

**DIOCESE OF GARY**

**OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS**

**GUIDE FOR ESTABLISHING  
LOCAL SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS**

**PROMULGATED DECEMBER 1995**

**REVISED DECEMBER 2008**

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## INTRODUCTION

On March 21, 1995, Bishop Dale J. Melczek, Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Gary, promulgated several policy statements that were recommended to him and the Priests' Council by the Education Task Force. One such policy statement reads as follows:

*"Catholic school ministry has complex relationships with other ministries in the local parish. Each school shall establish a school advisory council to work on local planning issues and to collaborate with other parish structures. Such a council would serve as a subcommittee of the parish education commission."*

Therefore, it is a matter of policy that local school communities must create local school advisory councils. To be sure, many schools in the Diocese already have such councils or boards in place. It is incumbent upon those school communities who do not have such councils to arrange for the implementation of this policy in the near future.

Not only are such councils a matter of policy, they are also a natural outgrowth of the sense of Church as the People of God that has always been part of the Catholic tradition, especially since the Second Vatican Council. Indeed, the entire movement toward the creation of parish councils, parish commissions, and school advisory councils reflects an abiding faith in the "royal priesthood" (1 Peter 2) which is inherent in all of the baptized People of God. Clergy, religious, and laity must work in consort and collaboratively to build up the Kingdom of God in the Diocese, in the parishes, and in the school communities.

It should be noted that the policy statement identifies these bodies as school advisory councils rather than as school boards. The term "advisory council" was chosen purposely. The term "school board" has a definite meaning in the public tradition. It is mandated by state statute for school corporations and operates within certain defined legal conditions. Catholic school advisory councils are very different from public school boards in nature and scope. Catholic school councils are consultative in nature as are the other consultative bodies identified in the revised Code of Canon Law (1983). A comparison of the public school board and the Catholic school advisory council appears in the appendices of this document.

The following general guidelines serve to assist local leadership in developing and maintaining school advisory councils that foster a spirit of collaboration and inclusion in the faith community that is the parish with a school.

## THE ROLE, PURPOSE, AND FUNCTION

### OF A LOCAL SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL

A Catholic school advisory council is a body whose members are selected and/or elected to participate in the decision-making process in designated areas of responsibility. A parish school is part of the educational mission of the parish for which the pastor is the canonical administrator. He delegates, according to diocesan policy, administrative responsibilities to the school principal, who is accountable to him. As part of the Gary diocesan school system, the principal is also accountable to the Bishop through the Superintendent of Catholic Schools.

In the Diocese of Gary, school councils are consultative in nature. A consultative council operates in the policy-making process by assisting in formulating and adopting, but never enacting, policy. This type of council is more in keeping with the shared decision-making perspective of the Catholic Church as also demonstrated in the consultative status of the diocesan Priests' Council, the diocesan Finance Council and other diocesan advisory groups. The constituting authority, i.e., the pastor of the local school community, establishes those areas wherein the council is to be consulted. Such action is usually made effective by the council's Constitution.

Consultation reasonably implies that the administrator(s) (pastor/principal) shall listen to the advice of the council in certain designated matters prior to final decision-making. The operating principle is that the administrator(s) will not act contrary to the advice which has been given, especially when there is a consensus of the council, unless the administrator(s) has an overriding reason to do so. It is customary, but not obligatory, for the administrator(s) to communicate this reason in writing to the consultative body, the school advisory council.

The general role of a Catholic school advisory council is Agenda driven. It convenes to provide policy direction to the school. This very general responsibility has six (possibly seven) distinct functions:

## **I. TO PARTICIPATE IN AND ENCOURAGE STRATEGIC PLANNING**

- TO ESTABLISH A MISSION STATEMENT, GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND LONG-RANGE AND SHORT-RANGE PLANS.

Developing a mission statement for the council makes it possible for the council to work in an inter-relationship with the Church, parish, and school. A mission statement identifies what the council is called to do by the parish and by the diocesan Church in light of the teachings of Christ, the needs of the students, and the demands of quality education. It ensures that the school community promotes and enhances its identity as Catholic.

