

Micro-managing Boards: Where does the principal fit in?

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What led me to develop this workshop?

1. Board micro-management is problematic in some school communities.
2. Some principals are victims/casualties of board micro-management, and other principals actually contribute to it.
3. Sometimes board micro-management is unavoidable or even acceptable, however it must always be for a short season, and understood as a temporary leadership solution.
4. If not resolved, board micro-management will become very problematic:
 - frustrating principals and /or frustrating boards
 - leaving some board members the impression that micro- management is acceptable board behaviour
5. Board micro-management will hinder the future development and growth of the school.
6. There are specific actions /strategies that principals can take to move a board from micro-management to visionary, big-picture, policy setting leadership.

Observations in my work among school leaders (principals & school boards)

Problems occur when school boards ‘cross the line’ and start micro-managing things that a principal should be doing. Conversely, problems also occur when principals cross the line and start doing things that are ultimately the responsibility of the board.

Successful principals are those that are able to maintain healthy relationships with their school board and help it to understand what its role ought to be. Wise principals try to bring solutions not problems to their school board. They also don’t bring issues to the board that is ultimately the responsibility of the principal.

My observation is that when principals find themselves “in trouble” it usually has more to do with a poor relationship with their school board than it has to do with their relationship with staff, parent, and student community.

A successful principal helps shape the board, leading them to understand the role and responsibility the board should have. If school boards are doing what they should be doing, and principals are doing what they should be doing, then boards won’t have time to or a desire to micro-manage the affairs of the school.

Why does board micro-management occur?

1. It may be the current and long term culture / practice of the school community
2. Board members and / or principal fail to understand the unique role and responsibility of the school board and principal
3. Lack of clearly written guidelines outlining the responsibilities of the board and the principal
4. May be a newly established school where the school board may have been very 'hands-on' in order to get the school established and now has not relinquished appropriate responsibilities to the principal / administrative team.
5. Small school community with few volunteers, so board members end up acting more like volunteer parents and then don't change that distinction when they serve in a board capacity.
6. In the sudden absence of a principal (leave, resignation, termination), the board steps in and assumes certain administrative decision-making and responsibilities.
7. Principals bring certain administrative/ management issues (problems) to the board and invite /ask the board to deal with them.
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What can a principal do to help move a school board from a culture of micro-management to one of visionary, big-picture, policy setting leadership?

1. Don't bring 'problems' to the school board, bring 'solutions to problems' to the school board instead.

Examples:

2. Help school board members to understand what the role of the school board ought to be
 - a. Encourage a Board Retreat
 - Board Governance
 - Strategic Visioning / Planning
 - b. A series of focused discussions at board meetings:
 - Discussion Guide: *Seeing the Big Picture: Developing Visionary Board Leadership*
 - Mission & Vision
 - Governance
 - Administration
 - Educational Program
 - Financial Management
 - Parent-Partnerships & Community Relations

Seeing the Bigger Picture:

Developing Visionary Board Leadership



A discussion guide for Christian School Boards

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Introduction

Christian School Boards are being challenged to be trustees or guardians of the school's mission and vision. In doing so descriptors such as visionary, 'big-picture' thinking, policy setting, and strategic planning are used to describe school boards that understands their rightful leadership role and responsibility.

Regrettably, other Christian School Boards have fallen into a leadership mindset that believes good leadership means being the 'watchdog' for the school society, controlling decisions made by the school's administration, micromanaging the affairs of the school, and being involved in a very 'hands-on' way.

This discussion guide is designed to encourage School Boards to be more visionary, initiating insightful policy development and wise long term planning. Its goal is to move Boards from simply reacting to the myriad of issues that will inevitably arise each year to being proactive in focusing on those 'big picture issues instead.

Each School Board will find itself busy this year. Past practice suggests that most Board agendas and discussions will likely be too long for the meeting time allotted. The issue is not "Will our board agenda be full this year?" but rather "Who and what will fill our board agenda?" John Maxwell once made the observation that leaders tend to initiate and followers tend to react. Simply stated ...

Leaders

Initiate

Lead, pick up the phone and make contact

Spend time planning, anticipate problems

Invest time with people

Fill the calendar by priorities

Followers

React

Listen, wait for the phone to ring

Spend time living day-to-day, reacting to problems

Spend time with people

Fill the calendar by requests

Helen Keller was once asked, "What would be worse than being born blind?" She replied, "To have sight without vision". Sadly, too many people are placed into leadership positions without a vision for the people or organization that they will lead.

