

ADVISORY COUNCIL LEADERSHIP MANUAL



CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Diocese of Helena



Diocese of Helena

Catholic Schools Office

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Our Catholic schools exist to provide students with the best Catholic education possible, to be the redeeming message of God's love, and to form an active community of believers.

July 29, 2008

Dear Advisory Council Member:

Thank you for your interest in serving as a member of the Catholic School Advisory Council. This Leadership Manual is provided to you as a means to help understand the role and function of the Catholic school Advisory Council. It reflects the respect that the Diocese of Helena Catholic Schools Office holds for the role of the local Advisory Councils and recognizes the generous commitment you have for your local Catholic schools - an integral part of the ministry of Catholic education.

In developing this manual, consideration is given to how school Advisory Councils can, in their advisory capacity, effectively and efficiently assist the school administration and pastor (where applicable) in the operation of the Catholic school programs. It is hoped that this Manual will serve as a resource for you, as an aid to understand the role and responsibility of the school Advisory Council, as they pertain to the policies and procedures of the Diocese of Helena, the State of Montana, and the Roman Catholic Church.

In preparing these guidelines, the Diocese began from the proposition that Advisory Councils, as components of the governance of Catholic schools, are a good and desirable experience, reflective of (among other things) the basic value of participation embedded in any real understanding of Catholic governance and school leadership. In particular, Catholic School Advisory Councils are not to be understood as a necessity but as an opportunity to engage more and wider sectors of the Church (and especially the laity) in the evangelizing work of Catholic education. The governance of Catholic schools should reflect the reality of Catholic education as a partnership between parishes, priests, diocesan authorities, and Catholic educators.

As you prepare for your participation as a member of the Catholic School Advisory Council, should you have questions or concerns with your role, responsibility, or function, please do not hesitate to contact me. On behalf of our Bishop, the Chancery staff, and the employees of Catholic schools in our Diocese, thank you very much for your generous contribution to the Catholic school system.

Sincerely,

Patrick Haggarty, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Catholic Schools
Diocese of Helena

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Shared Leadership in the Mission of Catholic Education

The education of youth is a ministry of the Catholic Church. In the Declaration on Christian Education, promulgated by the Second Vatican Council, the distinguishing characteristic of a Catholic school is described in this way: “The Catholic school pursues cultural goals and the natural development of youth to the same degree as any other school. What makes the Catholic school distinctive is its attempt to generate a community climate in the school that is permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and love.”(The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, Rome 1988) Thus, the Catholic school should be able to offer young people the means to acquire the knowledge they need in order to find a place in society that is strongly characterized by technical and scientific skill. However, at the same time, it should be able, above all, to influence a solid Christian formation (The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, Rome 1997).

An important element in developing this community climate is the collaborative leadership of parents with and school administration (and pastor when applicable) in the operation of the local school Advisory Council. Each has a specific role and commensurate responsibilities in the development of the school’s programs, policies and procedures.

The purpose of this manual is to delineate the ways that the Advisory Council participates in the educational mission of the Catholic school. The school is strengthened through the working partnership between the leadership of the school, the parish(es) and its constituents.

By its nature, the council is advisory. It is accountable to the school administration (and pastor when applicable) in its operation. It agrees to follow the policies and administrative procedures of the Diocese of Helena and the Office of Catholic Schools. Members agree that they will use their talents, gifts and insights for the common good of the community to promote the mission and goals of Catholic education. They will defer their personal agendas in order to discern with other members the issues, concerns and challenges they face in meeting the educational needs of the students.

Not only will they take seriously their role as advisors to the school administration (and pastor), but also they will accept the conditions of membership on the Advisory Council, namely, the Code of Ethics, which describes the parameters of their collaboration and responsibility.

The members model the faith community to its constituents. They promote respect between and among each other, acknowledge the various views of each member, discern with each other in an open and collaborative manner and support the decisions approved by the council. The Advisory Council functions only when it is in session. This relieves them of “being on duty” at social or school events, or when they meet other members in the community.

The members understand that they are part of the parish community and that the school is a vital part of the parish community as well. Each member is a public relations agent of the school. It is a privilege to serve as a member of the Advisory Council. The members are valued because of their expertise, the support that they give to Catholic education and their generosity in sharing their talents with other members.

Spirituality of Catholic Schools

The “spirituality” of the Catholic school refers to the manner and style of expressing Catholic faith, not only through explicitly religious liturgies, rituals and symbols, but also through the cultivation of Christian habits and virtues in everyday activities and practices.

All Catholic Schools, regardless of their establishment, have a “special spirituality”. This is the unique, on-going story of the school, flowing from the fundamental Christian story, which must be told, re-told and celebrated. To say that a school has its own “special spirituality” is merely to recognize that the school, as a continuous human community, naturally develops a distinctive manner and style of giving expression to a common faith.

Where a school has been founded or administered by a religious institute, this special spirituality will be profoundly influenced by the spirituality, charism if you will, of the founding order. It is recognized that the spirituality and traditions of different institutes are rich and diverse. Naturally, further development and enrichment of the expression of that special spirituality will occur over time. Just as schools whose history and traditions are based significantly in the work of a religious order have a right to partake of the special spirituality of that institute, so there exists a right in religious orders to nurture their special spirituality within such schools.

Where a school has not had an association with a religious order, its own special spirituality may derive from all or any of its name, its patron, the special character of its community or the stipulations of the “public juridic person” which exercises jurisdictional authority in respect of the school. A particular form of lay spirituality, the emergence of which has been a feature of the Church since Vatican II, may animate a school.

Consultative Bodies in the Church

The Code of Canon Law requires several consultative bodies in each diocese. Although not specifically mentioned, school councils are certainly within the spirit of the Code of Canon law and should be constituted within the norms given for the mandated consultative bodies.

Consultation implies that the school administrators will listen to the advice of a properly convened body in certain designated matters prior to a decision being made. The operating principle is that the school administrators will not act contrary to the advice that has been given, especially where there is consensus, unless the school administrators have an overriding reason. In such matters, it is customary that the school administrators will communicate the reason(s) to the school Advisory Council.

Consultation in the Church

Fr. John Robertson – Diocese of Helena, 2001

The role of consultation is “part and parcel” with our understanding of who we are as Church. Thus, the ultimate basis for consultative bodies in the Church is theological – in keeping with the very nature of the Church herself. We begin this consideration with the Scriptures, the source of who we are. As we began this evening, we heard from the *Book of Samuel* (text on page 5) – with the familiar “here I am” response of Samuel, who did not at first recognize the voice of God. Today, God calls and we are challenged to respond and then grow in the grace of our God. *First Peter* (2:9-10):

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into wonderful light. Once you were not a people at all and now you are the People of God; once you were outside the mercy and now you have been given mercy.

We recall, too, that the *Book of Genesis* reminds us that God created men and women in His own image and likeness – we are created to be good – we are created to reflect the very presence of God.

The Second Vatican Council refers to this reality as our being the People of God. In baptism, we received a share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ. Each of us is to carry out our own part in the mission of the Church in the world (see *Lumen gentium*, 31). Through Baptism and Confirmation all are commissioned to participate in the saving mission of the Church itself. They are to assist those in the hierarchy in their roles and may be appointed to exercise certain functions within the Church for a spiritual purpose. Those who have appropriate knowledge, competence or ability are to express themselves with regard to the good of the Church, preferably through the agencies set up by the Church for this purpose (see *Lumen gentium*, 33, 37).

One more section from the Second Vatican Council is important (see *Gaudium et spes*, 92): [The mission of the Church] requires in the first place that we foster within the Church herself mutual esteem, reverence, and harmony through the full recognition of lawful diversity. Thus all those who compose the one People of God, both pastors and the general faithful, can engage in dialogue with ever-abounding fruitfulness. For the bonds that unite the faithful are mightier than anything which divides them. Hence, let there be unity in what is necessary, freedom in what is unsettled, and charity in any case.

The Second Vatican Council also calls for councils to assist the work of the Church within each Diocese (see *Apostolicam actuositatem* and *Christus Dominus*). Following Vatican II, a series of documents gave force to such groups within the diocesan Church (see, for example, *Ecclesiae sanctae* and the *Directory on the Ministry of Bishops*). The *Code of Canon Law* that became effective in 1983, puts much of this into the law that governs the Church.

The documents cited above deal most specifically with the pastoral and finance councils in a diocese and a parish. However, the groups that have a school as its responsibility can take heed of what is said about the functioning of groups in a parish. Rather than a parish, we are concerned about a school system; rather than a pastor, we have a Superintendent and School administration s. But the overriding concern is that appropriate pastoral care be given the group of people served by the school. And just as in a parish, it takes the cumulative wisdom of the People of God to achieve that appropriate pastoral care.

Each entity within the Church is to have a Finance Council (see canon 1280). In this instance, it is the finance committee.

Perhaps another way to look at this is to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit is at work in the Church today. Through the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist) the Spirit dwells in the People of God, giving to each from the variety of gifts of the Spirit. Individually, each of us has particular talents and gifts, weaknesses and faults. Collectively, however, we combine the individual gifts and talents to more closely resemble the God in whose image we are created.

The Sacrament of Orders assures the appropriate use of the various gifts of the Spirit in the community. In other words, one role of those who are ordained is to provide “holy order” among the People of God. As *Lumen gentium* (30) reminds us, this role is not to extinguish the gifts of God’s People, but rather to foster and nurture them so that all cooperate in the mission of the Church according to the most appropriate use of their gifts and talents.

In a 1989 article (*Origins*, Vol. 18, No. 47), Father James Provost notes that the *Code of Canon Law* draws four important consequences from these theological realities.

Communion (see canon 209) – all are bound to maintain communion with the Church and to fulfill the duties we owe to the Church. Thus, we are to exercise mutual respect, shared responsibility, and acknowledge the degree to which we participate in the communion of the Church.

Sanctification (see canon 210) – we are to live a holy life and promote the growth of the church and its sanctification. In other words, the Church is the work of all of us, not just a few.

Mission (see canon 211) – all of us have the duty and right to work so that the message of salvation may reach all human beings in every age and in every land. This statement gives the legal basis for active participation in the life of the Church is a call for collaboration and shared responsibility so that we can be what the Church is – a communion on mission.

Participation (see canon 212) – all of us have a duty and a right to participate in the inner life of the Church, especially through those agencies set up by the Church. Thus, we have both a right and a responsibility to apply our experience and insight, especially the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit.

Father Provost concludes that consultative bodies in the Church are “practical expressions of the reality that the Church is God’s work, lives from the presence of the Spirit dwelling in our midst and needs to have structures through which it stays in touch with the impulses of the Spirit, who blows wherever it wills.”

As the People of God, then, we join together in these consultative groups. We are being asked to share our wisdom and understanding, our gifts and talents, our insight and practical experience. In short, we are being asked to function together as the Church.