Establishing goals and objectives for its internal operations enables the council to deal effectively and realistically with its tasks during the course of the school year. These goals and objectives provide a basis for the council's annual self-evaluation.

In formulating a long-range plan, the council has the opportunity to gather information and then to work with the pastor and principal to develop the ideal picture of what things should look like at the end of the planned time line.

## **II. TO ASSIST IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

- TO COLLABORATE IN FORMULATING POLICIES IN ACCORD WITH DIOCESAN POLICIES WHICH GIVE GENERAL DIRECTION FOR ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION.

A policy, by definition, is a guide to discretionary action. It is a written expression of the council's intention regarding some aspect of educational organization or operation. It is not concerned with administration and implementation. The executive officer, i.e., the principal, is the person who implements policy.

## **III. TO OFFER FINANCIAL ADVICE**

- TO DEVELOP THE PLANS/MEANS TO FINANCE THE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS INCLUDING TUITION, DEVELOPMENT, FUND RAISING, AND ALLOCATING RESOURCES ACCORDING TO A BUDGET AND MONITORING THESE PLANS

It is the principal's task to prepare the expenditure side of the budget using as many resource people at the parish level as necessary. The principal, however, should not bear the financial responsibility for the school alone.

It is the council's task to analyze and discuss the proposed budget, to identify funding sources and amounts needed from tuition, fund raising, parish investment (subsidy), development efforts, etc., and to review the implementation of diocesan policies and procedures that are related to the business operations of the school.

**IV. TO SERVE AS INSTITUTIONAL ADVANCEMENT AND PUBLIC RELATIONS RESOURCES**

- TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN TO PROMOTE THE SCHOOL FOR IMAGE AND ENROLLMENT

This includes communicating with various publics on behalf of the school, listening to constituents' needs and concerns, promoting the education program in whatever manner possible, expanding the schools' communications materials, and making appropriate efforts in political advocacy.

- TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE DEVELOPMENT PLAN AND PROGRAM

This includes coordinating various events and activities such as an Annual Appeal, events for parents and alumni, a scholarship program, a planned giving program, special project campaigns, and the identification and solicitation of major donor prospects.

- TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE MARKETING PLAN AND PROGRAM

This includes various programs and services such as surveys, publications, and public relations media to promote the benefits of the school.

- TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A COMPREHENSIVE ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT PLAN (RECRUITMENT and RETENION)

This includes coordinating various programs to communicate with parents and families with children baptized in the parish, programs to involve parents of young children - especially those whose first born is under the age of three, to investigate programs to expand the services of the school so that students with differing abilities may be included and receive an appropriate education.

**V. TO CREATE AND IMPLEMENT A PROCESS TO REVIEW MEMBERSHIP NEEDS AND TO ENSURE THE ON-GOING GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNCIL**

To provide for consistent and effective council membership needs, actively recruit potential candidates, review candidates' experiences and skills in relationship to those of current council members, and to recommend a slate of qualified candidates to the pastor. To ensure the on-going growth and development of the council members, new-member orientation as well as ongoing training and periodic and annual evaluations are planned and conducted.

**VI. TO EVALUATE ITSELF PERIODICALLY**

- TO CONDUCT AN ASSESSMENT(S) IN ORDER TO DETERMINE ITS OWN EFFECTIVENESS IN LIGHT OF ITS MISSION AND ITS RESPONSIBILITIES AS OUTLINED BY DIOCESAN POLICY AND BY ITS OWN CONSTITUTION AND BYLAWS.

The council's productivity is based on achievement of the goals and objectives which give the council specific direction throughout the year. The council's internal operations are based on how the council spends its time and how its members operate within their bylaws.

**VII. TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SELECTION OF THE PRINCIPAL, THE COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WHEN AND IF ASKED**

The Office of Catholic Schools may assist parishes in their search for a new principal as needed. The schools' office may serve as a screening agent and resource to the pastor and his local search committee. In a prayerful context, the search committee makes its consensus recommendation to the pastor. It is the pastor, however, who ultimately hires and serves as direct supervisor of the school principal.

## COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP

### ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Councils vary in size and in method of selection. Ordinarily, councils have from seven to nine elected/appointed members serving three-year staggered terms. Councils should select officers from the membership, i.e., a chair, vice-chair, and secretary. The pastor and the principal serve as **ex officio** members. A teacher may be asked to serve on the council in an advisory capacity. In determining membership eligibility, the following factors should be considered:

- Membership in the parish or a parent of a child attending the school;
- Eighteen years of age or older;
- Genuine interest in Catholic school education;
- Ability to work effectively with others;
- Willingness to maintain high levels of integrity and confidentiality;
- Willingness to support diocesan/parish/school philosophy and mission;
- Be a credible witness of the Catholic faith to the school and beyond;
- Not be a salaried employee of the particular parish or school.

### MEMBERSHIP QUALIFICATIONS

Parish communities, in preparing for school advisory council elections, should encourage individuals who have special skills or expertise (e.g., legal, financial, public relations, etc.) to present themselves as candidates for council membership. The contribution such people make benefits the entire parish/school community. When certain areas of expertise are not possessed by elected council members, efforts should be made to recruit such people to serve on ad hoc committees.

The following are examples of desirable qualifications for those who might serve on Catholic school advisory councils:

- A willingness to give the time to serve conscientiously;
- Ability to be objective and free of personal self-interest;
- Ability to influence public opinion favorably in areas of importance to the school;
- A willingness to learn while serving as a council member;
- A demonstrated competence in her/his chosen field;
- A willingness to support council decisions even if s/he does not fully agree;
- A willingness to accept working within a consultative and consensus council model.

## **COUNCIL RELATIONSHIPS**

### **THE PASTOR AS COUNCIL MEMBER**

The pastor's role on the local school council is somewhat different from the one he plays relative to the parish council. In the latter he sits in collegial assembly with the council which is a sort of "extension" of himself as spiritual and visioning leader. With his councilors, he dialogues about all the needs of the parish faith community and fashions with them decisions and solutions for responding to those needs. In the school advisory council, he shares his spiritual and managerial gifts with the council members. He shares the vision of Catholic education that is fashioned by the parish pastoral council and the parish education commission. He is, in effect, the council's spiritual leader, its pastoral manager, yet also a fellow council member.

The pastor, as spiritual leader, shares his pastoral vision and offers other spiritual insights that will enrich and improve the quality of the council's policy making. His most important contribution will more than likely be in the area of religious education, worship and sacramental preparation. As pastoral manager, the pastor furnishes the council with vital information, which only he possesses, about income, expenditures, etc. As a full member of the council, the pastor is aware that all local policies must be ratified by him before they can be implemented. Therefore, he participates in policy discussion sharing his insights, expertise and recommendations.

The pastor, as canonical administrator, hires the principal according to diocesan processes and procedures. As the hiring agent, he annually assesses the principal's performance using diocesan instruments.

The pastor's leadership is a dynamic force in the creation and growth of the Christian educational community. One important fact to emphasize with regard to the pastor-council relationship is that pastors need not bear the burden of educational decision-making alone. Lay people are willing and able to use their talents and gifts in participating in the educational ministry of the Church. Indeed, the creation of consultative bodies in the local Church, such as the school advisory council, provides the pastor with needed support and provides the laity a sense of partnership in the enterprise.

### **THE PRINCIPAL AND THE COUNCIL**

The principal is the educational leader and executive officer of the school. As such, s/he provides educational direction to the council. S/he is the link between the council and the school with its faculty, students, and parents. The principal is the inspiring force which helps the council to lift itself above budget and finances and see its role in the educational mission of the Church. Furthermore, the principal serves as a liaison for the council to the parish education commission.

The agenda for council meetings is a way in which the principal can provide solid training and guidance for the council by helping to see that it is drawn up with care and that it distinguishes carefully between the various types of agenda items that can be included. It is crucial that the principal constructs the agenda carefully so that all can tell the difference among items that are meant to be information, discussion, advice, or action.

The principal keeps the council informed about the operation of the school and about diocesan processes and procedures. S/he prepares and submits policy recommendations and is responsible for policy implementation after ratification by the pastor.