Boards that 'lead' rather than 'follow' will be those that initiate healthy discussion and debate around such topics as Mission and Vision; Governance; Administration; Educational Programs; Financial management; and Parent Partnerships and Community Relations. :

Consider prioritizing your Board meeting agenda this coming school year so that 30 minutes of regular Board agenda time is devoted to a focused discussion on one of the following topics. Encourage different board members or administrators to introduce the various topics and select the discussion question(s) that are most likely to invite reaction and discussion around the board table. Realize that 30 minutes will not be sufficient time to discuss any one of these topics. Therefore it may be appropriate to continue the discussion at a follow-up Board and/or Committee meeting.

This discussion guide is divided into 6 different topics. It may be wise for the entire board to spend a few minutes reviewing the various topics before deciding which topic(s) it wants to give particular attention towards. Some boards may want to spend considerably time focusing on one discussion topic, whereas other boards may want to cover a new topic each Board meeting. No one method is preferred over the other. Ultimately, the fact that your board dedicates focused time for a 'big picture' discussion is what's important.

#1. Mission & Vision

An excellent Christian School expresses and nurtures a clear mission and vision of Christian education that guides all of its decision making and activities.

Every Christian School should have these three documents:

A Statement of Faith that articulates the school's foundational principles. Sometimes this document and the school's philosophy and /or core values are one and the same document. The School's statement of faith / philosophy are generally articulated in the by-laws or Constitution; a Christian School must always be rooted in the Bible.

A Mission statement that is a short declaration of what the school says it is, or why it exists. This document is sometimes called a purpose statement, because a school's mission statement should explain the school's purpose for its existence.

A set of educational goals developed from the statement of faith, philosophy statement and/or the mission statement that directs the schools work.

Often an intermediate step between the mission statement and the goals is a vision statement that includes the schools vision for the future and its picture of what its graduates will look like.

God's Word	Statement of Faith	Philosophy Statement	Mission Statement	Vision Statement	Educational Goals
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(adapted from Vision to Action: CSI Accreditation Handbook page 38)

Discussion Questions

1. *An excellent Christian School expresses and nurtures a clear mission and vision of Christian education that guides all of its decision making and activities.* Does this statement describe our school?

2. Does our school have a written philosophy statement or statement of faith that is founded upon the Word of God and clearly articulates the school's beliefs regarding Christian education?

3. Does our school have a graduate profile which clearly describes what our school hopes its program will accomplish in the lives of its graduates? What should the graduate profile say?

4. Does our school have a strategic plan to implement the vision and goals that were developed jointly by board, committees, staff and community?

5. Does our board, committees, administration and staff take time to understand and develop the vision and practice of Christian education?

6. How will our school ensure that new parents will be just as committed to Christian education in 5 years as current members of your board? (note: This is an important question as many of these parents will be on your board and /or committees in 5 years)

7. Does our board require its employees/ board and committee members to sign a “community standard” that is reflective of the school’s mission and vision?

8. Do our teachers foster the growth of a Biblical worldview and the implications for Christian education among themselves?

9. Is the Christian character of the school evident in visual displays, devotions, and behavior of students and teachers?

10. Is the Christian character of the school evident in the policies, programs, and teaching and learning that takes place?

11. Do our school’s promotional brochures and admissions package present the school and its mission and vision effectively and attractively?

#2. Governance

An excellent Christian school is owned and operated by an “Authority” (School Society, Church Board, etc.) which is structured according to a well-defined set of standards as expressed in the Constitution, Bylaws and Policies. These standards appropriate ethical norms in the procedures adopted to implement policies of the board and society.

Discussion Questions:

1. Does our Society’s Constitution and By-laws articulate a clear mandate to a governing body to hold the school in trust for both God and the community?
2. Has our Constitution and By-laws been reviewed within the past seven years? What changes would we likely make if we were to revise it this year?
3. Does each Board member have a handbook containing relevant information for responsible governance of the school; outlining such things as defined roles and responsibilities for Board and Committee members, clear Committee mandates, and current board policies and procedures?
4. Do our Board and committees manage their functions effectively and efficiently evidenced by the fact that each Board and Committee member receives a written set of minutes and agenda with supporting documents in advance of meetings?
5. Are current policies in print and used effectively for membership; student admission; and personnel? Do these board policies and activities reflect the goals and principles of the society?
6. Does our Board have a well-defined long-range development plan for the school?
7. Does our board regularly evaluate the performance of the principal / administrative team on the basis of established criteria and procedures?.