Father Provost points to a way to visualize the respective roles involved. We have a two-part system: individual office holders and consultants. The office holders are those who are accountable for the appropriate governing – in this case, of the school. Office holders here are the Bishop; the Superintendent of Schools or Vicar for Schools; and the School administration s. Consultants are the members of the consultative group, the School [Advisory Council]. Your wisdom is being sought – your wisdom as members of the Church, rooted in your Baptism and your sensitivity to the lived experience of being a Catholic here and now; and your prophetic creativity which is rooted in the Gospel. Thus, office holders are accountable to see that the mission of the Church is carried out. But they are not to carry that burden alone – they rely on consultative groups for appropriate assistance in carrying out the mission of the Church. In the present context, of course, this is especially the educational/formative mission of the Church.

How do consultative groups work? In order to provide consultation, the group must be called together. It is the long-standing understanding of the Church that the Spirit works when a group of people gathers in faith (where two or three are gathered in my Name, there am I in their midst). Appropriate information is to be given to those whose consultation is sought. Every member of the group is to be given the opportunity to be heard. When it is appropriate (normally when asked to do so by the presiding officer) members are to observe secrecy. Those being consulted are to offer their opinions/observations sincerely based on their best understanding of the issue at hand. Those being consulted are to listen attentively to one another – thus allowing the Spirit to work through the group and consensus to emerge. All factors need to be considered. It is not a matter of winning/losing – rather it is a matter of discerning the will of God for this time in this place.

The Schools [Advisory Council], the consultative group, is charged with the responsibility of looking at the pastoral needs of the school – its future direction, how it “fits” into the overall pastoral goals of the Diocese and the Church [of Helena]. For example: How can Catholic education flourish and prosper? What are the goals for Catholic education? Do the schools as they exist meet those goals – if so how do we make them better, if not, why not and what can we do about it? What do we do to assure the financial stability of these schools? How do we (schools) see ourselves as the People of God? Etc.

As the Code of Canon Law puts it, in this area the responsibility of the Schools [Advisory Council] is to *investigate* all those things that pertain to the work of Catholic education (part of the pastoral good of the Diocesan Church and local churches), *weigh* them, and *propose* practical conclusions about them.

The Finance Council/Committee also is a consultative group – even though the function they fulfill is more technical. Broadly speaking, the Finance Committee is to give counsel regarding the financial functions of the schools. Those who are administrators need the consultative expertise and the experience of those familiar with accounting procedures, legal ramifications, and the like. We must recognize a serious danger for those involved with this or any other finance committee: that taking care of the financial aspects of administration becomes the overriding concern to the point that what we are about is lost. To quote Father Provost: “in taking care of Caesar’s coins, we may neglect to render to God what is his due, namely the church’s mission.”

Whatever thought there may be in the minds of anyone here that the finance committee is the exalted group while the [Advisory Council] really is not – please put it to rest now. We are not in the stance of saying that “power follows the cash.” Certainly, the role of providing the best possible advice regarding the finances of the schools is a critical function. However, it is only part of what is needed for the successful pastoral operation of this school system. Again to quote Father Provost: “Finance Councils have to be seen for what they are, technicians who assist in the administration of the church’s resources, but not the stewards of the church’s pastoral treasure.”

The primary responsibilities of any finance council/committee are to prepare a budget for the year to come; examine the year-end report of receipts and expenditures; and make sure the Advisory Council has appropriate financial information for its deliberations. They are to be consulted for all significant financial expenditures; regarding investments; matters of insurance; the acquisition or selling, security and maintenance of property; and the ways in which employees are paid a just and decent wage – one which allows the employee to provide for his/her own needs and the needs of his/her family.

Although it is not good to mix consultative and administrative responsibilities, for particular serious reasons at certain times, a member of a finance council may be asked to take on some administrative role. When this is necessary - it needs to be for a specified period of time and for a particular purpose both of which are outlined in the appointment of the individual to this function. When such a step has been deemed necessary, one function of the Council/Committee is to provide the counsel appropriate to changing the situation so that these unique roles are not unduly mixed.

Administrators in the Church are bound to fulfill their administrative responsibilities in the name of the Church and in accord with the norm of law. Thus, church administrators act in the name of the Church and not in their own name. The members of the Finance Committee have the duty and responsibility to provide appropriate counsel so that the school administrators may fulfill this function. The Committee cannot act on its own; but the advice and counsel provided is critical for the financially secure operation of the schools.

So, the Catholic Schools Advisory Council and its Finance Committee exist to serve the needs of the Catholic Schools and promote the good of the Church. The good of the Church requires that the consultative groups be functioning and functioning well. The future of the schools requires that each member take his or her responsibility seriously, that the group spends time in prayer and study, and that the counsel which is given be both realistic and forward-looking.

Canon Law

It is of vital importance that the governance structures of Catholic schools conform to Canon Law. Otherwise, they are not authentically Catholic, and will be open to constant dispute.

- In Canon Law, Catholic schools operate under the jurisdiction of an ecclesiastical public juridic person, in practice either an (arch) diocese or a religious institute or parish.
- In the case of a diocese, the bishop is the canonical administrator of that diocese, while in the case of a religious institute; the congregational leader is the canonical administrator.
- In the case of parish schools, the pastor is the canonical administrator of the parish and the works of the parish.

The public juridic person under whose jurisdiction a school operates may change over time, as in the case where a diocese assumes direct jurisdiction over a school originally established by a religious institute.

The relationship between the public juridic person and a school is the primary governance feature of that school, and a school council derives its existence and role from that relationship. Naturally, the manner in which the relationship between a public juridic person and a school may be expressed or mediated in practice is diverse, and varies from diocese to diocese and from religious institute to religious institute.

It should be noted that the relationship between a public juridic person and a school is not one based simply upon property, but is fundamentally spiritual in character. Especially where a public juridic person is a religious institute, it may or may not own all or some of the property used by the school. However, such a religious institute invariably would deeply influence the special spirituality of that school.

Although some of the Canon's speak directly to schools and Catholic education, the foundation for the school Advisory Council and finance committee are adapted from the Canons that form a pastoral council and finance committee. It is the basis of these bodies for the bishop that forms the Advisory Council and finance committee.

Christ's Faithful

Canon 217

The Christian faithful since they were called by baptism to lead a life in conformity with the teachings of the gospel, have the right to a Christian education by which they will be properly instructed so as to develop the maturity of the human person and at the same time come to know and live the mystery of salvation.

Catholic Education

Canon 793

§1. Parents as well as those who take their place are obliged and enjoy the right to educate their offspring; Catholic parents also have the duty and the right to select those means and institutions through which they can provide more suitably for the Catholic education of the children according to local circumstances.

§2. Parents also have the right to make use of those aids to be furnished by civil society that they need in order to obtain a Catholic education for their children.

Canon 794

§1. The duty and right of educating belongs in a unique way to the Church that has been divinely entrusted with the mission to assist men and women so that they can arrive at the fullness of the Christian life.

§2. Pastors of souls have the duty to arrange all things so that all the faithful may enjoy a Catholic education.

Canon 795

Since a true education must strive for the integral formation of the human person, a formation which looks toward the person's final end, and at the same time toward the common good of societies, children and young people are to be so reared that they can develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual talents, that they acquire a more perfect sense of responsibility and a correct use of freedom, and that they be educated for active participation in social life.

Catholic Schools

Canon 796

§1. Among educational means, the Christian faithful should greatly value schools, which are of principal assistance to parents in fulfilling their educational task.

§2. It is incumbent upon parents to cooperate closely with the schoolteachers to whom they entrust their children to be educated; in fulfilling their duty teachers are to collaborate closely with parents who are to be willingly heard and for whom associations or meetings are to be inaugurated and held in great esteem.

Canon 797

It is necessary that parents enjoy true freedom in selecting schools; the Christian faithful must therefore be concerned that civil society acknowledges this freedom for parents and also safeguard it with its resources in accord with distributive justice.

Canon 798

Parents are to entrust their children to those schools in which Catholic education is provided; but if they are unable to do this, they are bound to provide for their suitable Catholic education outside the schools.

Canon 799

The Christian faithful are to strive so that in civil society the laws which regulate the formation of youth provide also for their religious and moral education in the school themselves in accord with the conscience of the parents.

Canon 800

§1. The Church has the right to establish and supervise schools of any discipline, type and grade whatsoever.

§2. The Christian faithful are to foster Catholic Schools by supporting their establishment and their maintenance in proportion to their resources.

Canon 801

Religious institutes, whose proper mission is that of education, while faithfully retaining this mission of theirs, are also to devote themselves to Catholic education through their schools established with the consent of the diocesan bishop.

Canon 802

§1. If schools imparting an education imbued with the Christian spirit are not available, the diocesan bishop is to see to it that they are established.

§2. The diocesan bishop is to provide for the establishment of professional schools, technical schools, and other schools required by special needs whenever such would be advantageous.

Canon 803

§1. That school is considered to be Catholic which ecclesiastical authority or a public ecclesiastical juridic person supervises or which ecclesiastical authority recognizes as such by means of a written document.

§2. It is necessary that the formation and education given in a Catholic school be based upon the principles of Catholic doctrine; teachers are to be outstanding for their correct doctrine and integrity of life.

§3. Even if it really be Catholic, no school may bear the title Catholic school without the consent of the competent ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 804

§1. Catholic religious formation and education which are imparted in any schools whatsoever as well as that acquired through the various media of social communications are subject to the authority of the Church; it is the responsibility of the conference of bishops to issue general norms in this area, and it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to regulate such education and be vigilant over it.

§2. The local ordinary is to be concerned that those who are assigned as religion teachers in schools, even in non-Catholic ones, be outstanding for their correct doctrine, their witness of Christian living and their pedagogical skills.

Canon 805

For his own diocese, the local ordinary has the right to name or approve teachers of religion and likewise to remove or to demand that they be removed if it is required for reasons of religion or morals.

Canon 806

§1. The diocesan bishop has the right of vigilance over visitation of the Catholic Schools located in his territory, even those schools which have been established or are being directed by members of religious institutes; he is likewise competent to issue prescriptions dealing with general regulation of Catholic Schools; such prescriptions are also operative for those schools which are directed by religious, with due regard for their autonomy regarding the internal management of their schools.

§2. The directors of Catholic Schools, under vigilance of the local ordinary, are to see to it that the instruction given in them is at least as academically distinguished as that given in the other schools of the region.

The Council and Finance Committee

Can. 536

§1 If, after consulting the council of priests, the diocesan Bishop considers it opportune, a pastoral council is to be established in each parish. In this council, which is presided over by the parish priest, Christ's faithful, together with those who by virtue of their office are engaged in pastoral care in the parish, give their help in fostering pastoral action.

§2 The pastoral council has only a consultative vote, and it is regulated by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop.

Can. 537

In each parish there is to be a finance committee to help the parish priest in the administration of the goods of the parish, without prejudice to can. 532. It is ruled by the universal law and by the norms laid down by the diocesan Bishop, and it is comprised of members of the faithful selected according to these norms.

Can. 1280

Each juridic person is to have its own finance council or at least two counselors who, according to the norm of the statutes, are to assist the administrator in fulfilling his or her function.

