in the protection of students. This means that they must ensure adequate supervision, maintain a safe plant and equipment, have a current

**BY CHARLES L. MCKINSTRY**

disaster plan, and protect students from sexual misconduct.

### *Supervision*

Parents entrust the physical welfare of their children to the school. Board members should ensure that the teachers and principal provide appropriate supervision. Students must be supervised for a reasonable period before and after school. The exact length of time will vary, but a rule of thumb is 30 minutes before and after school. During the school day, students must be supervised continuously. Higher-risk activities, such as science and industrial technology labs, water sports, camping, and snow skiing, will require greater supervision, use of safety equipment, and training. Schools may even have a legal duty to more closely supervise students with known aggressive tendencies. School-sponsored field trips and off-site activities also require supervision by school personnel who are capable of providing for the safety of the students.

Example: The principal has hired a mother to supervise lunch and afternoon recess for grades 1 to 4. The supervisor must have adequate skills and judgment for dealing with children. She must be physically capable of doing the task and have training in emergency procedures. The number of children must be manageable within the physical characteristics of the playground; for example, the supervisor must be able to see all of the children from one position. Also, the type of activities in which the children are engaged will affect the supervision needed.

Board members should pay close attention to the issue of adequate supervision. On occasion, the board may wish to ask the principal to review the daily supervision of the students and present them with a report. The board needs to assist administration in providing adequate human resources to ensure appropriate supervision.

### *Safe Plant*

The safety of the physical plant is a joint responsibility of the board and administration. Larger schools should have a safety committee that meets on a regular basis and keeps minutes of its

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***School-sponsored field trips and off-site activities require supervision by school personnel who are capable of providing for the safety of the students.***

meetings. The committee should oversee safety inspections, make decisions about corrective action, and follow up to make sure the work is completed. Board members should make sure that the safety committee is active. In addition, each board member should be personally attentive to unsafe physical conditions, calling such problems to the attention of the appropriate personnel. The board must provide adequate financial resources to create and maintain a safe plant.

### *Disaster Plan*

Every school must have a current disaster plan. This plan must be more than a paper document. Adequate supplies and training must accompany the plan to make sure it covers all foreseeable events and that personnel are trained in its implementation. Board members should ask to review the school's disaster plan if the principal has not recently done so. The conference office of education will provide plans that can serve as models in devel-

# **Each year, board members should be required to sign a form stating they have no conflicts of interest with their relationship to the school.**

oping or revising the school's disaster plan.

## *Sexual Assault*

Protecting students from sexual assault is a very important duty of the school. Board members should oversee the school's compliance with mandatory provisions such as child abuse reporting and employee criminal record checks in accordance with local laws. Protection of students begins with the application and reference-checking process for new

employees. The personnel committee should ensure that the administrator doing the reference checks asks specific questions, such as whether the applicant (employee or volunteer) has ever been accused of sexual misconduct with a minor. Thorough reference-checking is part of the process. The administrator should check with each supervisor for the past 10 years. Calling only listed references is inadequate.

Ongoing supervision and keeping student well-being ahead of other competing concerns is crucial to providing an environment where students will be willing to come forward if improper actions occur.

## **Protection of Employees**

School boards can avoid legal liability by protecting employees from unfair treatment, harassment, and discrimination. Board actions affecting employment are serious matters that require dispassionate, careful decision-making. Board members must carefully review the governing provisions of the union education code. These are often specifically made a part of the employment contract. Even if a written contract is not used, board members can expect the courts to require the board actions to comply with the union education code provisions.

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In general, the following basic elements of due process<sup>1</sup> should be followed in any action adversely affecting the employment status of certificated personnel:

- *Notice.* The employee should be told what action is being considered and the basis for the action.

- *Access to Evidence.* Prior to the hearing, the employee should have access to relevant evidence, including items in his or her personnel file.

- *Hearing.* The employee should be invited to attend any hearing by the personnel committee or the school board relating to his or her employment, to hear any evidence presented, to ask questions, and to present his or her side before a decision is made. A representative of the conference office of education should be present to ensure that proper procedures are followed.

- *Appeal.* If the board votes to terminate the employee, an appeal to the conference board of education should be provided.

- *Reprisal.* The employee should be assured that no reprisal will be allowed against him or her for exercising these rights.