8. Does our Board take advantage of board training workshops offered by SCSBC to further equip us in our leadership task?

9. Is there evidence of a sense of harmony among board, committees, administration, parents, and teachers?

10. Does our Board have confidence in its committees and generally accept their recommendations?

#3. Administration

An excellent Christian school is led by a principal who gives competent administrative and instructional leadership.

The School's principal is responsible to the governing "Authority" for implementing the school's mission, vision and policies. The entire administrative team should promote a learning community of believers striving for excellence to bring glory to God. This learning community should also prepare children and young people for servant hood to others and discipleship of Jesus Christ. The professional staff, led by the principal, works diligently to ensure that the school's educational programs and practices meet the mission and identified goals

(adapted from Vision to Action: CSI Accreditation Handbook page 50)

Discussion Questions:

1. Is our principal's task defined in a clear job description and regularly reviewed in consultation with the board?

2. Is our principal / administrative team's work evaluated directly by the Board and through the services of an external School Review Team?

3. Has an Assistant Principal (Administrative Team) been appointed and are they responsible for specific administrative tasks?

4. Are school policies, procedures, and information compiled in handbooks for parents and teachers?

5. Does our principal have the support of board, parents, and teachers?

6. Does our principal demonstrates administrative leadership in:
 - organization and management of all resources?
 - delegation of tasks?
 - involvement of staff in decision making?
 - long-range planning?

7. Does our principal demonstrates educational leadership in:
 - curriculum implementation and renewal?
 - supervision and development of teachers?
 - monitoring of student achievement?
 - awareness of current trends and issues in education?
 - both short and long range strategic planning?

8. Does our principal / administrative team have adequate administrative time?

9. Is our principal supported with adequate secretarial time, evidenced by excellent office management, and efficient administrative record keeping, filing and procedures?

10. Does our principal / administrative team follow a program for personal professional development? (CPABC Certification) Are they actively involved in professional organizations?

#4. Educational Program

An excellent Christian school:

- ***has a biblically-based educational program that serves student interests, needs and abilities and meets provincial requirements.***
- ***uses a broad range of instructional methods to serve student interests, needs, and abilities.***
- ***is a personal and professional learning community with a clear vision, strong curriculum, child-oriented pedagogy, and valuable assessment.***

A Christian school provides curriculum that equips students to live for their Creator, Redeemer, and Lord. The school structures its curriculum in recognition of, and commitment to Christ, the Lord of all creation, and to reveal God's claim on each of our lives.

Curriculum in a Christian school proclaims God's dynamic design for the universe, revealing life's inherent interrelatedness. The curriculum also shows how sin wreaks havoc and brings life-damaging effects. At the same time, the curriculum demonstrates the redemptive powers of Jesus Christ and our human ministry of reconciliation and restoration.

Christian schools strive to develop a biblically-based curriculum in which teachers and students wrestle together to understand better how to live rooted in Christ and dedicated to teaching and learning in his power and strength.

Discussion Questions:

1. Is a biblical worldview clearly evident in the school's curriculum handbook and course outlines?
2. Is a detailed and current curriculum outline available for each grade level or course?
3. Does our school engage in program reviews that involve principal, teachers, students, parents, and the education committee on an annual basis?

4. Does our school's pedagogy incorporate a dynamic blend of purpose, content, skills, and assessment that serves the diversity of students' interests, needs, and abilities?

5. Do our teachers engage in formative assessment using the dimensions of teaching on an annual basis and school leaders exercise summative evaluations as per Board policy?

6. Does the school assess achievement in ways that foster student learning and improve teaching?

7. Does our school communicate with parents regularly about the progress of their children through reports and conferences?

8. Does our school use external assessments such as Foundation Skills Assessments and Graduation Program Examinations to strengthen specific programs and interpret results in the context of its school mission?

9. Does our school actively gather feedback regarding aspects of its educational program from students, parents, and occasionally from the broader community?