Types of Catholic Schools

Parish Schools

In this model, the parish school is part of the educational mission of the parish for which the pastor is the canonical administrator. He delegates, according to the diocesan policy, administrative responsibilities to the school administration, which is accountable to him.

The bishop is the owner of the school and delegates the control of the property to the pastor or parish administrator.

Regional or Inter-Parish School

In this model, the school is supported and operated by two or more parishes. In practice, this usually winds up being a parish school and under the pastor of the parish where the school is located, and the other parishes(es) contribute scholarship money and perhaps have an official parish representative on the Advisory Council. For this reason, it is difficult to give clear examples of this type of school.

The bishop owns all the parishes under one corporation and delegates the control of the school to a pastor, parish administrator, or school administration.

Diocesan Schools

This can be a bit confusing. Sometimes the term diocesan school refers to all Catholic schools in a diocese. Other times diocesan schools are used to distinguish schools apart from the schools run by congregations, orders, and lay groups.

In our discussion here diocesan schools refers to schools operating directly under the central office of the diocese. Diocesan schools function as part of the diocese. The school administration is usually directly accountable to the bishop through the Superintendent of Schools.

The bishop is the owner of the school and delegates the control of the school to the school administration.

Private Catholic Schools

In order to call themselves Catholic, private Catholic institutions receive formal approval from the diocesan bishop and commit themselves to follow diocesan norms regarding religious education programs and the Catholicity of the school.

Religious Orders, Congregations, Lay Institutes, Personal Prelatures

Religious orders and congregations traditionally found and operate their own Catholic schools as an instrument of their mission. Lay institutes and Personal Prelatures follow along the same lines. Orders and Congregations have been turning more and more over to lay boards (with some members of the order or congregation), reserving some powers, development, and supervision to a central province school Advisory Council.

Lay institutes and personal prelatures follow the same development, though most of their members are already lay. Most religious orders and congregations have canonically reserved powers.

Religious Congregations hold property in their own right according to the laws of the state.

The articles of incorporation define the role and authority of the agents of the corporation.

These schools may operate in the diocese with permission from the bishop.

Private or Independent Lay Schools

Since Vatican II, lay groups are founding and operating schools. These are run by an independent board. The school administration is responsible to this board. Some are looking to affiliate with some order or congregation. Some bishops do not permit these independent lay schools, insisting they affiliate with a diocese, parish, congregation, order, etc.

These schools may operate in the diocese with permission from the bishop.

Catholic School Governance

“Governance” is a term in Canon Law where it has a much more particular meaning, denoting the power existing in respect of the Church, its organs and instruments by those in Sacred Orders.

Fundamental Principles for the Governance

The Love of Christ

Catholic education is animated by and based upon the love of Christ for all people.

The Role of Parents

Parents are the primary educators of their children, in whose place (“in loco parentis”) and with whose collaboration Catholic schools fulfill their mission.

Faithfulness to the Mission of the Church

Catholic schools sustain the mission of the Christ - to preach the Good News, including fidelity to the teachings of the Church.

Church solidarity

Members and agencies of the Church have an obligation to support those other individuals and agencies of the Church in need, and to work for the good of the whole Church community.

Support for the common good

The general obligation on members of the Church is not only to support the Church, its agencies and members, but also to ensure that the work of the Church and its agencies contribute to the benefit of society as a whole.

Embracing the poor

The Church community must continually assess its actions and policies to ensure that they empower the most disadvantaged and marginalized.

Educational Quality

The obligation upon all those involved in Catholic education is to strive to provide the highest possible quality of education to those attending Catholic schools.

Participation

The principle that powers and functions in any community are exercised, wherever possible, by the persons and bodies closest to and most accountable to those affected.

Inclusiveness

Catholic education should be open to all those who wish to receive a Catholic education, and that all those engaged in Catholic education in whatever capacity will be welcomed and valued in the pursuit of the educational mission of the Church, to the extent that they support that mission.

Unity in Diversity

Catholic schools recognize that the Holy Spirit inspires different communities in different ways, bestowing upon them diverse charisms that provide inspiration for action, all for the same purpose of promoting the Kingdom.

Stewardship of resources

All agencies of the Church have the responsibility to use financial and other resources responsibly, particularly with a view to ensuring the well-being of future generations.

Rule of Canon Law,

Every agency of the Church is constituted and operates in accordance with Canon Law.

Types of Governance

Four types of school councils / boards are often referred to in governance literature. They are jurisdictional, limited jurisdiction, consultative, and regulatory. In "A Primer on Educational Governance---in the Catholic Church", these types are defined as follows:

Jurisdictional

A jurisdictional council / board is one that not only legislates but also controls. It has final authority and total jurisdiction for all areas of educational policy and administration, as well as the legislative power to enact policy.

There are no jurisdictional councils / boards in the Catholic Church.

Limited Jurisdiction

A limited jurisdictional council / board is one that has power limited to certain areas of educational concern. It has final, but not total jurisdiction, since the diocesan bishop has jurisdiction over the religious education and Catholicity of the schools including private schools, and most religious congregations have canonically reserved powers.

There are few limited jurisdiction school boards / councils in the Catholic Church. In such cases, typically, the jurisdiction is limited school finances.

Consultative

A consultative council / board is one that cooperates in the policy-making process by formulating and adapting, but never enacting shared decision-making in the Catholic Church because of the consultative status of the diocesan Presbyterian council and the diocesan finance council. The constituting authority establishes those areas where the council is to be consulted. Such action is usually made effective by the council's / board's constitution.

The majority of Catholic schools have a consultative council.

Regulatory

A regulatory council / board is one that enacts or uses existing rules and regulations to govern the operation of its institutions. This type of council / board is considered administrative rather than policy-making or consultative.

Public school boards are designated as regulatory.

The School Administration

Those who are in a leadership position, appointed by the Bishop and employed by the school are school administrators. They are educational leaders and executive officers of the Advisory Council. This includes the building principals and the controller / business manager / finance officer.

While the School Administration remains directly responsible for the school's curriculum, programs, personnel, and finances, he/she will work interactively with the School Advisory Council to fulfill the Council's responsibilities. As such, the responsibilities of these individuals are:

- Preparing and submitting policy recommendations to the Advisory Council
- Informing the Advisory Council of local policy implementation
- Keeping the Advisory Council informed of Diocesan processes and procedures
- Providing direction to the Advisory Council
- Seeking advice from the Advisory Council on all matters that affect school operations
- Working with the Finance Committee in preparing the annual school budget for the council's review and reporting periodically on year-to-date finances
- Leading and/or attending Committee meeting to which they are assigned

The Pastor

The pastor is the primary spiritual leader of his parish(es). He is responsible for the educational ministry in the parish and parish school, when applicable. The pastor of a parish with a school serves as an ex-officio member of the Advisory Council. Pastors where regional diocesan schools exist, share the ex-officio membership of the Advisory Council. As such, his responsibilities include:

- Participating in the Advisory Council meetings and sharing his wisdom and expertise
- Approving policies and protocol, particularly those that relate to religious education in the school
- Hiring the school administration after consultation with the Advisory Council and according to Diocesan procedures
- Approving the budget prepared by the School Administration and reviewed by the Advisory Council
- Cooperating in the initiation and implementation of the school's development plans, student recruitment efforts and long-range plans

Catholic School Advisory Council

The Catholic School Advisory Council is a body of dedicated men and women willing to participate in the policy-making process by formulating, adapting, and recommending policy to the person with authority to enact it (school administrator)

The school administrator is required to consult with the Advisory Council but not bound by the council's advice.

Each Catholic school in the Diocese of Helena shall have an Advisory Council. The council is, by its very nature, advisory to the school administration (and pastor when applicable).

Ordinarily, the school administration (and pastor when applicable) participates in all regular, special and executive session meetings of the council. They participate in all deliberations of the Advisory Council and have final approval of all Advisory Council decisions. In cases where there is a parish school, the pastor retains final authority of all decisions.

The Advisory Council has a unique relationship within the school community. It relates in a formal way, through a liaison, to the local Parish Council(s). It relates to the school faculty and staff through the school administration. Moreover, it represents its constituents: parents, guardians and parishioners. The members act as members of the council only at official council meetings or when otherwise directed.

Roles, Functions, and Responsibilities

The Advisory Council has roles, functions and responsibilities that shall be published and understood by all members, including:

A Commitment to fundamental principles

- The council and its operations are to be conducted in accordance with sound and fundamental principles in accordance with Canon law and the Diocese of Helena.
- The council will have ongoing development of the Catholic ethos of the school, which means promoting the school as a center of evangelization (in partnership, where appropriate, with a parish or other Church agencies) in fidelity to the teachings of the Church, diocesan authority, and the special spirituality that animates the school community.
- The council will have a practical application for supporting faculty, support staff, and especially the administration, which will have the day-to-day responsibility for maintaining and promoting the Catholic ethos of the school.
- The council will ensure that the school fulfills its potential as an option for the disadvantaged, including the poor.

A Special Spirituality of a School

- The council will aid the school administration in identifying, enunciating and celebrating the school's special spirituality.
- The council and its operations are to be conducted consistently with the school's special spirituality.
- The council and its documents are to be interpreted and applied consistently with the school's special spirituality.

Authority

- The council will understand and limit its use of authority, as granted by Canon law, the bishop, and/or pastor (when applicable).
- The council will provide advice to the school administration on any matters referred to it by the school administration and/or pastor (when applicable).

Appointment / Dismissal of Members

- The council will have a method for assisting the school administration (s) for recommending appointment or dismissal of council members.

Appointment and Dismissal of school administration

- The council will have a consultative role with the bishop in the appointment and dismissal of a school administration.

School Finances

- The council will advise the school administration on all matters pertaining to school finances.
- The council will recommend or not recommend approval of the proposed school budget.
- The council will oversee the prudent financial management of the school, particularly with a view to ensuring access to quality education for future generations, and including planning for the provision of future facilities;

Rights & Responsibilities

The council shall have a statement of the rights and responsibilities of the governance from which the council derives its authority, acknowledging at least the following rights and responsibilities:

- the right and the responsibility to ensure that the school participates in the special spirituality of that religious institute;
- the right and responsibility to ensure that council members are appropriately educated and prepared for their role, particularly in relation to the special spirituality of a religious institute and the school;
- the right and responsibility to exercise stewardship over and protect the temporal goods of the Church as represented by the property and assets of the school;
- the responsibility to promote freedom of action by the council within the scope of its powers, subject to the rights, duties and responsibilities of the jurisdictional authority, the relevant Diocese, and responsible Catholic education authorities;
- the responsibility to develop strong partnerships with others of the Church, including bishops, congregation leaders and Catholic education authorities, for the purpose of ensuring proper coordination and distribution of resources between Catholic schools;
- the responsibility to ensure that any disposal of property is carried out in accordance with both civil and Canon Law.
- the responsibility to act as a forum for the discussion of school governance issues between diocese and religious institutes.
- the responsibility to develop school governance policies that encourage unity of purpose and solidarity between all Catholic schools, while recognizing and protecting diversity in particular communities and spiritual traditions.
- the responsibility to develop policies concerning the equitable distribution of resources among Catholic schools.
- Modeling faith community in a spirit of cooperation and interdependence with the school administration and local pastor(s).