Annually, council members give feedback to the principal; this feedback, along with the pastor's appraisal and teacher feedback, becomes an important part of the principal's effort to set personal and professional goals for herself/himself as a Catholic educational leader. A copy of these documents is forwarded to the Office of Catholic Schools. The feedback/appraisal instruments are available from the Office of Catholic Schools.

### **EXPECTATIONS: PRINCIPAL OF COUNCIL / COUNCIL OF PRINCIPAL**

A council should expect much from its principal, should see the principal as the educational expert, and should utilize that expertise to the maximum extent possible for the good of the entire school community. By the same token, however, the principal as a professional has a right to expect much from the council. Each should have a complete understanding of what the other's expectations are.

#### **The principal should assume that the council will:**

- Acknowledge that the school is a significant expression of the teaching mission of the Church and function within its structure;
- Model faith community in the spirit of interdependence with the pastor and principal;
- Act in an ethical and responsible manner; at all times observe confidentiality;
- Acknowledge that the administration of the school is the principal's responsibility and support her/his efforts;
- Furnish objective counsel and advice;
- Work collaboratively to create an established set of policies to guide the principal in performing her/his role;
- Appraise the principal's implementation of policy fairly and on a regular basis in accordance with diocesan guidelines;
- Adhere to diocesan policy and develop local policies which will enable the school to reach its goals;
- Follow agendas or expected procedures in council meetings so that the principal can be adequately prepared to respond to questions, issues, etc.
- Be fully and carefully prepared for each meeting by doing the required readings and completing necessary tasks for committee work and reports;

- Be loyal to the decisions the council reached through consensus even if personally opposed to the final recommendations and decision;
- Review and update the local constitution and bylaws when necessary;
- Participate in ongoing board in-service when provided at the diocesan or local level;
- Collaborate in the school's planning endeavors;
- Pray often for and with other members of the council, the Catholic school, and the parish community it serves.

The Council should be able to assume that the principal as chief executive officer of the school will:

- Prepare the council meeting agenda (collaboratively with the council officers) to keep meetings to a reasonable length;
- Treat all council members alike and not show preference to individual members;
- Strictly enforce or implement the policies set by the council and ratified by the pastor;
- Keep the membership informed on council matters;
- Avoid unexpected issues, topics, and areas of action at council meetings so the council can have adequate time to respond after being fully advised of all of the facts;
- Support council decisions;
- Keep the council advised of changes, innovations, and trends in education that are applicable to the school;
- Operate the school in a fiscally sound and responsible manner;
- Provide leadership in the implementation of the school's long and short range planning.

## **THE COUNCIL AND THE FACULTY**

It is important to the success of a school that the council members and its professional staff members have a healthy relationship. This is so because both groups have the best interests of the school and its programs at heart although their functions differ. To ensure harmonious relations with the faculty, the council should provide for communication with teachers (and staffs) through the principal, and for occasional socializing which will celebrate and confirm council-teacher harmony

As formal action, the council should authorize effective and appropriate channels and vehicles through which teachers can communicate with policy makers concerning policy issues. For instance, during the "first reading" period of a proposed policy, the council might ask the teachers to forward, through the principal, their reactions and suggestions.

Council members must realize that, as individuals, they have no authority outside the meetings of the council and must conduct their relationships with staff members, the parish community, and all outsiders on the basis of this reality. For example, if a staff member has an alleged grievance and conveys it to a council member, the member may not undertake to pursue the matter on her/his own but, instead, should refer it to the appropriate party for disposition. Ultimately, the pastor and principal make all personnel decisions.

## **THE COUNCIL AND THE COMMUNITY**

The local school council is in a unique position in relation to the school. It not only knows the school, i.e., its goals, programs, strengths, weaknesses, successes, failures, dreams and struggles, but it also knows and is part of the thinking of the laity who are called upon to support the school. This places the advisory council in a unique position to “sell” the school, to be the public relations arm of the school, and to market the product of Catholic education.

One of the standing committees of every local school council should be a public relations committee. It would be the task of this committee to publicize both the workings of the council and the programs of the school. Working with the principal, the public relations committee would make the maximum use of all media resources available. Within the parish itself, the Sunday Bulletin is a resource that should be used. In addition, the local council might choose to publish its own newsletter. Also, local neighborhood newspapers are often effective sources of publicity.