A wise board will steer away from rash or emotional actions and base its decisions on solid information. If a termination is being considered, prior written evaluations should normally reflect the problem, as well as efforts aimed at solving it.

In addition to ensuring procedural protections to employees who may be affected by adverse employment decisions, board members should protect school personnel from unlawful discrimination based on protected categories such as age, race, and disability. Employment applications and personnel committee and board discussions should refrain from any reference to even innocent information in these areas. To ensure that they are sensitive to the law and choose appropriate courses of action, the board should seek guidance from someone trained in these areas, perhaps a representative from the conference office of education, the principal, or a lay board member with specific experience and training.

A United States Supreme Court

**Higher-risk activities, such as science and industrial technology labs, water sports, camping, and snow skiing, require greater supervision, use of safety equipment, and training.**

holding issued in June 1998 makes a printed policy and employee training important factors in avoiding liability from sexual harassment claims. Each union or conference should have a written policy in this area, and it should be distributed to each employee. Board members should ask the principal for a report on what has been accomplished in this area. If the actions are inadequate, the board should ensure that appropriate remedies are implemented.

### Protection of the School's Finances

Board members act as guardians of the school's funds. As such, the law requires them to act more carefully than they would with their own money. Board members must learn to read the school's financial statement. They should question the principal and/or business manager carefully to understand the statement. (See the article by David Penner on page 33.) Members should be alert to inaccurate or incomplete statements, which may include assets that are not listed on the financial statement such as a reserve fund or money held in scrip.<sup>2</sup> Also, they should watch for any bills that are unpaid but not recorded in accounts payable on the statement. Inadequate collection of accounts receivable (such as tuition) is a frequent problem. The board should adopt a written policy about collection, review accounts receivable regularly, and ensure that the policy is being followed.

Board members should watch for evidence of misappropriation of funds. Signs of this may include cash-flow problems when the operating statement looks strong, evasiveness or reluctance to reveal information by the business manager or principal, and a lifestyle inconsistent with income. Personal financial setbacks are sometimes the catalyst for misappropriation.

### Insurance

The church provides numerous protections to its institutions in the form of property insurance, liability insurance, and errors-and-omissions insurance. Board members need to carefully check the status of such coverage. In most cases, individual board members who

are named in a lawsuit will not be personally liable. The conference and school will indemnify the board member through a specific clause in the school constitution, as well as the union education code.

### Confidentiality and Defamation

School board meetings are generally open to parents and members of the constituency. One exception is when the board holds an employment or discipline hearing. At those times, the board should go into closed session. All non-voting members and employees, except the principal, should be excused. Items discussed in closed session by the board or its personnel committee must not be shared outside the room. Generally, state law provides a privilege to communications in a closed hearing. That protection is not available for parking lot conversations or sharing of private information orally or in writing. Board members have an ethical responsibility to honor the confidentiality of a closed meeting. Violation of this rule can result in personal as well as institutional liability.

### Summary

To obtain more information on any of these areas, contact your conference and union offices of education. However, you may also need to get specific information about local or national laws relating to your school. Serving as

a board member brings legal responsibilities to protect the students, employees, and assets of the school. Following the guidelines contained in this article will help board members meet these important requirements. ✍

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\* The guidelines in this article are based on laws in the United States, though the principles are applicable worldwide. All readers should consult the bylaws relating to education in their division, as well as local and national regulations.

### NOTES

1. Although due process as a constitutional requirement is not applicable to private employers, the courts will generally imply a covenant of good faith and fair dealing in all contracts. The end result looks very similar to constitutional due process. For additional information in this area, consult the board's legal advisor. Definitions of *certificated* and *classified* personnel are found in the box accompanying the Plubell article on page 17.

2. Scrip is a gift certificate sold by the school that provides a percentage of the value as profit to the school. It is a fund-raising device that is growing increasingly popular.

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**Boards should appoint a safety committee to do inspections of the school plant and grounds.**

# TECHNOLOGY PLANNING

## A GUIDE FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

**T**he impact of computer technology on society promises to be greater than the introduction of steam power and the Industrial Revolution. Technology has increased so rapidly that it has been estimated available computer power is doubling every 18 months—and the trend is expected to continue into the foreseeable future.<sup>1</sup> Internet connections are increasingly faster, cheaper, and more readily available for individuals and institutions. Technology clearly has the potential to change how we work, teach, and learn in our schools.<sup>2</sup>

Since the first affordable computers appeared on the market, the academic world has struggled with how to use technology in the curriculum. Today, school boards are feeling increased pressure to integrate the use of technology into their schools. To ensure the successful use of technology in the classroom, school boards need to follow these five key steps: visioning, planning, modeling, funding, and training.