- Adhering to Diocesan policy and developing policies that enable the school to fulfill its mission.
- Assisting in the search and selection of the school administration when a vacancy occurs.
- Participating in the Diocesan School Administration Assessment and Evaluation process.
- Reviewing and advising on the school budget, tuition rates and other sources of financing.
- Developing and periodically reviewing the council statutes.
- Participating in the school's development, student recruitment efforts and long-range plans.
- Acting as the public relations and marketing arm of the school and its programs.
- Participating in council in-service both at the Diocesan and local level.
- Evaluating annually the council's effectiveness, productivity and internal operations.
- Directing individuals and/or groups to appropriate resources and communication chain for conflict resolution.
- Participating, upon request, in the School Accreditation Process.

Non-responsibilities:

- Acting as a grievance committee or conciliators for any group or party.
- Hiring, evaluating or terminating faculty, support staff, and coaches; nor do they advise school administration s in personnel matters.
- Administering the school or telling the school administration how to administer the school.
- Implementing policies and procedures.
- Disciplining students
- Developing curriculum
- Approving instructional material
- Writing regulations

Accountability

Catholic school Advisory Councils are advisory to the school administration and pastor (where applicable). Their advice is sought because it is valued. The Bishop appoints members of the Advisory Council because he not only values their advice and consultation, he is also aware that leading a Catholic school is a very complicated and arduous task. Hence, the Advisory Council is established to assist the school administration in making decisions that affect school operations. In essence, no decision regarding Catholic school operations should be made by the school administration, until he/she has solicited and received objective and prudent advice from the school's Advisory Council.

With this in mind, it is also important to recognize that Catholic schools exist to serve parents and their children, to help parents share their faith heritage with their children as well as provide them with a quality education. The school Advisory Council then, is seen as representative of the parents, a group constituted to reflect parental thought and aspirations, and to marshal parental talent. Members of the Advisory Council have an obligation of accountability to these constituents. That obligation implies a large measure of open, two-way communication. This does not require that the Advisory Council does all of its business in a fishbowl. Committee meetings need not be open. The Advisory Council is entitled to closed ("executive") sessions to discuss sensitive issues. Sometimes to accomplish its tasks, the Advisory Council must have confidential information that cannot appropriately be shared.

However, within the limits of the Advisory Council's functions, the council and its individual members have a responsibility to listen to their constituents and to be accountable back to them. This does not mean that recommendations of the Advisory Council are popularity contests. An Advisory Council member is not supposed to poll the neighbors on an issue and vote according to their plurality! An Advisory Council member is supposed to bring to each issue his or her best judgment on what is good for the school and express that to the school administration. That might or might not coincide with the popular majority. An Advisory Council member needs the flexibility to participate in Advisory Council discussions with the freedom to contribute to and join a consensus decision.

Advisory council members do need to have a sense of where their constituents stand, what their priorities are, and what their concerns are. Some of this information is obtained informally in casual conversations with friends, other school parents, and parishioners. Advisory council members do well to raise the topic of the school in appropriate informal settings to see what people are thinking and what they have to say.

Providing vehicles for listening to the Advisory Council's constituency is half of the accountability task. The other half requires that the Advisory Council provide information about its activities to the parents and Catholic community. The Advisory Council meetings themselves are normally open and constituents should be encouraged to attend. In addition, the Advisory Council should find other routines for reporting. Here are some ideas for addressing that.

- Post Advisory Council minutes (or a summary of them) on the school's webpage.
- Include a brief summary of each meeting in the parish bulletin(s).
- Produce an easy-to-read annual report to summarize the Advisory Council's activities for the year.
- If the Advisory Council is weighing some difficult question, produce a brief "study paper" for the parents that summarize the issue and the Advisory Council's options.
- Send an occasional letter from the Advisory Council chair to the parents and parishioners outlining what the Advisory Council is doing .

If the Advisory Council sees itself in a stewardship role, it will make systematic efforts to see that there is regular two-way communication with the people it is there to represent.

Who does what?

School Administration

Building Principal

- Provides for prayer together
- Shares responsibility for agenda building with the chair; usually originates most agenda items
- Introduces policy items
- Reports how policy is implemented
- Makes the rules and regulations that he/she deems necessary for the effective and efficient operation of the school without Advisory Council's approval
- Shares information; provides data for evaluation regarding
- School programs
- Student / family Issues
- Academic environment
- Provides academic / educational direction
- Recruits, selects, evaluates, and retains or terminates school faculty and support staff
- Knows and supports Diocesan Policy

Controller / Business Manager / Finance Officer

- Primary developer of the school budget
- Introduces policy items affecting financial operations
- Reports how policy is implemented
- Makes the rules and regulations that he/she deems necessary for the effective and efficient operation of the business / tuition office without Advisory Council's approval
- Shares information; provides data for evaluation regarding
- Tuition programs
- School budget
- Business Office Issues
- Provides financial direction
- Recruits, selects, evaluates, and retains or terminates business office support staff
- Knows and supports Diocesan Policy

Advisory Council Chair

- Sets agenda with administrator
- Leads Advisory Council meetings
- brings out all points of view from the group
- seeks agreement
- keeps discussion moving and on the topic
- withholds judgment or comment while letting members themselves arrive at conclusion
- draws out quiet members
- controls over-enthusiastic members
- directs those who tend to wander
- encourages all members to participate
- summarizes comments for clarification
- guides a group toward closure

No matter how skilled the leader, the success or failure of a meeting can never be put on the one person. The success of any meeting and the wisdom of decisions made will always be directly related to the willingness of all members of the group to accept ownership for what takes place during the meeting.

Advisory Council Member

- A person selected to serve a defined term on the governing council of a school because of his/her of expertise, special abilities, or willingness to support the mission of the school
- Provides advice and consultation to the School Administration
- Initiates policy questions
- Recommends policies to guide the educational programs which it has authorized
- The group to whom the School Administrator(s) report and seek advice on school operations, administrative decisions, classroom activities, student performance, etc.
- Identifies and directs administration employments searches.
- Representative group with an identifiable public

Ex-Officio Members

- Members who by right of their office are members of the Advisory Council, e.g. Pastors, Superintendent, School Administrator(s), Religious Education Coordinator

Ad-Hoc Committee

- Committees that are formed as a need arises
- The scope of authority of each of the committees is limited to study and investigation within its particular area of concern
- Provides reports and recommendations to the Advisory Council
- Dissolves when the task is completed

Standing Committee

- Committees that are part of the structure of Advisory Council operation
- Reports as needed

Policy Formulation

While a school Advisory Council engages in many activities, two are major ways for giving direction and advice, 1) long range planning and 2) formulating policies.

Planning gives the council purpose and focuses its energy. It provides the Advisory Council with a yearlong (or multi-year) agenda.

Policies convey to the school the mind of the Advisory Council on critical or sensitive matters. Policies are also intermediaries between the school's climate and its philosophy on the one hand, and its regulations and practices on the other hand.

A policy is "a guide for discretionary action." It tells people what the Advisory Council expects, but not how to accomplish it. Formulating policy is a responsibility of the Advisory Council. Determining how policy is to be implemented is a responsibility of the administration. The term "regulation" is used to describe the administrator's means for specifying how people are to act or how something is to be done. In addition to regulations, administrators also use programs, procedures, and organizational structures for getting the administrative job done.

In contrast to regulations, policies are broad, general, and direction-setting statements. Regulations are specific, concrete, and tightly written; ideally, they contain few loopholes. If you want to know whether you have a policy or a regulation, ask yourself: "Does this statement leave room for discretionary action on the part of the administrator?" If the answer is "yes," you have a policy. If it is "no," you have a regulation. There are few exceptions to this rule. Occasionally, however, overriding considerations will motivate the Advisory Council to adopt a very specific policy (for example, the establishment of a tuition payment plan or a grievance procedure).

Some policies, by their nature, call for regulations to support them; other policies exist primarily to set a tone or to establish the school's position (for example, a personnel policy calling for nondiscrimination in hiring practices). Similarly, not every administrative regulation has to flow from policy. Some arise out of practical concerns or the need to implement applicable state or federal law; others are an outgrowth of the school's philosophy or tradition.

Some Things Policy Can Do

Give general direction to the school administration (s)

If the Advisory Council does not advise and give direction to the administrator, it has failed in its purpose for existing. However, the Advisory Council must be careful not to tie the hands of the administrator with a collection of detailed demands and restrictions. It is the administrator's job to "run the school."

Anticipate and forestall crises

As the proverbial line goes, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." While policy cannot prevent a lawsuit (or a catastrophe), it can guide the administrator to take reasonable precautions and reduce the possibility that rash judgment or negligence will rule in a crisis.

Clarify expectations for students, parents, teachers and others

A policy lets people know where the school stands and "what happens if..." they choose to disregard that position. Those associated with the school have a right and a duty to know what the school expects of them.

Codify and preserve the Advisory Council's decisions

Advisory council policies should not be a well-kept secret, nor should Advisory Council members have to sift through piles of old minutes in order to trace the decisions of their predecessors. Once enacted, Advisory Council policies should be promulgated (through the school's normal channels of communication), numbered, and placed in a folder or manual of school policies. A loose-leaf binder is a useful means for maintaining the school's policies. Reference to policies in handbooks for students, teachers, and parents can also help preserve the Advisory Council's decisions and communicate them to those whom they affect.

Reduce subjectivity, inconsistency, and arbitrariness

Charges of unfairness and inconsistency are some of the most damaging accusations that can be made against a school or its administrators. As Advisory Council members and administrators change, keeping track of prior decisions and the reasons behind them becomes even more difficult. Policies foster continuity and assist the school through periods of transition between administrators' and Advisory Council members.

Some Things Policy Cannot Do

Control or supervise administration

The Advisory Council should be able to trust its administrator to implement policy and to manage the day-to-day operations of the school. The school administration is the school's professional leader that has been hired to lead the school. If, after unsuccessful attempts to resolve differences, the Advisory Council cannot put faith in the administrator, then the Advisory Council's responsibility is to find a new administrator, not to try to administer the school.

Resolve specific problems after the fact

While surviving an unexpected or unavoidable disaster may suggest the need for new or changed policies, policies cannot be made to work retroactively. People cannot be held responsible for rules enacted after the fact.

Address isolated cases or petty items

To create a policy for the exceptional case is a mistake. It creates misunderstanding regarding the school's "norms;" it can cause bad will and poor public relations; it can backfire on the Advisory Council by legitimizing (even glorifying) actions that are unacceptable or petty. Individual cases should be addressed individually by the administrator, with those responsible for them.

Substitute for programs

Policies, by their nature, give general direction. They cannot educate. If students' standardized test scores are disturbingly low, a policy directing that they be higher probably will not help.