The specific tasks for a school public relations committee could include the following:

- Maintain continuous communications with parish organizations and the total parish community, most especially the parish council and the parish education commission;
- Stimulate public interest in the school;
- Produce written materials for dissemination to news media, governmental bodies, and local groups;
- Produce audio-visual materials to tell the school story;
- Justify the need for greater financial support for the school;
- Promote such legislation that will benefit the school by active involvement with local and state legislators.

## THE COUNCIL MEETING

### PURPOSE OF MEETINGS

The parish places its educational aspirations in the hands of the council and, in so doing, gives the council the opportunity to assist in shaping the school's future. The council in its meetings concentrates on its basic functions which are:

- To implement at the local level the objectives and policies of the diocesan Office of Catholic Schools;
- To plan, implement, and evaluate its committee charges;
- To perform officially the specific actions required of the local council by its constitution;
- To recommend policies affecting the school that will guide the principal and staff (after pastor ratification);
- To review the principal's implementation of school policies;
- To evaluate the effect of the school's policies on the total educational program.

### PREPARING THE AGENDA

Developing the agenda is a very important part of the preparation process since the agenda identifies the issues to be dealt with at the meeting and provides for orderly discussion.

The task of preparing the agenda ordinarily belongs to the chair of the council in conjunction with the pastor and principal. The process should, of course, include an orderly way for council members or others to submit suggestions, for inappropriate items to be disallowed, etc.

Agenda and other written materials that will assist in discussion should be mailed sufficiently in advance of the meeting to allow council members to come prepared. A productive meeting within a specified time framework of perhaps one-and-a-half to two hours will result.

### SUGGESTIONS FOR AN EVENLY-PACED AND PRODUCTIVE MEETING

The following are recommendations to move the meeting along in a timely fashion and accomplish its meeting goals.

- Start the meeting with prayer;
- Start on time, set the ending time, and abide by the time frame;
- Never discuss any subject not on the printed agenda;
- Do not listen to written materials read aloud - including minutes, correspondence, reports, etc.; these should be mailed and read in advance;

- Follow an agenda format in which all action items are separated from all information items;
- Place all action items after the information items on the agenda to allow adequate discussion of all those items;
- Place all delegations, committees, and individuals on the agenda prior to reports so as not to keep delegates present any longer than necessary;
- Ask the principal to send her/his written recommendations in advance on every action item;
- Ask the principal to express his/her recommendations in the form of proposals, worded as they will appear in the official minutes;
- Ask the principal to list briefly the reasonable alternatives to the recommendation and to give, when possible, the pros and cons for each;
- Ask the principal to design standard forms for recommending appointments, acting on bids, and all other routine actions so that many small decisions can be made in a single motion;
- At the end of the meeting, set the date, time and place for the next meeting and develop a preliminary agenda;
- Close the meeting with prayer and crisply end on a positive note.

### **RECOMMENDED AGENDA FORMAT AND TIME FRAMES**

- I. Call to Order and Opening Prayer (5 minutes)
- II. Information/Communications and Reports (30 minutes)
  - A. Routine matters
    1. Approval of Minutes
    2. Acceptance of Agenda
  - B. Official delegations
  - C. Non-staff communications and reports
  - D. Principal's report
  - E. Council members' reports
- III. Recommended Actions (45 minutes)
  - A. Old business
  - B. New business
- IV. Future Business/Events (10 minutes)
  - A. Meeting dates
  - B. Preview of topics for future agendas
  - C. General discussion to guide future recommendations
- V. Executive Session (if one is held)
- VI. Adjournment and closing Prayer (5 minutes)

The value of this meeting format can be seen in an analysis of each of the steps in the agenda.

### INFORMATION/COMMUNICATIONS/REPORTS

The first matters to be dealt with in this time frame are routine matters such as review of Minutes and Agenda items. Ordinarily, very little time needs be spent on these matters. General information sharing then begins. This is a varied selection of matters from several different sources. None of the subjects has reached the stage where the principal is ready to recommend definite action. They may be old or new topics. Often they will be matters of information requested by the council at some prior session. Just as often the subject may be new.