### Visioning

Ronald W. Costello, director of secondary education in Noblesville, Tennessee, believes that “technology will never provide the changes in education that it should until we create a local vision of how technology should impact how we work, teach and learn.”<sup>3</sup> Unless there is clear evidence that technology will enhance children’s learning, teachers and administrators will resist implementing

***To ensure the successful use of technology in the classroom, school boards need to follow these five key steps: visioning, planning, modeling, funding, and training.***

high-tech programs. The solution is to merge our individual dreams for education and technology into a single, shared vision. For successful visioning, three key groups need to be involved: parents, community, and staff.

For the school’s primary constituency (parents) to share in this vision, they must understand how it will benefit their children. School administrators and boards should solicit their input through surveys, phone calls, and direct involvement. Parent representatives need to be included in all phases of creating and implementing technology. Their enthusiasm and commitment will help encourage those who are reluctant—including staff and other parents.<sup>4</sup>

Community involvement in technology planning and implementation is critical. Schools need to become acquainted with and to take advantage of the wide range of resources available in the community. This is an excellent opportunity to develop partnerships, positive relationships, and deeper involvement with business and community leaders.<sup>5</sup>

Getting the teachers to share the vision is perhaps the most important aspect of integrating technology into the classroom. Without staff involvement, it is unlikely that technology will be used to its fullest potential in the classroom. School board members should encourage staff involvement throughout the planning process, program coordination, and staff training.<sup>6</sup>

Costello says, “If we do not have a

**BY MELVIN WADE**

mutual vision of where technology will take us, then it will be difficult to set priorities, to know where we are headed, and to know when we have achieved what we are trying to accomplish.”<sup>7</sup>

### **Planning**

Once the board has developed a shared vision of how technology will impact the school, it is necessary to plan how to achieve that vision. The board should begin this process by forming a technology committee,<sup>8</sup> being sure to involve those who have a passion for technology to serve on this committee. Members should be selected carefully, making sure that their diversity represents the school’s constituency.<sup>9</sup> The group should include parents, staff, and technology professionals. Only a few schools have realized the importance of

the involvement of a technology professional in planning for technology and facilities.<sup>10</sup>

When it comes time to write a technology plan, you can simplify the task by finding an existing model to use as a guide.<sup>11</sup> Modify it as necessary to ensure that it reflects the shared vision of technology you have developed. Some examples of model plans and guides may be found on the Internet.<sup>12</sup>

### **Modeling**

Educational leaders must themselves become involved in planning and implementing technology. The goal of having students learn in a technology-rich environment will be achieved only when their teachers and other school leaders creatively use technology and model its use.<sup>13</sup> Teachers, principals, and board members set a good example by using

***Since the first affordable computers appeared on the market, the academic world has struggled with how to use technology in the curriculum.***

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**The goal of having students learn in a technology-rich environment will be achieved only when their teachers and other school leaders creatively use technology and model its use.**

the computer in meaningful ways.

One simple way of doing this is by

using E-mail for communications. This application breaks down barriers for many reluctant users. The board chair can begin by communicating board minutes, agendas, financial reports, and other information by E-mail before the board meetings. Products such as Microsoft Office2000 provide for extended collaboration and sharing of resources over the Internet. This will encourage other board members, educational administrators, and teachers to turn on the computer and check their messages on a regular basis.<sup>14</sup>

Board chairs and heads of subcommittees can make good use of the presentation software that comes with modern office suites, such as Microsoft Office and WordPerfect Office. It's not necessary to be a genius to use this software. Most packages today come with helpful instructions that walk you through the steps. The impact in terms of leadership and communication will be well worth the time spent to become familiar with the software.

#### **Funding**

Technology funding must appear on the budget every year.<sup>15</sup> When planning

the school's budget, the board should include two categories relating to technology: equipment maintenance and new technology.

The first deals with repair and replacement of existing equipment, service agreements, and training of staff. It will do more harm than good for new technologies to be launched while letting existing equipment go unused because the staff is untrained and the equipment is not maintained.