When Are Policies Developed?

In the natural cycle of Advisory Council activity, formulating policy comes up at several times:

- When the Advisory Council does its annual goal setting. As the Advisory Council surfaces needs and wants, they translate these into goals. Specification of the goals usually calls for either projects/programs to be undertaken or policies to be developed.

- When there is a problem to be resolved or a decision to be made, and there is neither a local guideline nor a guideline from a higher level of governance to which the school or school system can appeal.
- As a third opportunity, the school or school system should review its manual of policies on a regular basis (every five years is not an unmanageable period). Ordinarily, such a review will surface areas in which new policies are needed, suggest points of clarification for existing policies, and lead to the discarding of policies that are no longer useful.

Areas That Need Policies

Schools write policies where the need exists for them. That is why a “master list” of policy areas can be dangerous. If the school is part of a larger (diocesan) school system, many topics already may be covered by policy that supersedes that of the local school Advisory Council. In those cases, the local Advisory Council is usually free to make the policy more specific to its circumstances, as long as the resulting statement does not conflict with that of diocesan policy. For example, in one diocese where use of corporal punishment was strongly discouraged, many individual school Advisory Councils formulated policies prohibiting the use of corporal punishment altogether.

The following list contains topics that frequently become substance for local school policies:

- Relationships with public schools
- Financial reports to the community
- Use of the school facilities
- Job descriptions for staff members
- Personnel benefits
- Purchasing procedures
- School visitors
- Admissions criteria and priorities
- Discipline/suspension and dismissal
- Field trips
- Uniforms
- Tuition payments; penalties for non-payment
- Athletic eligibility
- Substance abuse
- Married students/pregnancy/single parents

Good Policies

Good policies achieve their purpose if they

- Respond to or anticipate educational needs of the community
- Are clear enough to give guidance, broad enough to give space
- Are stated in language that is clear, simple, non-technical
- Are communicated to all, but especially to those affected
- Are written down
- Are systematically indexed and placed in a loose-leaf manual
- Are regularly evaluated

Diocesan Policies

Subsidiary is the guiding principle. This requires that “what can be accomplished by initiative and industry at one level should not be assigned to or assumed by a higher organization or authority.” With that principle in mind, the following guidelines should be helpful.

- Diocesan policies are developed and evaluated by the diocese
- Diocesan policies are guides for the superintendent’s and/or the school administration’s discretionary action
- Diocesan policies govern all of the schools (elementary and/or secondary) in the diocese
- Diocesan policies provide the framework within which local policies and regulations can be written
- Diocesan policies are adopted where the overall good of the system is best served by common policy

Proposed policies become policies subject to the approval of the Bishop. Once signed and dated by the bishop, policies passed by the school Advisory Council become binding upon the superintendent, pastors, school administration, and staffs of the schools in the diocese.

Policy Development Process

The Diocesan and School Policies shall be the policies of the Advisory Council. Additional Advisory Council policies may be developed as necessary to assist the school administration in the operation of the school. Advisory council policies may not be contrary to Diocesan policies.

Catholic schools of the Diocese of Helena follow the policies developed by the Diocese. There are various processes provided by the Catholic Schools Office that support the written policies and procedures. One of the Advisory Council’s responsibilities is to develop policies for the operation of the school. The policy is determined by a response to a need expressed by the school administration (pastor, if applicable) or the Advisory Council representing its constituents. In some instances, parent input may indicate that consideration should be given to developing a policy. This information may come from data received through an open forum, parent surveys or the results of input from focus groups.

For policy development to be effective, it is essential that appropriate input be sought from those who will be affected by the policy. Policies are never made in isolation nor are they made to “solve one problem.” The nature of policy development requires time to analyze the need, gather data, allow for thoughtful deliberation and ultimately approve a policy statement. This process cannot be covered at one meeting.

There is a difference between developing policy and implementing policy. The Advisory Council develops and recommends policies. In parish schools, the Pastor approves or rejects the policy. In regional schools, the Bishop approves or rejects the policy. The school administration implements all approved policies.

The following benchmarks may indicate that the Advisory Council needs to change, update or develop a policy:

- The current school policy is obsolete.
- The school’s policy contradicts Diocesan policy or procedures.
- A particular situation arises that is not presently covered by policy.

The issue or topic may be brought to the Advisory Council by one or more members for discussion and, if approved, the individual or group who proposed the policy may be asked to develop a rationale for the new or changed policy. This formalizes the process but does not imply that it will receive approval.

The individual or group submits a request to the Advisory Council for a new policy or change in policy and will use a form devised by the school Advisory Council that includes a statement indicating the need for the policy, a rationale for the policy, suggestions with preferred solution, suggestions for an alternate solution, and implications of implementing the change. Once the topic is placed on the agenda, the following occurs discussion about the topic, issue, concern, study of the issue is initiated, questions, concerns are clarified by the individual or group who initiated the policy, a statement is formulated that is brief, simple, clear, the statement is written in “goal language” (what will be accomplished).

The members engage in a discussion about the topic, clarify implications and request that the individual or group who initiated the policy prepare a draft of the proposed policy for the next meeting.

The first reading of the proposed policy is considered at the Advisory Council meeting. (This may occur at an executive session.) During this time, the members analyze the statement for clarity, engage in dialogue about the pros and cons of the policy as well as its implications. They further discern as to whether or not the policy should be implemented. If there is general consensus that the policy should be considered, the initiator or a committee assigned by the chair “writes” the policy with the suggestions and changes made by the Advisory Council.

The second draft is prepared for the next meeting of the Advisory Council. The second reading of the proposed policy allows the Advisory Council to either accept or reject the proposed policy. If accepted, the policy shall be sent to the Pastor / Bishop’s Office for approval. If rejected, the Advisory Council either asks that the proposed policy be changed to include the Advisory Council’s input or proposed policy is dropped.

New policies cannot be retroactive.

Publication of the policy occurs when the Advisory Council recommends the policy and the Pastor / Bishop approve it. When approved, constituents are informed about the new policy. This may be through the school newsletter, the parish bulletin(s) and/or the school’s handbooks.

Reviewing and rescinding policies is also the responsibility of the Advisory Council. Policies are tested every time they are used, and they should be changed as soon as they become obsolete or dysfunctional.

When the policy has been approved, the school administration determines how the policy will be implemented and informs the Advisory Council about the progress being made. The Advisory Council may share its preferences with the school administration. However, it is clearly the school administration's role to create the rules, guidelines or procedures to implement the policy. It is usual practice for the school administration to seek input from appropriate publics, e.g., parents, faculty, Advisory Council members, and pastor(s). Even with consultation, it is still the school administration's role to create the strategies to be used to implement the policy.

The characteristics of a good rule, guideline or procedure are clear language, date of implementation, and consequences (if necessary) for not following the regulation. Newly created regulations cannot be retroactive.

The appropriate publics are informed in a timely manner. The school administration periodically updates the members on how the implementation process is progressing. Some changes take time for implementation, and the Advisory Council and school administration should not expect immediate results.

The Advisory Council is advised that not all issues are policy matter and ordinarily can be handled through a change in procedures. The school administration apprises the Advisory Council of ordinary changes in procedures so that they are well informed.

Strategic Planning

Ultimately, the responsibility of writing the school's plan belongs to the Administration. However, it is helpful, if not necessary, for the school administration to have the advice and consultation of the School Advisory Council members when putting together such a complex project. The following recommendations for the school's strategic plan are only that ... a recommendation.

Components

An effective strategic plan has six (6) components:

Enrollment:

Enrollment planning typically estimates the numbers of students that the school will serve in the next four years. It will also identify where these students will come from (parish residents, move-ins or transfers, non-Catholics) and what their needs will be (handicapped, gifted, learning disabled). This section is very important because it helps determine what will be required in the other areas listed below.

Curriculum:

A curriculum plan will state what changes, if any, are expected in the school's curriculum. For example, it will outline what courses will be revised, what textbooks will be changed, and what academic programs will be added or dropped.

Supportive Services:

Support services planning should include all areas that support a positive and effective student learning environment as hot lunch, retreats, athletics, transportation, breakfast, etc.

Staffing:

A long range Plan should project staffing needs and staffing changes. It will report any new positions which the school anticipates (e.g., full time kindergarten teacher, additional part time secretary, part time coordinator for gifted students program) and positions which are likely to be reduced. (It does not need to include data or guesses about potentially sensitive information: "Do you expect to retire in the next four years?" or "Will you be getting pregnant and taking a leave?")

Facilities:

The long range plan identifies major changes or additions relating to the building and the school's space. If enrollments will be increasing or decreasing, what implications does that have for space? If new programs are to be added, what facilities will they require? What capital repairs are due?

Finances:

The final section of the plan should include the projected costs of the school and with the sources of funding. It should include all financial implications of the criteria identified in the first five sections. It should also address revenue sources such as parish subsidy, foundation contribution, tuition, fundraising, etc.

Plan Outline:

Each component of the strategic plan should include:

Observations: These will be highlights from the information that you can obtain relating to that section. For example, in the section on enrollment, you may place information such as "Infant baptisms have leveled off at 45-50 per year for the last five years. There has been a gradual growth in parish membership of about 5 percent each year "

Assumptions: These are the unproven predictions which the planners chose to make regarding things that will affect the future of the school. For example, the section on enrollment, an assumption might be: "Barring special intervention, about 50 percent of our registered families will want to enroll their children in grade one." In the section on finances: "The inflation rate will be about 6 percent." In the section on facilities: "The roof on the south wing will need replacement in three or four years."

School Needs and Wants: "Needs" are the things perceived as necessary to preserve the school and its present quality. "Wants" are the things perceived as desirable for the improvement of the school. Again an example: in the section on curriculum, replacement of science books for grades one-eight may be specified as a "need" while the addition of a part-time librarian to staff might be listed as a "want".

Goals and Objectives: "Goals" are long-range (three-five years) things to be accomplished. "Objectives" are short-range (one-year) things to be accomplished in pursuit of a goal. For example, in the section on finances, a goal might be to establish a tuition assistance fund; that goal might be supported by objectives such as inaugurating a monthly collection for tuition assistance, introducing the Adopt-a-Student program, and establishing a committee to locate and verify situations of need. These short range "objectives" help to achieve the longer range "goal".

In summary, the finished product of the strategic plan has six sections that deal with enrollment, curriculum, supportive services, staffing, facilities, and finances. Each of these sections has four subheadings: observations, assumptions, needs and wants, and goals and objectives. The whole plan need not be lengthy: perhaps eight or ten typed pages at most.

Process for Writing a Strategic Plan

The Planning Committee is a standing committee of the Advisory Council. The group should have 4 to 10 members. The members of the committee should have an understanding of the school(s), have the flexibility and listening abilities to work with a group, and be able to give of their time to the project.

The committee assembles data in the six areas of concern: enrollment, staffing, facilities, curriculum, support services, and finances. Mainly it is looking for: What is the present status?, What trends are evident from the last few years?, and What projections do knowledgeable people make for the next few years?