Information from official delegations should be first on the agenda because the council probably will not want to ask official visitors to wait too long for its attention. All other communications and reports which do not come from the school would follow delegations. Correspondence, printed reports from outside organizations, and written reports from parish committees or community groups appear on the agenda list at this point. Reports from standing committees – all such committees should exist and be operative – would appear here. The section held open for the principal is for the many “no action” matters s/he may present.

The next part of the “Information/Communications/Reports” section of the agenda gives council members an opportunity to ask questions of the principal concerning various matters. Such questions come from parishioners, from council members, from past agenda items, or from trains of thought started by the current agenda. The space is reserved both to make certain that individual council members have their chance to get answers and to prevent their side questions from popping up at odd moments during the meeting.

### RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

This time frame is often at the heart of the meeting because it deals only with action items. The fastest single way to clear away “conversation underbrush” at a council meeting is to draw a hard line between “action” and “no action” items. Almost everywhere there is a council which, after wrangling about something for half an hour, has finally turned to the principal to ask in exasperation, “What do you want us to do about this?” and has been told “Nothing, this is just for your information.” The proposed agenda faces this problem squarely, breaks sharply with existing patterns, and places all action items where they belong – together.

### FUTURE BUSINESS/EVENTS

Here the principal has an opportunity to give the council a preview of future agenda items, to give them time to think about the issues, to indicate what information they will

require, and to suggest the direction which the principal's recommendations should follow.

### EXECUTIVE SESSION

Should an issue arise which requires greater confidentiality, an executive session should be held at this time. It is a good idea to include the executive session on each agenda even though it would not be held each month. Executive session information must be held in strictest of confidence.

### MEETING MATERIALS

In order for council members to make sound decisions during the meetings, it is desirable to furnish them with background materials on each agenda item in advance of the meeting. This enables members to study the material at their leisure, call the principal for more information if needed in advance of the meeting, and be prepared to join in decision-making at the meeting with a minimum of discussion necessary.

Enclosures may be prepared by the principal or by council members who have information on agenda items. The materials should include:

1. The minutes of the last meeting
2. Date, time, location of meeting
3. The Agenda
4. Committee reports (when appropriate)
5. Financial report (quarterly)
6. Part of principal's report
7. Background materials for proposals or other agenda items.

## ANNUAL CALENDAR

There are certain items with which a council should be involved yearly, and there are logical times for that involvement. What follows is a suggested calendar of those events:

AUGUST	Goal setting Committee appointments In-Service for council members
SEPTEMBER	Introduction of new staff members Committee work
OCTOBER	Day of Formation
NOVEMBER	Long Range Plan review/update
DECEMBER	Enrollment Committee Report New programs/staffing projections presented
JANUARY	Council mid-year self evaluation Mid-Year financial review Budget preparation
FEBRUARY	Membership Committee meets
MARCH	Budget consultation Nomination process for new members begins
APRIL	Report on personnel needs Election of new members Budget – final approval
MAY	Council final self evaluation Election of officers Orientation of new members

Some of these events should take place at the regular council meeting. Others call for extra time and special or executive meetings. That is why it is so important to determine this kind of a calendar on a yearly basis. All members know, well in advance, what to expect in terms of time commitment when dates are set for the entire school year.

## CONSENSUS DECISION-MAKING

While council meetings proceed best when well-ordered, timed, and primed by a clearly defined agenda, it is important to note that the preferred model for council decision-making is that of “consensus building”. This model for decision-making reflects that of the parish council and, indeed, the spirit of collaboration that is inherent in the Church as the People of God. Consensus building does not slavishly adhere to vote taking and Robert’s Rules of Order. The following comments about the consensus decision-making model are taken from the NCEA School Board Study Programs: Board Member’s Manual Part I.

Consensus decision-making is the model in which decisions are made by the general consent of the group rather than by the majority rule used in parliamentary procedure. It is not difficult to make consensus work with relatively small and friendly groups.

In consensus decision-making, a good decision is one which each member of the group understands and recognizes as the best that can be made, given the divergent views of the members. It is a decision which is unlikely to please everyone totally, but one which each member of the group can support.

