

Covenantal Succession . . .

Beza; he helped to refine, develop and maximize Beza's already substantial gifts. His greatest desire was that Beza's legacy might one day even outstrip his own.

In our still youthful movement of classical and Christian schools, we have been blessed with a goodly number of dynamic founders. And we are just now coming to the time when we will have to survive the passing of these leaders from the scene. How we invest, how we prepare and how we build consensus now will surely do much to determine what our long-term impact in this poor, fallen world will be.

Common Questions About School Boards

by Patch Blakey, Ron Lee, Don Post and Douglas Wilson

1. How much daily input should a board have on the routine operation of the school?

In general, the board may have input on the routine operation of the school, but not daily input. The input should be during a duly called meeting of the board with the headmaster or the person in charge of the daily running of the school. The board should have no authority except when it sits to conduct business, or in that rare time when they appoint a commission of the board to accomplish some particular task. Individual board members should have no independent authority unless it has been specifically delegated to them by a vote of the board for a particular task. (D. Post)

2. What pitfalls should a start-up school avoid in the selection of its first board?

It is tempting to select individuals who are influential in the local community. Individuals may possess skills that are necessary for your success, but if they are not philosophically aligned with the classical and Christian vision of your school, you must pass them by. It would be better to contract for their services. It is more important that the board consist of individuals who have a common mission and passion for the school than to try to appease appearances. (R. Lee)

3. What considerations should the school board give to selecting replacement board members for those who have resigned? (P. Blakey)

The school board should have a process established that enables it to evaluate potential board

members on a number of issues before they are even nominated as a candidate. At a minimum, the board should verify that each of the potential candidates are members of a Christ-centered, Bible-believing church in the community; they are in agreement with the school's statement of faith; their practice of life is consistent with their profession of faith; they are knowledgeable of and have demonstrated commitment to the classical Christian methodology used at the school; they are in agreement with the school's written philosophical positions; and that they have expertise which is of value to the school.

4. What does an administrator do if the school board is not complying with the bylaws and policies it has established for the operation of the school?

There are two ways to go. If the violations are egregious, and the issues involved are important, then the administrator should formally request the board correct the deficiency. If they refuse to do so, then the administrator should appeal to the entity that the board is accountable to. If there are no orderly procedures in place for making such an appeal, he should submit his resignation.

If the violations are not egregious, then the administrator should propose to the board that they change the bylaws and policies in order to conform to the actual practices of the board and school. (D. Wilson)

5. What is the role of the board in helping to raise funds for the school?

In the early stage of the school,

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board members may need to be the chief fundraisers. Fundraising may not be its strength, yet the board is responsible for the school's financial stability. Hiring a professional or soliciting the services of a committed parent who has excellent social acumen might be an important step in expanding fundraising potential. (R. Lee)

6. To whom is the board accountable?

The board is accountable to whatever entity its formal constitutional arrangements specify. Usually, this will be to a church or church board, or to a parents' association of some kind. If that accountability is not specified, then the board is not really accountable to anyone, and such lack of specificity is not wise. In addition, the board is accountable to God to submit to whatever governmental accountability has been established. (D. Wilson)

7. Can a board be involved too little in the operation of the school?

This question depends on the definition of "be involved." If "be involved" is defined by being present on a regular basis to give input on the routine operation of the school, then the answer is no (see #1 above). If "be involved" means being present to observe the running of the school and having regular discussions with the staff to have a better idea of the operation of the school, then the answer is yes. If it means the board member is not involved as a parent or does not keep up with his responsibilities as a board member, then the answer is yes. The distinction should be understood between policies and

procedures. The board passes policies which give direction to the headmaster. The headmaster writes procedures which implement those policies. The board does not need to be involved in writing the procedures. Board members should be involved in school life because it is their calling to be responsible for the education of their own children, as well as those in the entire school. (D. Post)

8. Should the school administrator be a voting member of the school board? Why or why not?

No. The school administrator is an employee of the board. Even though the administrator has the direct pulse of the school and can provide the most realistic insight into the daily occurrences at school, his conflict of interest is too great to be an effective board member. The vast majority of board decisions deal directly with what he is expected to enforce. The administrator would have to recuse himself from the majority of decisions, essentially nullifying the primary board member responsibility of voting. In contrast, the administrator should be the most influential person to the board. He can lobby for his preferences, yet the administrator only reports to the board. This way, the board can assure the parents that it is in control and is maintaining proper checks and balances. (R. Lee)

9. Typically, should the school administrator be included in the meetings of the school board? Under what circumstances should the administrator be excluded?