However, schools must also make funds available for new technologies and programs. This includes not only equipment, but also technical support and training of staff. It is more important to make steady progress forward than to unrealistically assume that one day funds will be available to do everything at once.<sup>16</sup>

While technology costs need to be included in the school's operating budget, these funds do not have to come entirely from traditional sources such as tuition and church subsidies. Parent groups will often come up with creative ideas for fund-raising if they are informed of a need at the school. Schools should also seek to develop partnerships

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with the business community. This will give teachers and students a better sense of how the work world uses technology and suggest ways to involve the community in funding the school's technology program. Other sources of outside funds include grants and technology fund-raisers. Grant-writing information is available on the Internet.<sup>17</sup>

### Training

A good staff training program is the key to successfully implementing any technology plan.<sup>18</sup> Unless the staff is trained in the best use of the technology, the equipment will go unused.<sup>19</sup> Technology is used most creatively and effectively when a master teacher understands how to incorporate it into his or her instruction to orchestrate the flow of learning.<sup>20</sup>

Staff training can begin even before any technology plan is in place. A good way to begin is to allow the staff to take the school computers home on weekends, holidays, and vacations. Be sure to set up a support network so they will have someone to call if problems arise.<sup>21</sup> Also, teachers will be more likely to get on board with technology if the board and educational administrators show their commitment by paying for the teachers to attend technology workshops, and providing substitute teachers while they are away.

Another training strategy, peer mentoring, has also proved successful. Staff members with technology expertise spend time with those who have little or no experience, helping them become comfortable with the equipment and working with them on classroom technology projects.<sup>22</sup>

### Conclusion

Integrating technology into the classroom can be a daunting challenge. But research has consistently shown that leadership is the key to successful implementation of technology. Teachers will use technology to its best advantage only when principals and school boards assume leading roles in modeling and helping the schools achieve this potential.

At the same time, educators must recognize that technology is not the answer to all their problems. But good

teachers can become even better when they integrate technology into the curriculum to create a powerful tool for learning. By following the steps outlined here, schools can begin to use technology in practical ways. Even if this means starting with small steps, once technology starts to catch on, the growth in enthusiasm and excitement with technology will be exponential.✉

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18. McDaniel, p. 18.
19. Huntington.
20. Kinnaman.
21. Huntington.
22. McDaniel, p. 19.

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**Board members should set a good example for teachers and students by using technology in creative ways.**

# Budgets and Boards

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***The budget is the educational plan of the school in monetary terms.***

Everything has a price tag” sounds rather trite, but the truth of this statement becomes evident as school boards go through the painful process of choosing priorities for school programs, activities, and personnel in a time of shrinking revenues and rising costs. As a consequence, schools have adopted budgeting and other financial practices common to the business community as they attempt to become more accountable to their constituencies. Such practices can help to demonstrate that the school boards, along with the school administrators and teachers, are providing cost-effective educational programs that meet children’s needs.

## **Budgeting Procedures**

The budget is the educational plan of the school in monetary terms. An operating budget forecasts revenues and expenditures for the fiscal year, which usually runs from July 1 through June 30. A capital budget covers both short- and long-term expenditures for physical plant and equipment. The short-range capital budget deals with expenditures for the fiscal year. The long-range budget includes new and replacement equipment, as well as major structural improvements and additions extending beyond the current fiscal year.

While budgeting usually begins afresh each year, historical experience and projected needs do influence the process. A team effort is required for budget preparation, especially during the early stages. Participants may include staff members, school organizations (e.g., Home and School Association), the constituency, and the board. A short questionnaire might suffice for some groups, while formal meetings might be more appropriate for other groups.

The board needs to develop rational explanations for every major area of the budget. They can do this by developing detailed schedules supporting each area. Boards should be especially alert to (1) funding changes that exceed 10 percent of a prior budget, (2) unrealistically low allocations, and (3) the need for a

**BY WARREN E. MINDER**

School financial management includes many interrelated functions. Administrators must demonstrate that school expenditures support the best educational program possible, given the available resources. The major components of financial management include: (1) budgeting procedures for both the operating and capital budgets; (2) funding sources, mainly from tuition and subsidies; (3) establishing priorities and policies and determining who is responsible for implementing them; (4) accounting procedures; and (5) monitoring the budget and reporting to the board.

reasonable emergency-operating fund. The budget emergency fund should offer a financial cushion to deal with unexpected expenses.