To get data on this last point, the committee certainly has open dialogue with the administration, staff, students, pastor, parents, and other Advisory Council members. These queries may be through meetings, personal contacts, or written surveys.

The committee reviews the data in each of the six areas and attempts to identify the "needs" and "wants" of the school. These are then converted into goals. A goal represents the fulfillment of a need or want. "We need 10% more students" becomes "Goal: to increase our enrollment by 10%."

"Objectives" are elaborations of the goal into more specific, shorter-range targets. A goal to increase enrollment by 10% may generate a half dozen objectives such as "Objective: to provide realtors with promotional information on the school," "Objective: to arrange for personal contacts of families with children who are approaching school age" and "Objective: to investigate the feasibility of starting a kindergarten."

The committee reconciles the goals and objectives for each of the six planning areas to be sure they are internally compatible. (Are enrollment goals provided for in projecting facilities goals? Are staffing goals casted out and provided for in the financial goals? Etc., etc.)

The committee regularly communicates with the Advisory Council and when the plan is completed, brings it to the Advisory council in draft form. If the Advisory Council has reservations or suggestions, the committee may need to develop a revised plan. The committee may also need to go to the Advisory Council for direction if, during the planning process, it reaches an impasse which it cannot resolve.

If the planning is to produce anything concrete for the school, it is essential that there be "programs". Programs are the projects or activities designed to achieve the objectives you have set. Each program should specify: What is to be done, By whom it is to be done (or at least who will take responsibility for seeing that it gets done), By when it will be done (with deadlines for intermediate steps if that would be useful), and the standards for measuring the success of the program.

Annually, the validity of the goals and objectives is reviewed. Changes are made if they appear to be called for (New data or a year of experience may alter the perceptions of what is needed or feasible) and new programs/projects are designed for the next year.

The process is begun again (recycled) periodically but not more than five (5) years.

Development

Catholic school development is a total school effort to provide quality Catholic education, sound business management, and effective public relations in order to attract employees, families, students, and dollars. This is accomplished when, working with the Advisory Council, the school administration is able to articulate the school's educational philosophy, crystallize the school's objectives, project them into the future, and take the necessary steps to realize them.

The Role of the Education Foundation

The Diocesan schools in the Diocese of Helena are in a unique position that they have established separate organizations for the primary purpose of financial development. These education foundations attract dollars to the local Catholic school. In order to do this well, the school administration is responsible in working with the foundation board members and the Advisory Council members to assure the school's philosophy is communicated extremely well to both organizations and the greater Catholic school community.

The Role of the School Administrator

The school administration is responsible for recruiting and maintaining a professionally qualified and dedicated staff. This is a fundamental leadership criterion for school administration. Although he/she may request advice or assistance in recruiting a prospective teacher or coach, as a matter of personnel, it is expected that the school administrator employs, evaluates, and/or terminates employees as he/she deems necessary and within compliance of federal and state laws, as well as Diocesan policy.

The Role of the Advisory Council

In addition to employee development, attracting families and students to the Catholic schools is also the responsibility of the school administration. However, as it is not expected that a school principal would be an expert in financial management or accounting, it cannot be expected that he/she is an expert at recruiting students or families to the school. Therefore, the school administration relies heavily on the advice and participation of Advisory Council and foundation board members to attract families and students to the Catholic school. In addition to active participation, it is also necessary that the Catholic school adequately and appropriately staff and fund a Development Office for the purpose of attracting families and students to the Catholic school.

Public Relations

An important task for the Catholic school community, including the Advisory Council, is to help create a favorable image of the school in the parish and civic community. Individual Advisory Council members can do much to help in this area by their own enthusiasm and support for the school. As leaders in the community, Advisory Council members are in the best possible position to promote a positive image of the Catholic school.

Public Relations are everyone's responsibility. The administration, however, has final responsibility for approving printed materials and media releases.

Good public relations include the following:

- communication and liaison with parish organizations and the total parish community
- stimulating public interest in the school which will help with the recruitment of students and faculty
- seeing that press releases, newsletters, catalogs and case statements are disseminated to news media, local organizations, and appropriate school publics

Finance

One of the most important roles of the Advisory Council is school finances. Each Catholic school has employed at least one person in its finance / business office to direct and manage all aspects of the school's financial responsibilities. This includes all accounts receivable (tuition assessment, tuition collection) accounts payable, and human resources.

The Advisory Council vice chair is the chair of the finance committee. As such, this person works with the school administration (the building principal(s) and the controller / business manager / finance officer for Diocesan policy compliance and Catholic school stewardship expectations. Through the finance committee, the Advisory Council:

- Advises the school administrator(s) or pastor (where applicable) in ways to maximize the financial capacity of the school while at the same time, remain committed to the mission of a Catholic school.
- Advises the school administrator(s) or pastor (where applicable) in ways to develop plans / means to finance the educational programs, including establishing an annual operating budget.
- Advises the school administrator(s) or pastor (where applicable) in establishing tuition levels and tuition payment programs.
- Advises the school administrator(s) or pastor (where applicable) in developing the annual school operations budget.
- Monitors all financial matters involving the school, school personnel, and school operations on a monthly basis.
- Reports any inconsistencies and/or discrepancies to the Catholic Schools Superintendent.

All aspects of Catholic school income, including tuition and donations are kept in strict confidentiality. Therefore, members of the Advisory Council and/or finance committee will not be involved in the process of tuition assessment or tuition collection with any individual or family.

Budget Calendar

As a guideline for the School Administration, Advisory Council, and its Finance Committee, the budget calendar is provided with a strong recommendation that it be followed as a course of action for the Catholic school budgeting process.

In addition to following the budget calendar, it is expected that each month, the School

Administration and Finance Committee will meet and follow this guide, as well as review the year-to-date and monthly actual performance against the school budget.

Month	Action	Responsible Party
July	Begin implementing school budget	Administration
August	Publish the Year End results	Administration
September	Establish final school budget based on school enrollment and staffing	Administration / Finance Committee
October	Present final budget to Advisory Council	Administration / Finance Committee
	Send final budget to Catholic Schools Superintendent	Administration
November	No Activity	
December	Begin preparation of annual budget	Administration
January	Student re-registration	Administration
	Employee "Intent to Return Forms" distributed and returned	Administration
	Budget requests distributed and returned	Administration
	Outline school budget process and begin gathering evidence	Administration / Finance Committee
February	Develop line by line expenditure budget using budget requests, staffing projections, and enrollment projection	Administration / Finance Council
	List all salary costs, including fixed charges and benefits.	Administration
	Include facility improvements and repairs in a detailed format that shows levels of importance and priority	Administration / Finance Committee
	Develop the "Cost of Education"	Administration / Finance Committee
March	Develop line by line income assumptions including tuition, fundraising, parish assistance (where applicable), and other sources of income	Administration / Finance Committee
April	Present tentative budget to Advisory Council	Administration
	Tuition information distributed to families	Administration
May	Begin school commitment of tuition assistance to families	Administration / Tuition Office
June	Invoice and Collect Tuition	Tuition Office
	Refine Budget per enrollment fluctuations and personnel changes	Administration

Goals and Evaluation

Annual Goals

The school administration annually informs the Advisory Council of the school theme and goals developed by school faculty members, support staff, and administration.

In support of the theme and goals, it is recommended that the Advisory Council develop its own annual goals that coincide and support the annual school goals.

Annually, the Advisory Council should review its goals to determine their effectiveness for pending school year.

Annually, the Advisory Council should review the school's mission statement and strategic plans to determine whether they are appropriate and effective.

Evaluation

The Advisory Council also assists the Superintendent or Pastor (if applicable) with evaluating the school administrator(s), per the process and protocol established by the Diocese and implemented by the Superintendent.

Administration Selection

The hiring of School Administrators for Diocesan Catholic Schools is the responsibility of the Bishop in consultation with the Diocesan Superintendent and local Advisory Council. When a school administrative vacancy occurs, the Advisory Council Chair will establish a search committee at the time a vacancy in the position occurs. The Diocesan Superintendent is a member of the committee.

After a comprehensive search, screening process, and interview, the search committee will submit to the Diocesan Superintendent the name(s) of the individual(s) recommended for the position. The Diocesan Superintendent will submit these name(s) along with his/her recommendation to the Bishop.

After appointment by the Bishop, the Diocesan Superintendent will offer a contract to the candidate.

Consensus

What Is Consensus?

Consensual decision-making processes are intended to help groups “think and feel together.” In the context of Pastoral Council meetings consensus describes how Council members work out a decision by thinking together as a group.

Consensus is a form of decision-making that enables a group to come to agreement without voting.

- Consensus is reached after consideration of the opinions of all members present.
- All members shall have the opportunity to articulate his/her thoughts in advance.

Upon reaching consensus, each member understands the decision, recognizes it as the best possible, given the group and the situation, and be willing to accept and support the recommendation of the Advisory Council.

Why Not Vote?

Sometimes voting is fine. It can be useful when a group is making simple decisions, uncomplicated by strong feelings or opinions one way or another. Sometimes it is useful and timesaving simply to “take a straw vote” to get a sense of the group during a discussion.

At other times, however, voting results in “winners” and “losers.” When a great deal is riding on a decision, a great deal is at stake, or when the decision to be made is highly emotional for some or all Advisory council members, a vote can polarize the group and result in tension/conflict. In such instances, a vote can prevent an Advisory council from witnessing to solidarity, harmony and unity.

What Are the Basic Guidelines for Consensual Decision-Making?

- Avoid blindly arguing for personal points of view.
- State positions as clearly and logically as possible.
- Listen closely to others’ statements; observe their reactions carefully before pressing a personal point.
- Avoid changing position only to reach agreement or to avoid conflict with others.
- Support only those solutions with which are acceptable.
- Yield only to positions that have objective, logical-sounding foundations.
- Avoid resorting to “conflict reducing” measures like majority vote, coin toss, averaging, bargaining.
- Seek out differences of opinion (remember, it is natural to differ and differences should be expected and can be growth inducing).
- Involve everyone in the process. Differences of opinion or disagreements reflecting a wide range of information and opinion can create a situation in which better solutions can be reached.
- Discuss underlying assumptions. Listen carefully to one another and encourage all to express themselves. If discussion reaches a stalemate, look for the next most acceptable alternative for all members.
- Do not confuse consensus with unanimity. Consensus does not necessarily mean that everyone agrees with every single point, or feels equally good about the final decision. It does mean that all agree this is the best decision for the faith community as a whole -- taking into account the wisdom of the group.

How Can the Advisory Council Chair Be a Good Facilitator?

- By testing out agreements (“Do we have agreement on . . .”) as the discussion proceeds.
- By sending up “trial Balloons” (“Could we go with . . .”).
- By suggesting a straw vote to determine where group feeling is when people are in doubt or are hard to read.
- By checking out non-verbal (body language can betray how uneasy or how comfortable people are with the direction of the discussion).
- By preventing railroading by more vocal or aggressive participants (advocating patience with those who are slower, quieter, more timid) and by promoting inclusiveness.
- By asking dissenters, “What would you need to see, hear, feel, and learn to allow you to think better of this decision?”
- By helping the group to deal effectively with situations or persons that block consensus.