Typically, yes, he should be included. The administrator is the person who represents the

school to the board, and the board to the school. In order to do this effectively, he has to have good communication with both. The administrator is the telephone wire between the board and the school. Exceptions would be during certain aspects of the board's evaluation of the administrator, or any circumstances when there would be an apparent conflict of interest (e.g., a decision being made concerning academic probation for the administrator's son). (D. Wilson)

10. How essential is a board of directors to the successful operation of a school? (P. Blakey)

The board acts as the "head and heart" of the school. It initiates the bylaws which ultimately define the authority and limits of the board, as well as the mission of the school. Certainly one person could do this on his own. However, Proverbs indicates that there is wisdom and safety in a multitude of counselors (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22; 24:6). In addition, God is trinitarian, or community oriented, with each member of the Godhead selflessly serving the others. The board needs to form itself consistently with the pattern given in Scripture and expect to derive the benefits that the Lord promises.

11. How responsible is a board of directors for the failure of a school?

I believe ultimately it is the board of directors' responsibility for the failure of a school. It should be receiving the necessary input (finances, development director's report, headmaster's report, etc.) and asking the necessary questions in order to have a clear picture of the state of the school. It should take the necessary steps to

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make adjustments to policies and personnel when the school is being steered in the wrong direction or is going through a major storm. The board has fiduciary responsibilities in both giving of its own resources and seeking other sources of income to support the school. The most important aspect is for the board of directors to be sure that neither it nor the school is experiencing mission drift. This appears to be the most common problem, whether it is departure from the mission or failure to understand and properly implement the mission. (D. Post)

12. How much authority for the operation of a school should be delegated to the administrator and how much should be retained by the school board? In what areas is this mandatory and in which is it simply preferential (for example: hiring, firing, student discipline, curriculum selection, establishing the daily routine).

All the day-to-day authority should be held by the administrator. That is what the administrator is for. The board should create policy which the administrator has to apply to particular situations. If something comes up for which there is no policy, the administrator makes a decision, and requests a new policy for next time, or he asks the board chair to convene a meeting to give him direction. In our experience at Logos, the administration screens teaching applicants, and the board interviews the finalists. The board hires, but the administrator has full authority to fire. The administration has full authority to discipline students, with the parents having recourse to appeal to the board if they so desire. The curriculum committee of

the board makes curriculum recommendations to the board, which the board approves, and the administration implements. The administrator prepares the budget, which the board approves, and the administrator executes. And so on. The board should be engaged enough to know what it is doing, and not so engaged that it micro-manages or undercuts the administrator. (D. Wilson)

13. What are noteworthy conflicts of interest that a school board should seek to avoid? How might a board manage these conflicts of interest if they currently exist?

One of the obvious conflicts is government intrusion into the operation of the school. The ACCS website provides a detailed position paper concerning that subject. (See ACCS > Position Papers > ACCS Statement on Vouchers.) Another common conflict is nepotism within the school staff and board. The most loyal and knowledgeable staff member could be the spouse of a board member or vice versa. The board could set a strict policy prohibiting such activity or establish enforceable checks and balances. Such policies might state that one spouse should not directly report to the other and the board member would recuse himself if a spouse's salary or personnel issue were to be discussed. Board members must annually disclose conflicts of interest to satisfy nonprofit tax laws. The school could use the questions from that document as a source for evaluating other business transactions in which the school is engaged. (R. Lee)

I am sure the list of noteworthy

conflicts of interest which can arise from our sinful human natures and from the desire to provide our children with the best possible education is endless. Remember that this endeavor is not primarily about you or your children but the glory of God and His Kingdom work. You avoid these conflicts by remaining daily in the Word and prayer, being involved in the covenantal life of a church, being accountable to others for your own character and manner of life, being quick to repent of your own sins, and seeking to make every board decision according to God's Word. When you find yourself in the middle of a conflict, be quick to repent of your part in it, do not try to hide it, seek the wisdom of others and do quickly what God's Word requires. Remember you are not the savior of your school but only Christ is. "Cast your cares on Him because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7). (D. Post)

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