**B**oard members must realize that most budget items are relatively fixed and that budgets have little flexibility. Salary and fixed benefits (e.g., Social Security/pension plan, medical, etc.) compose the major part of a school budget. In addition to these labor costs, such items as teaching supplies, library expenditures, professional development, facility maintenance, transportation, utilities, insurance, and building supplies, must be included in the budget.

Educational needs should be the major consideration in the budgeting process, with how to finance them as the next priority. Reversing the order—placing financing ahead of educational needs—will stunt the growth and the quality of the academic program. Satisfied customers, including constituents, parents, and students, will be more willing to support a high-quality educational program than one that is underfunded and educationally weak.

### **Funding Sources**

Identifying funding sources is the true beginning of the budget process. In most schools, the largest source of revenue is tuition. This means that realistic enrollment projections are critical. Preliminary budgets should be developed, based on different percentages of the current enrollment (105, 100, 95, and 90 percent), because the number of students is apt to fluctuate. Also, estimates of subsidies from supporting churches and the local conference must be based on what the supporting entities have agreed, by constituency vote, to contribute to the educational ministry of the church.

Schools and local churches seldom use the same fiscal year. Therefore, friction can result when, partway through their fiscal year, churches are asked to provide additional funds. To deal with this problem, the school administrator must anticipate the needed subsidy and communicate this to local pastors and

church treasurers *before* church budgets are developed. Some conferences subsidize teaching materials, substitute teachers, equipment, and other areas. The superintendent can supply information about the various areas of assistance available.

### **Priorities and Policies**

In budgeting, as in other areas, the board establishes policy; administration implements it. In small schools, a board chairman or school treasurer may be

the person responsible for budget implementation and control, with assistance from a head teacher or teaching principal. The board does not usually get involved in the minor details of budget management. However, they must hold the administrator responsible for that.

The board needs to understand the difference between *budgeting* and *authorizing expenditures* for specific materials or services. Failure to clarify this will create conflict during the implementation of the budget. Each school

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## **A team effort is required for budget preparation, especially during the early stages.**

line the financial transactions of the school and form the basis upon which sound financial decisions can be made by the school board and administration.

Keeping a record of financial transactions also allows the board to trace individual items and to identify what was spent, for what purpose, and by whom, as well as the source of the money used for the expenditure. Such data may be needed when the finance committee or school board requests de-

with the financial plans outlined in the budget.

Within the accounting system, special attention must be given to the proper handling of trust funds. Schools may have various trust funds for items such as class trips, new computer equipment, student activities, yearbook production, etc. Each school must keep adequate cash in the bank to cover the total of all trust funds, which are also known as agency funds. Large perma-

nent trust funds should be listed separately and reported as line items on the balance sheet. These should be held in an insured account at a local savings and loan or commercial bank or in certificates of deposit, treasury notes, or treasury bonds. Since the average school board usually lacks the expertise to manage these funds, they should seek professional assistance in this area. Allocation and spending of trust funds should be subject to audit and board review.

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should have a policy authorizing administrator spending, including the amount permitted without specific board approval. (This amount will vary with the size and needs of the school.) A board should not reward spending outside those guidelines. An administrator who goes unnecessarily over budget or who budgets poorly should be confronted and held accountable.

### **Financial Record-Keeping**

Accurate financial record-keeping is an absolute necessity for every school to function effectively. Such records out-

tailed information. This data is also needed for the yearly audit of the school's financial record.

During the budgeting process, money is allocated for different areas of the school program. Once the budget is established, there should be little need to transfer funds from one account to another. If money was allocated for library books, it should be spent on library books, not playground equipment. Proper accounting procedure records what takes place and should assist the administrator and board in making decisions that are in harmony

with the financial plans outlined in the budget. This is commonly known as *accounting*.

The *Academy Accounting Manual* prepared by the General Conference serves as the standard for senior academies in the North American Division. The division auditors review the academy financial records yearly (in most unions) and present a statement for board review and accountability. Re-

### **Accounting Procedures**

While financial record-keeping is usually referred to as bookkeeping, this is only one phase of a complete system that

grettably, not all unions and conferences have a standard accounting system for elementary schools and junior academies. Some conference education departments have developed simple accounting systems to help schools establish acceptable accounting practices. The local conference auditors usually look over school financial records yearly and prepare a brief report on their findings. The local school board should review these reports and address any concerns mentioned.