Statutes

Each school Advisory Council shall define its authority and membership through a written set of statutes (by-laws) approved by the Bishop. Local statutes shall be in accord with Diocesan procedures. A current copy of these documents shall be on file at the Office of Catholic Schools.

Questions related to Advisory Council documents and/or proceedings shall be referred to the Superintendent.

Advisory council Meetings

Planning the Agenda

The school administration and chair of the Advisory Council plan the meeting agenda and have it distributed to the members along with an agenda packet prior to the meeting. Topics for future agendas can be raised at the meeting. The format for the meetings is the same for all meetings. The agenda includes the desired “outcome.” A sample format follows:

Gathering

- Usually occurs 10-15 minutes before the meeting. The purpose is to socialize. Rotate task of bringing refreshments.

Call to order

- Welcome and Opening Prayer
- Recognition of visitors
- Review of the Agenda

Allocated time for all of the above is about 10 minutes. The chair handles this part of the agenda.

General Reports

Pastor (when applicable):

- updates and shares general information

School administration (s):

- provides information about the school’s program
- provides a progress report about the school’s goals and objectives
- informs about the coming school activities
- clarifies questions raised in report

Allocated time for all of the above is no more than 30 minutes

Committee Reports

- Indicate who will present the report on behalf of the committee and the purpose of the report, e.g., input from Advisory Council, final recommendation.
- Not all committees give reports at each meeting.

Standing Committees

- List each committee that will apprise the Advisory Council about its progress, only if they have information, need input from the Advisory Council or have some final recommendations for the

Advisory Council to consider.

Ad hoc committees

- List each committee that will apprise the Advisory Council about its progress, only if there is information, input is needed from the Advisory Council or there is some final recommendation for the Advisory Council to consider.

Ordinarily, the reporting time should be about 10 minutes for each of the reports. If additional time is needed, appropriate adjustments are indicated in the agenda and announced at the beginning of the meeting.

Other business

- Allocate about 10 minute for other business matters. Indicate the topic or issue to be addressed.

Visitors Comments

- Guests should be informed that someone would respond to them later. Do not make promises about resolving the issues raised.

Closing Comments

Closing Prayer

Meetings are usually scheduled for two hours. Executive Sessions are held either before the regularly scheduled meeting or after the meeting. Executive sessions need not be part of every Advisory Council meeting.

Executive Session

The Advisory Council meets in Executive Session in order to deal with sensitive issues that may not necessarily be shared with the public. The agenda may reflect that the Advisory Council will meet in executive session. Decisions made in an “executive session” are recorded. The decision, topic, issue or concern discussed in executive session is not published. The minutes of the executive session are confidential. These minutes are not made public. Some of the topics that may be covered in “executive session” include but are not limited to:

- The final selection of a school administration hired to fill a vacancy
- the resignation or removal of a Advisory Council member
- the review of the performance of the school administration and the renewal or non-renewal of the school administration 's contract

Other topics that are part of the Advisory Council’s responsibilities can also be included in the executive sessions of the Advisory Council as part of the decision-making process. The school administration (and pastor if applicable) is always present for an executive session.

Managing the Meeting – Hints for the Chair

- It is the responsibility of the chair to begin and end meetings on time. The chair should keep the agenda moving and assure that all members are active participants.
- A full discussion of issues shall take place before any final recommendation or decision is determined. The chair should indicate the purpose of the discussion; e.g., listing pros and cons about an issue, planning, solving a problem, making a recommendation or finalizing a decision.
- The chair shall make summary comments during the discussion and periodically during the meeting. He/she keeps the topic moving, and at the same time, ensures that the progress of the

discussion is noted.

- The chair shall relate the comments of individual Advisory Council members to the purpose of the discussion. He/she will clarify points being discussed and inviting further development of an idea about the issue that keep members engaged in the topic.
- The chair should set time limits for each item on the agenda. The topic should have a specified amount of time allotted for information, input and response. If the discussion exceeds the time limits, the time can be renegotiated. It may be necessary to move the topic to a future meeting or assign a committee to research the issue further before placing it on an agenda.
- The chair should table comments about topics not on the agenda. Such topics can be dealt with at another time or they may become a future “agenda item.”
- If the discussion goes off track, the chair shall interrupt the discussion, remind members that “side-bar” conversation and comments are unacceptable.
- The chair may encourage a “closing statement” from each member before moving to the next topic. This is one sentence about what has occurred. Members may “pass” if they wish. This tactic gives members confidence to speak to the issue and engenders respect for the opinions of others. It is not an opportunity to “open the discussion” again.

Visitors Attending Advisory Council Meeting

Advisory Council meetings, other than those held in executive session, are open to the members of the Catholic school / parish community. They are not “open to the general public”. The dates and times are announced in the school’s monthly calendar and/or the church bulletin. A particular time may be stipulated on the agenda to allow visitors to address the Advisory Council.

Visitors should be aware of the protocol observed by those who attend the Advisory Council meetings. It is important that a friendly atmosphere prevails, but it is also important that visitors know the parameters for speaking to the Advisory Council. A flyer welcoming visitors could be distributed before the meeting begins. The flyer would include a statement of welcome and the protocol to be followed by visitors during the meeting.

Suggested Procedures for Visitors

- Visitors observe the Advisory Council while it is in session. They do not engage in the discussion nor do they actively participate in the agenda either through comments or by offering their opinions on the topic being discussed.
- Once the visitor is recognized, the visitor has one opportunity to express an opinion on the matter at hand. Each individual may speak for a specified amount of time (2-3 minutes) on matters that concern the Advisory Council.
- There is no discussion or debate between the visitors and the members. All members listen to the visitors. If necessary, either the chair or someone designated by the chair can assist in clarifying the question or topic.
- The chair thanks the visitors for their comments and informs them that someone will get back to them later.
- The chair and the members are cordial to the visitors. It is understood that the issues raised will not be handled at the meeting. If appropriate to the parameters of the Advisory Council’s responsibilities, the issue may be addressed at a future time. Ordinarily, the visitor’s comments are related to the matters considered on the agenda. Personnel issues and individual family or student’s needs are not discussed. Questions of a general nature, however, could be referred to the appropriate person, e.g., school administration or pastor (when applicable).
- The chair assures the visitors that the matter will be taken under consideration by the Advisory Council, the school administration, and pastor (when applicable). It is important that the chair not “promise” that the issue will be dealt with at the next meeting because it may not be possible to do

so. The chair does not necessarily address some of the issues raised. It may be appropriate, for the school administration (or pastor, if applicable) to respond to the individual's question, issue or concern later.

Open Forum Meetings

Advisory Council members believe in and support the mission of Catholic education. As a part of the mission of Catholic education, the Advisory Council endeavors to “know” what will improve the school's program and its operation. Since the Advisory Council represents the parents and guardians, they will periodically, want to assess “how they are meeting the needs of the school.” They will also want to know if the school is meeting the expectations of its constituents. The Open Forum is an opportunity for the Advisory Council to communicate with the school families. It will also help the school's administration continue to provide a learning environment that is Catholic and excellent. This will also assist the Advisory Council in developing annual goals to meet the needs of the school community, the students and the school's program.

The Open Forum allows the Advisory Council, pastor(s) and school administrator to hear from the parents and guardians of the students. The parents and guardians are given the opportunity to express what they are thinking about the school and its mission of Catholic education for their children.

A letter and registration form is sent to each family indicating that Parents and guardians are invited to attend an open forum with the Advisory Council.

The date and time is announced well in advance. The purpose of the open forum is clearly stated. The protocol for participation is announced. This is not a time to resolve specific problems or express grave displeasure with an aspect of the school's program, operation or personnel.

Parents and guardians will be given the opportunity to express themselves in groups and have their input become part of the information collated by the school Advisory Council.

Parents and guardians will be asked:

- What do you like about the school?
- If you could change one thing in the school, what would that be?
- If you could add one thing to the school's program, what would that be?

After registrations have been returned, the parents and guardians will be randomly arranged in small discussion groups; nametags will identify the discussion groups. An Advisory Council member will be assigned to facilitate the group discussion following the format listed above. The facilitators listen and record comments but do not respond to questions or make comments.

The meeting will begin on time. The purpose of the meeting is stated. Serious consideration will be given to all that is shared with the school Advisory Council since the input will serve as a means of continuous improvement in the school's program and its operation. The purpose of the small groups is to ensure that all participants have the opportunity to express their opinions.

After a given time, the responses are shared with the group at large. The issues raised are specified in each of the categories. No final judgments or decisions are made at this time. The chair of the Advisory Council assures the parents and guardians that an ad hoc committee will collate the responses from the notes from each of the discussion groups. The

summary report will be sent to each family. The items of concern will be given to the appropriate person for follow-up, namely the school administration (pastor, if applicable) and/or the appropriate Advisory Council members.

The results of the Open Forum become an agenda item at a future Advisory Council meeting.

The Advisory Council determines a way to communicate the results to the school families. Families are informed that the issues raised will be addressed in one of the following ways, e.g., item for discussion of the Advisory Council agenda, policy recommendation to the school administration and to the Advisory Council, goals and objectives for action plans for school Advisory Council or the school faculty and staff. Some items may be deferred for action later. Others may be discerned as impossible or inconsistent with the mission, means and philosophy of the Catholic school.

Periodic reports are given to the school families. These updates are a response to the families that Advisory Council members have heard them and that they will, when possible, deal with the issues raised.

12 Most Difficult Things for Advisory Council Members:

1. Determining what your function is on the Advisory Council and how to accomplish it effectively.
2. That no matter what you **think** you know about the Advisory Council, when you first come on board, you still have a lot to learn.
3. Learning to acknowledge publicly, you have no power and authority as an individual member; that only the board as a whole can function.
4. Recognizing the difference between formulating/enacting policy (the Advisory Council's job) and administering the school (the principal's job).
5. That you must represent **all** the parents/students. Your decision must be made in the interest of the total school and not made solely for you, your children, your friends, special groups, or interests.
6. Learning how to respond to the complaints and concerns of parents and others associated with the school.
7. That you must think deeply and sometimes accept a reality that is contrary to your own beliefs.
8. That change comes slowly.
9. The Advisory Council is established to help the school administrator(s) run the school(s).
10. That the school and/or Advisory Council cannot do every good thing.
11. That effective membership means being able to hold the minority viewpoint when discussing a given issue; then openly supporting the consensus position of the Advisory Council.
12. Discovering how the school is funded, that funding a Catholic school depends on many factors, and that there is constant tension between money and mission.

Advisory Council Prayer

To be true to its role in the Catholic educational setting, the school Advisory Council needs prayer. Catholic schools are, after all, religious institutions dedicated to raising young people's consciousness of God's presence in their lives.