The group still begins with a recommendation, but this recommendation serves as a proposal rather than a motion. Then, in the discussion that follows, council members work toward a decision which the whole group –not merely a majority of the group – can endorse.

Each member has some responsibility to help the chair find an acceptable decision. As the discussion goes along, the chair alters the proposal to incorporate suggestions which appear to bring the group closer together. This process replaces voting on amendments, the method followed in parliamentary procedure for altering a motion.

Instead of the “order” by Robert’s Rules, charity, courtesy, and common sense keep the group working in an efficient manner. The chair sees that members do not all speak at once or break into private conversation. When particularly difficult issues are being addressed by the council, it would be beneficial to interrupt the discussion for some quiet reflection and prayer before a final consensus is reached.

When the discussion seems to reach a conclusion, the chair says. “Is it everyone’s judgement that, given the various concerns and suggestions we have heard, our decision should be (such and such)?” There may still be hold-outs, and if time has run out for that item, or if additional efforts have been fruitless, then the chairperson must say, “We have not been able to reach a consensus, so reluctantly, we will have to vote and the majority will rule.” This, however, is to be done only after all efforts to reach consensus have been made.

In short, the following principles would apply to the consensus decision-making model:

- Each member – not just the chair – is responsible for trying to achieve an acceptable decision;
- The judgments and feelings of each member are heard and understood by the group to the extent that it is practical;
- New approaches or accommodations are reflected upon to address concerns as they arise;
- Formal motions and votes are not used in order to reach a decision;
- As the group moves toward consensus, the chairperson may ask for an informal vote simply as a way of testing the group’s support for the position which appears to be emerging;
- Each member is willing to accept a decision which, while not his/her first choice, seems to be the best decision the group can make after weighing all concerns;
- The chair determines whether to continue the discussion at another meeting (perhaps with additional information and study) or whether to bring the matter to a regular parliamentary vote if no consensus decision can be reached.

### **STANDING COMMITTEES OF THE ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Because of the volume of work of the school advisory council, it would be most appropriate for the council to create standing committees to research and make preliminary proposals for policy recommendations. At a minimum, each school advisory council should have the following standing committees in operation:

- Religious Education Committee – this committee operates, in a very fundamental sense at the heart of the mission of the Catholic school, because it monitors the religious education program of the school. It is most appropriate for the pastor to be an integral, contributing member of this committee since he is ultimately responsible for the religious education of the members of the entire parish including the school children.
- Academic Committee – this committee may monitor success in meeting the high academic standards that are a hallmark of Catholic schools. Furthermore, this committee may work with the principal to investigate and recommend programs that would innovatively enhance the scholastic life of the school.
- Finance Committee – this committee assists the pastor and principal in ensuring the fiscal responsibility of the school. This committee should enjoy clear lines of communication with the parish finance committee.
- Development Committee – this committee seeks ways to provide for public relations, recruitment of students, and long term endowments (according to the guidelines of the diocesan Endowment Fund protocol). A previous section of this

document highlighted both the importance of the role of the school advisory council in development efforts and provided tips for development and public relations activities.

- Membership Committee – this committee is concerned with membership needs and the on-going training and development of the council including new member orientation and in-service for all council members.

From time to time and when appropriate, the council may ask other interested parties to serve on these standing committees in order to expand the knowledge base of these committees.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These guidelines rely greatly on the thoughts and, in some cases, words of the following resources:

Board Member Notebook and Resource Materials printed by the Archdiocese of Chicago

Building Better Boards by Lourdes Sheehan, R.S.M. Ed.D, and NCEA Publication

School Board Study Programs an NCEA Publication

A Handbook for Board Members of Catholic Schools printed by the Diocese of Joliet, Illinois

Echo the Promise: Board of Education Monthly Meetings, printed by the Diocese of Green Bay

APPENDIX A

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS AND  
CATHOLIC SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCILS

A public school board is constituted as regulatory, i.e., one which enacts or uses existing rules and regulations to govern the operation of its institution. This type of organization differs significantly from the consultative nature of the advisory council of the Catholic school.