The accounting system should provide the administration and the school board with an ongoing summary of revenues and budget balances. Such data can also be formalized into a *budget operating summary* and presented to the board at its regular monthly board meeting.

#### Monitoring the Budget and Reports

Even with good planning, a monitoring process remains mandatory. Monthly board meetings should include a review of the financial statement. Financial reports may vary, but should cover expenditures, appropriations, income, and cash flow. The board should know what has been spent, how the current year compares with the previous one, what account receivables are outstanding and are out of harmony with board policy on collections, and how much funding remains.

Board members should concentrate on major issues as they review the monthly financial statement. Some boards nit-pick at small items and don't recognize injudicious spending on major expenditures. Spending should be considered in relationship to the total budget. If \$500 is allocated and \$600 is spent, the expenditure is 120 percent of the budgeted amount, but the total amount overspending is \$100. However, if \$5000 is allocated but \$6000 is spent, the expenditure is again 120 percent, but the total amount overspent is \$1000! Board members also need to monitor the spending on small items since having many smaller expenditures over budget can add up to a costly sum.

School activities need separate accounts, as do Home and School Association funds that are handled through

the school business office or local school treasurer. These monies should be properly monitored and audited, the same as other school financial records.

Adequate monitoring of the financial records implies that board members must be able to understand the accounting procedures and reports presented. To ensure that board members are informed and able to ask intelligent questions, all new board members should be given an orientation session at the beginning of the school year. Any board members who continue to have difficulty understanding financial reports should seek assistance from the administrator or treasurer.

**A**s part of the monitoring process, the constituency should be given a report on the general financial condition of the school. As long-range plans and educational priorities are reviewed, updated, and voted, the financial implications should be clearly articulated and understood by all. Most people understand the relationships between fixed costs and enrollment fluctuations. Certain basic expenses such as heating, lighting, water, maintenance, and replacement of broken or unsafe playground equipment will have to be met regardless of the number of students enrolled. When enrollments go down, these fixed costs, combined with decreased income, will adversely affect the school's financial stability. Decreased income, coupled with the effects of inflation on operating costs, only compounds the financial problem, and may drive the school into financial insolvency.

Constituencies must be the final decision-makers about the nature of the educational program and its sources of funding. Some small schools have stayed open at the insistence of the constituencies, who showed their support by contributing a second tithe as a subsidy for the school. On the other hand, some constituencies will refuse to adequately support the school under any circumstances. Much depends on the pastoral and educational leadership. No school board can operate a church school without its constituency's finan-

## **The board needs to develop rational explanations for every major area of the budget.**

cial support, so it is of prime importance to include the constituency in the reporting and monitoring aspects of the educational program and budget. Pastors, administrators, and board members need to "sell" the school to the constituency so that they understand the value of Christian education for the future of the church, and commit adequate resources to enable the school program to be academically superior and fiscally strong. ☞

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# THE FINANCIAL REPORT: KEEP IT SIMPLE AND UNDERSTANDABLE

**A**nd now for the fifth item on the agenda tonight, the financial report.” The board chair, sounding upbeat and informed, says, “It’s the BIG document in your information packet.”

Board members pull out the financial report and stare at it, uncertain about its contents. As pages are turned, worried looks appear on several faces, while other members look dazed. The principal of the school and the chair of the finance committee discuss “the effects of aging on accounts receivable.” Some members scratch their heads or cough quietly; one leaves the room to make an “important” phone call.

“Are there any questions?” the chair asks. The room is silent; no one makes eye contact. A representative from the local medical center asks about an item on page 17. Always uncomfortable dealing with finances, the board chair defers to the treasurer. Everyone else, not sure of the question, is glad just to be looking for page 17. Since no one can clearly answer the question (or the next three questions, all relating to accounting procedures), it becomes clear to most members that they have so little information about the school that they do not know what questions to ask. They watch the expressionless faces of the medical center representative and the treasurer, hoping for some visual clue—a smile or frown, perhaps—to help them sort out the financial condition of the school.