This is not just conceptual information. It is faith reality. It is a view of the purpose of life that affects everything a Christian does. If the Advisory Council is to give direction to the school's efforts to nurture that understanding/habit in students, then the Advisory Council itself must be in tune with that reality. Obviously, the prayer life of the Advisory Council's individual members will affect the decisions they help to make for the school. However, the Advisory Council itself also needs to be reflective and prayerful. It needs to absorb some sense of its role as a facilitator in proclaiming the gospel. It needs to tell its responsibility for making the Lord real for the school's students.

This does not happen automatically because the school philosophy or because it is written in the Advisory Council statutes. Rather, the Advisory Council should provide itself with occasions to be with the Lord together and to pray for the success of the work they do. Its meetings should begin and end in prayer. The prayer should be prepared. It is not a good idea to begin every meeting with prayer formula ("Let's start with an Our Father and a Hail Mary") or with a spontaneous prayer ("Father, would you start us off with a prayer?"). To a point, this is certainly better than omitting prayer from the meeting, however, the risk is that this becomes a formality, akin to singing "The Star Spangled Banner" before sports events. The Advisory Council's prayer should be a true call to reflection, with adequate preparation and time given to it so as to achieve that.

Prayer does not need to entertain. At the same time, some variety and group participation are helpful to people in bringing themselves into the presence of God. It helps them to pray actively. Each Advisory Council member should be willing to assist occasionally in the preparation of prayer, and always in becoming fully engaged with the prayer that the Advisory Council is sharing.

Take time with Advisory Council prayer. A few minutes may seem like a long time but for a Catholic school Advisory Council, it is a modest enough percentage of a two-hour meeting to assign to prayer.

A Catholic School Advisory council Member's Prayer

We have been asked to serve, Lord, and we have agreed.

*Help us to know our fellow Council members,
their gifts, their concerns, their lives.*

*We are doing your work Lord, and your love for us is,
above all, personal.*

*Help us to welcome conflict as a sign of the diversity,
as an opportunity, to reach for creative solutions.*

*Help us to recognize this diversity as a sign of your capacity to love us all
and help me to cherish it as a great strength.*

*Help us to approach issues with open, inquiring minds, free from prejudice,
with our spirit depending on yours
for the strength to make hard decisions.*

*Help us to listen;
to know when and to whom we should listen.*

*Help us to learn to use our gifts to promote thorough,
thoughtful discussion of important concerns in our Catholic community.*

*Help us to develop our skills as peacemakers,
to know how and when to mediate,
to conciliate,
to negotiate.*

*Help us to enjoy doing your work
and to remember your promise:*

Whenever two of us are gathered in your name, you are with us.

Sit with us now

Amen

A Prayer Service for an Advisory Council

Leader: Father, we come to you in prayer to begin our meeting. We are here because we wish to contribute to the academic, personal, and religious growth of our young people. We are aware that we are blind without the light of your Spirit and weak without the sustenance of your Son's words and sacrament. Be with us tonight so that we ourselves may grow in faith. Be with us so that we may be wise in our efforts to serve your young people.

Reading: (One of the following passages.)

Acts 2: 32-42. (Peter preaches that Jesus has been raised and we have been called to conversion, baptism, fellowship.)

Ephesians 1: 3-14. (God chose us to be his children through Christ. Let us praise him.)

I Thessalonians 1: 2-5a. (You heard the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit. You have shown faith, love, and hope.)

Leader: Jesus taught us that where we gather in His name, He is in our midst. Joined with Him now, we go to the Father in prayer.

Side A: Let us pray for the young people in our school whose growth in wisdom and grace depends in some measure on our work and our decisions.

Side B: Father, fill the lives of these students with your presence and your love. Help them to see your providence in the world they study and your care in the lives of the people around them.

Side A: Let us pray for the teachers and staff at our school. Their baptism and confirmation called them to be witnesses to the gospel message.

Side B: Father, support with the gift of your Spirit the work of those who teach and assist our students. Reward their work with the growth of our children and with joy in seeing that growth take place.

Side A: Let us pray for the parents whom our school serves. God has given to them the awesome responsibility of providing for the education of their children. This is a responsibility that, in a modest way, we share together in this school family.

Side B: Father, support the parents and guardians of our students. Make them wise in dealing with their children, generous and patient in their sacrifices, and at peace with the burdens they bear for their families.

Side A: Let us pray for our church, the faith community with whom we make our pilgrimage to God. It is especially with this family that we find the presence of the Lord.

Side B: Father, continue to give life to your people. We thank you for the gifts of your priests and of all who continuously re-create our faith family.

Leader: With the words that Jesus taught us, we pray now that God's kingdom may come in our families and in our world.

All: Our Father, who art in heaven ...

The Diocese of Helena

Catholic Schools Office



Realistic Expectations for School Administration

The Catholic School Advisory Council should expect the School Administrator to:

- ☞ Serve as its chief executive officer and primary advisor to the Advisory council
- ☞ Implement all local and Diocesan school policies
- ☞ Interpret the needs of the Catholic school and address them in an appropriate manner
- ☞ Maintain the Catholicity of the school culture
- ☞ Seek Advisory Council advice in all matters concerning school operations
- ☞ Keep the Advisory Council fully and accurately informed about the school program and operations
- ☞ Present qualified recommendations on all problems and issues to be considered by the Advisory Council
- ☞ Be alert to advances and improvements in educational pedagogy as well as up to date in educational research, and use them as the basis of school improvement recommendations
- ☞ Seek counsel for significant and/or extra-ordinary purchases
- ☞ Accept responsibilities for all executive functions of the Catholic school program.
- ☞ Supervise school personnel in a professional manner that is compliant with Diocesan policies and state / federal law.
- ☞ Accept all concerns, complaints, and other forms of communication regarding the school with a compassionate and skilled demeanor
- ☞ Be responsible for the actions of school personnel and students during the school day and/or during school events
- ☞ Lead the Catholic school enterprise in the spirit and intent of the Catholic faith.

The Diocese of Helena

Catholic Schools Office



Advisory Council Member Checklist

It seems reasonable that those who choose to become a Catholic School Advisory Council member are motivated by a desire to contribute to the Catholic school. Advisory Council members bring a mixture of attributes that will shape their service on the Advisory council. It is hopeful that Advisory Council members can endorse each check next to the criterion below.

As a member of the Catholic School Advisory Council, I am ...

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Dedicated to promoting Catholic education | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Able to both lead and follow |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Devoted to the teachings of the Gospel | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> An effective listener |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committed to academic excellence | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Organized and prepared |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Committed to high ethical standards | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fiscally responsible |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Civic minded and service oriented | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Up to date on educational issues |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trustworthy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Giving and understanding |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Able to maintain confidentiality | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Goal oriented |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Able to work independently and decisively | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Willing to give credit |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Willing to explore other points of view | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Appreciative of other's talents |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Able to see the big picture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assertive without controlling |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multi-task oriented | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cooperative and positive |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Patient | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Conscientious |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Able to delegate | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fact-oriented |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Involved, but not interfering | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A team-player |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Fair-minded | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Able to articulate my opinions |

The Diocese of Helena

Catholic Schools Office



Code of Ethics for Advisory Council Members

As a member of the Catholic School Advisory Council, I ...

- *...acknowledge that schools are a significant expression of the teaching mission of the Catholic Church and function within its structure;*
- *... will become more knowledgeable about the mission of Catholic education, as expressed in this school, and sincerely promote it to the various publics with whom I have influence;*
- *... recognize the need for continuing education about my responsibilities and know that I do not represent the Advisory Council officially unless explicitly authorized to do so;*
- *... will be fully and carefully prepared for each meeting by doing the required readings and completing the necessary tasks for committee work and reports;*
- *... support the School Administration in authorized functions and avoid intruding in administrative details unless requested to do so;*
- *... will be loyal to the decisions of the Advisory Council, even though I may be personally opposed to the final recommendations and decisions;*
- *... will be alert to alternate solutions to problems by keeping an open mind;*
- *... will disqualify myself from discussion and vote on an issue where there is conflict of interest with my family or business interests or if the outcome will grant me any pecuniary or material benefits; and*
- *... pray often for other members of the Advisory Council, the Catholic school, and the community it serves.*

**The Diocese of Helena
Catholic Schools Office
Advisory Council Application**



Candidate Name: _____

Address

Phone

Profession

Employer

Please Rate Your Expertise, Involvement, and/or Experience On The Following:		Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Less Than Average	None
1	Spirituality / Vision of the School					
2	Education Process, Policies, & Programs					
3	Human Resources					
4	Financial Resources					
5	Community Resources					
6	Legal Affairs					
7	Personnel Management					
8	Fundraising and/or Development Programs					
9	Child Care / Early Education / Preschool Programs					
10	Public Relations / Marketing					
11	Strategic Planning					
12	Facility / Plant Maintenance					
13	Publications					
14	The Business Community					
15	The Financial Community					
16	The Media					
17	The Government					
18	Other Non-Profit Organizations					
19	The Diocese					
20	The Local Catholic Community					

Candidate Name

I Am Active In

(Offer Time, Talent, & Treasure):

		Outstanding	Above Average	Average	Less Than Average	None
1	The Diocese					
2	The Local Civic Community					
3	The Local Faith Community					
4	My Parish Community					
5	The Catholic Schools					
6	Other:					

I Am:

1	A Member of a Catholic Parish	Parish:
2	A Non Catholic	Church:
3	Related to a School / Foundation Employee	Name:
4	An alumni of the local Catholic School	Year:
5	Parent of Student(s) in Catholic Schools	Grades:
6	Attended a Catholic School	School (s):
7	Gender:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female

Please state why you would like to become a member of the School Advisory Council:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

The Diocese of Helena Catholic Schools Office

Advisory Council Performance Review



In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the Advisory Council's efforts, please complete the following survey.		Always	Usually	Sometimes	Never	I Don't Know
As an Advisory Council, we ...						
1	... understand the mission and purpose of the school					
2	... encourage a positive attitude toward the school					
3	... maintain communication with the diocesan church					
4	... set clear goals and work toward their achievement					
5	... demonstrate familiarity with the structure and governance structure					
6	... actively promote positive public relations for the school					
7	... regularly review the school's operation budget					
8	... do not involved ourselves in administrative matters					
9	... participate in the evaluation of the school administrator(s)					
10	... represent the community whom the school serves					
11	... study all support materials carefully before the AC meeting					
12	... make relevant contributions and avoid lengthy commentaries					
13	... are effective at helping the school administrator(s) accomplish school goals					
The Committees of the Advisory Council ...						
1	... have clearly defined tasks					
2	... regularly report on their tasks					
3	... complete their tasks within the expected time limits					
4	... prepare specific recommendations for the Council's consideration					
The Agenda for Advisory Council meetings ...						
1	... is prepared by the school administrator in collaboration with the Chair					
2	... is distributed well in advance of the meeting time					
3	... makes clear the action expected on each item					
4	... is accompanied by appropriate background data					
Comments ...						