**PUBLIC SCHOOL COUNCIL**

**CATHOLIC SCHOOL COUNCIL**

**Objective:**

**Objective:**

Provide free education to all

Provide Catholic education to those who choose it

**Purpose:**

**Purpose:**

Responsibility for the total assets of the school district within the legal limits

Delegated role with limited responsibilities: no transfer of bishop's/pastor's authority to the council

**Orientation**

**Orientation**

Civic, societal

The Catholic Church

**Type:**

**Type:**

Regulatory

Consultative

**Entity:**

**Entity:**

Legal

Non-legal

**Establishment:**

**Establishment:**

By law

By Episcopal mandate or by religious congregation

**Policy:**

Develop policies that promote the education of youth so that they become good, productive citizens

**Membership:**

Elected at-large at general municipal elections  
Residency within district lines  
“Voice of the civic community”  
voter responsibility  
Compensation and expenses are provided by law

**Leadership Skills:**

Task, maintenance, and skills to promote positive decision-making

**Skills of members needed for the State to achieve its responsibilities**

Serve objectively so that the common good can be achieved

**Administrative Officer:**

One superintendent in charge of district personnel

**Impact:**

Own locally

**Policy**

Develop policies that embody Gospel values and have the ultimate effect of Christian formation and education of youth

**Membership:**

Elected at-large by parish – “Voice of Catholic community” or appointed in order to secure expertise  
Based on Baptismal call  
Contributed services are an assumption

**Leadership Skills:**

Task, maintenance, and skills to promote positive decision-making

**Skills of members needed for the Church to achieve its mission:**

Be able to pray formally, informally, alone and with others

Learn to discern the “voice” of the Spirit in deliberations

**Administrative Officer:**

One principal in charge of one unit: a school, or a consolidation

**Impact:**

The entire Church

## APPENDIX B

### THE GOOD ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER

Advisory Councils are only as effective and productive as the people who serve on them. Labeling some members as “good” and others as “bad” is common. Seldom, however, does one hear of a clear definition of what constitutes a “good” council member. Therefore, the following guidelines are offered:

#### A GOOD COUNCIL MEMBER...

is technically a council member only when the school advisory council is in session. No one person, unless authorized, should presume to speak on behalf of the advisory council.

avoids decisions which are administrative in nature, recognizing these to be the responsibility of the principal.

is well acquainted with diocesan and local school policies, works at all times for what is in the best interest of the students.

is flexible and realizes that there are times when changes must be made, when tradition cannot be honored, and when pressure must be ignored.

remembers that council deliberations may require confidentiality.

is interested in obtaining facts, but remembers that the principal has the responsibility to operate the school rather than having to spend full time making reports to the council or to individual members.

knows that the reputation of the entire school is reflected in her/his behaviors and attitude.

is a good listener at council meetings, on the street corner, in the church, but never commits himself/herself, the council, the principal, or the pastor.

insists that all policies be set forth in writing and that they be periodically evaluated.

is able to separate fact from fiction, rumor from reality.

supports the principal in her/his administration of the school.

understands the need for team work and consensus-building among council, principal, and pastor and, as a result, supports decisions when they are made.

Taken from Handbook, Joliet

APPENDIX C

COUNCIL MEMBER RESPONSIBILITIES

**As a member of the School Advisory Council,**

**I UNDERSTAND** that I am committing myself to:

Living in accord with the Gospel values of Jesus Christ,

Giving the spiritual and corporal works of mercy a special place in my life,

Sharing in the celebration of Sunday Mass at this parish whenever I am in town, and

Budgeting weekly financial support of the parish in accord with my means.

**I AM**

Ready to give the necessary time, thought, and study to the educational and catechetical efforts of this parish,

Willing to work in a spirit of harmony and cooperation,

Committed to and accountable for the decisions of this council,

Able to listen and open to change.

**I AGREE**

That all the information and ideas shared during the Executive Sessions of the Council are confidential in nature and are not to be shared with anyone outside of the meeting, and

That if I am approached with a problem which is of an administrative nature I will refer it to the proper person, rather than attempt to perform a function that belongs somewhere else.

As a sign of my commitment to these responsibilities, I agree that if I am unable to live up to these commitments, I should be disqualified as a member and offer my resignation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Taken from Echo the Promise, Green