All of the board members do understand that the school needs more books, a new computer for the secre-

***Unfortunately, financial information is often presented in a format not readily understood by the board members.***

tary, and a resurfacing of the parking lot. When they see these items, the uncertainty of a few moments ago translates into uncertainty about whether they have sufficient funds for these items. Some decide to vote the way the treasurer votes, thinking that he should know if the school is in financial trouble. However,

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**BY DAVID S. PENNER**

most feel more comfortable voting to “table the action for further details.”

This fictitious account illustrates the difficulties that many boards face when they try to make informed decisions without vital information about the school. Unfortunately, financial information is often presented in a format not readily understood by the board members. Consequently, board members waste valuable time thumbing through reams of paper in the financial report, trying to locate the figures under discussion—rather than focusing on the decisions to be made.

The average board member, who doesn't understand accounting and is overwhelmed by details, thus has to rely on the few who appear to understand the financial statements. These “finan-

cial thought leaders” not only dominate the discussion, but often control the decision-making as well. Those who are baffled by the financial statement must rely on other clues for an indication of how to vote. A frown, sigh, or sarcastic remark by a “financial thought leader” may influence a “lost” member's vote. When board members don't understand the financial report, they often make poorly informed choices or may delay decisions indefinitely.

### **Broadening the Base for Understanding**

In order to effectively participate in the discussion, every board member must understand enough to at least ask questions. One way to achieve this goal is to follow a simple three-point plan:

1. Include with every financial report a summary page that everyone, including those without an accounting background, can understand;

2. Reduce the amount of financial detail to only what is needed by the board; and

3. Take time to teach board members how to read and understand the financial report. Most board members serve as the representative for a particular church constituency and viewpoint. For any member to be locked out from the vital information in a financial report is a loss to the board as a whole and to the welfare of the school.

### **Make It SUPA (Simple, Understandable, Professional, and Accurate)**

To facilitate communication, the report itself must be kept *simple*—in other words, focused and appropriate to the discussion and time limitations; *understandable*—written in terms as free of accounting jargon as possible; *professional*—that is, neatly formatted

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**When board members don't understand the financial report, they often make poorly informed choices or may delay decisions indefinitely.**

and printed in a manner that is easy to read and that indicates quality time was spent in its preparation; and *accurate*—showing current numbers that reflect the school's true financial situation and are as error-free as possible. This SUPA test not only makes for good communication, but also helps improve the board's confidence in the leadership of the school.

**W**ith the goal of keeping things simple, the financial report might include the following sections: an introductory page, Financial Report Highlights (see section below); a balance sheet; a one-page summary of financial activity (comparing budget and actual expenses); and possibly a page or two of selected details from financial activity schedules that the board ought to monitor. The board will need to review only three to five pages at most if the report is prepared properly. Schools that have used the Financial Report Highlights page find that after using this format for a few months, many

board members are satisfied with the information provided on the Highlights page alone. The supporting documents—the balance sheet and the summary of financial activity—illustrate the Financial Report Highlights page and validate its information. Individual schools may choose to include other pages as necessary (such as an industry report), but should remember to keep the report brief and comprehensible.

Despite the obvious benefits of using a simplified financial report, it should be kept in mind that the complete financial statement is an important document that should be available to any board member who wishes to review it. A common mistake is to believe that everyone will benefit equally from receiving a complete copy. But it would also be a mistake not to have the document available for those who can and

<b>Adventist Academy</b>			
<b>Financial Report Highlights</b>			
<i>(Format A)</i>			
<b>30 April 1999</b>			
			Difference
1. <u>Current Student Enrollment</u>		195	
Enrollment last month		196	-1.00
Enrollment last year at this time		192	3.00
2. <u>Cash Received by the Academy</u>	\$142,676.38		
Projected amount	125,309.75		\$17,366.63
3. <u>Amount Paid by Parents</u>	51,673.52		
Projected amount	31,600.00		20,073.52
4. <u>Amount Earned by Students</u>			
Off-campus (cash)	22,237.95		
Last month	22,798.90		-560.95
On-campus	18,282.03		
Last month	15,794.34		2,487.69
5. <u>Amount Spent by the Academy</u>	138,825.46		
Budgeted amount	124,586.29		14,239.17
6. <u>Amount Owed by the Academy to Others</u>	166,572.30		
Last month at this time	158,552.39		8,019.91
7. <u>Amount Owed to the Academy</u>	260,372.54		
Last month at this time	245,232.68		15,139.86
8. <u>Money in the Checking Account</u>	38,111.59		
Last month at this time	34,260.67		3,850.92
9. <u>Age of Academy Debts to Vendors (in days)</u>		42	
Last month at this time		33	9.00
10. <u>Operating Margin for the Year (to date)</u>	\$129,454.00		
Budgeted margin (for the same period)	28,321.00		\$101,133.00

would like to review it.

**The Financial Report Highlights Page**

Many members don't ask financial questions in board meetings because they are afraid of revealing their ignorance or inability to understand accounting. As a result, the Financial Report Highlights page was developed with the following goal in mind: "Ten questions about the school's finances you want to know but are afraid to ask."

The answers to these questions come

from a variety of sources. Some are available in the details of the budget and monthly financial statements, while others are compiled from other records. In fact, these questions can give a much broader picture of the school operations than the financial statement alone.

The first cluster of information, which rarely appears on traditional financial statements, but certainly is essential to any school that depends on tuition income for survival, addresses these questions: "How many students

**In order to effectively participate in the discussion, every board member must understand enough to at least ask questions.**

are currently enrolled? How does this compare to last month and last year?" By comparing the numbers, board members get an immediate reference point. The second set of questions should be: "How much cash did we receive? How much were we expecting?"

The next few questions should address the issue of how the money is coming in and going out, while the ninth question deals with the reputation of the school with its vendors. Although there is no "bottom line" in non-profit organizations, many board members and some administrators also want a single figure they can remember and report to their constituents that briefly summarizes the financial position of the school. This figure, referred to as an "operating margin" in question 10, gives the feeling of a "bottom line."

A variety of information can be reported on this page. Each school should develop a customized version of this page, choosing items that are most appropriate for its situ-

**Adventist Academy**

**Financial Report Highlights  
(Format B)**

**30 April 1999**

		Difference
1. <u>How many students are currently enrolled?</u>	195	
Enrollment last month	196	-1.00
Enrollment last year at this time	192	3.00
2. <u>How much cash did we receive?</u>	\$142,676.38	
How much were we expecting?	125,309.75	17,366.63
3. <u>How much did parents pay?</u>	51,673.52	
How much were we expecting?	31,600.00	20,073.52
4. <u>How much did students earn?</u>		
Off-campus (cash)	22,237.95	
Last month	22,798.90	-560.95
On-campus	18,282.03	
Last month	15,794.34	2,487.69
5. <u>How much did we spend?</u>	138,825.46	
How much were we planning to spend?	124,586.29	14,239.17
6. <u>How much do we owe to others?</u>	166,572.30	
How much did we owe last month?	158,552.39	8,019.91
7. <u>How much do others owe us?</u>	260,372.54	
How much did they owe last month?	245,232.68	15,139.86
8. <u>How much is in the checking account?</u>	38,111.59	
How much did we have last month?	34,260.67	3,850.92
9. <u>How old are our debts to vendors (in days)?</u>	42	
How old were they last month?	33	9.00
10. <u>How are we doing? (Operating Margin, to date)</u>	\$129,454.00	
What were we expecting?	28,321.00	\$101,133.00

**Schools that have used the Financial Report Highlights page find that after using this format for a few months, many board members are satisfied with the information provided.**

ation. The style of the questions can be varied to meet the specific needs or circumstances. Two examples are included in this document. Format B uses full questions, while Format A uses brief phrases. In a survey of school board members, those responding all favored the concept but were evenly divided about which format they preferred. Union directors of education and treasurers surveyed also overwhelmingly supported the idea but favored Format A.

#### **Conclusion**

The goal of the financial report is to facilitate understanding. Therefore, whatever format is chosen, it is important that the Financial Reports Highlights page be simple and focused, since this page forms the basis of the board's discussion. Only items that are central to the decision-making role of the board should be included. Additional material, while interesting, may only confuse the issues.

The school administrator also benefits by keeping in mind the SUPA questions: Is it simple? Is it understandable? Does it reflect the professional standards of this organization? Are the figures accurate?

The benefits of using this format include increased communication with the board, an improved image of school management, better recommendations to guide administrative action, and, as a result, an increased potential for the success of the school. ✍

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