10. Does our school's educational program meet or exceed provincial requirements?

#5. Financial Management

An excellent Christian school is adequately supported with financial resources and responsible management.

Proper financial management enables the school “Authority” to provide the necessary resources to meet the school’s mission and for the staff to teach God’s children well. The Governing Board, in keeping with the spirit of God’s Word, must make certain that the staff is adequately paid, that the resources are available for the teaching staff to provide a quality Christian education, and that bills are paid in a timely manner. The Board must ensure that the school is operated efficiently, that tuition remains affordable, and that members who cannot afford the full cost of a Christian education for their children are assisted.

Boards and Administrators must ensure that the school meets their objectives of:

- sound financial stewardship;
- effective fundraising;
- comprehensive strategic planning;
- asset protection;
- compliance with legislation; and
- professional approach to accountability and transparency.

Adapted from SCSBC Administrative Handbook p. F1 and CSI Vision to Action Accreditation Handbook p. 43

Discussion Questions:

1. Does our school have a detailed budget and financial statements that are available and audited according to standard practice?

2. Does our school have clearly defined policies and procedures for income and invoice processing?

3. Has our board adopted a contract and benefit package that is fair and equitable for all its employees?

4. Is our school’s per-student cost of education (outside of transportation) similar to other SCSBC schools?

5. Does an itemized education budget meet our school needs?

6. Is adequate insurance and liability coverage provided for buildings, content, personnel, students, and transportation? What is 'adequate'?

7. Does our school operate with a balanced budget of income and expenses?

8. Is appropriate financial support available and distributed for parents who cannot meet tuition requirements?

9. Does our society meet the planned repayment schedule of its debts? Do we have a long term financial plan?

10. Does our school have an effective development program that recruits appropriate students and raises needed funds to secure both short term and long term needs? Does our school utilize appropriate financial tools such as planned giving, endowments, foundations, etc?

#6. Parent Partnerships & Community Relations

An excellent Christian school maintains contact with the parents and the supporting community.

Parents are primarily responsible before God for their children's education. The school must view it as a sacred trust that parents place their children's minds, hearts, and bodies in the school's care for six or more hours a day. The school must keep the lines of communication open between the school and the home. The school must realize its responsibility to parents, listen to them, and establish a partnership with them in the education of their children..

The school Board, administration, and staff continually articulates clarifies and promotes the school's mission and communicates the mission to the community to ensure that the school will be well-equipped to serve future generations. Telling the story of Christian education to groups within the school family (parents, grandparents, staff members, students, alumni, and members of supporting churches) and groups outside the school family (members from other church fellowships, businesses, and the general community) promote the school's mission and encourages others to join in obedience to God to provide Christian education alternatives in their community.

(Adapted from CSI Vision to Action Accreditation Handbook p. 45-46)

Discussion Questions:

1. Does our board, administration, and staff communicate regularly with the various educational partners and stakeholders and respond promptly to concerns that are raised?
2. Is the membership of our School Society interested and involved in the affairs of the school?
3. Does our school communicate frequently and effectively with parents via conferences, phone calls, emails and newsletters?
4. Are our parents interested and involved in the affairs of the school?
5. Is there an active forum for interaction between parents and teachers?

6. Are expectations of our principal and staff regarding community relations clearly defined?

7. Does our principal and staff have satisfactory contact with the supporting community?

8. Does our school have a positive reputation in our local community?

9. Does our board have a well-defined and active program of public relations and promotion?

10. Does our school invite and encourage parents to volunteer at school, assist with student learning at home, and provide opportunities for parents to participate in school decision-making and operations?

11. Is our school actively involved in the community through student service learning, teacher engagement and parent participation?

Conclusion:

Boards that have a clear vision for their task keep the “big-picture” board responsibilities in mind. Only then will board discussions move beyond mere reaction to micro-management detail and initiate critical direction-setting policies that will provide healthy leadership for your school.

Board Training and Governance Workshops

BOARD LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE - "Leadership for Christian Schools" This is a one-day training session with several workshop "tracks" to meet the needs of the various board, committee and administrative team members who will be attending. Usually scheduled for the first Saturday in November, this conference provides school leaders with the opportunity to meet with specialists and consultants, and to network with colleagues in the greater Christian school community. [Details are posted on the SCSBC website](#) as they become available; information and registration materials are mailed to schools at the end of August.

Additionally, the Christian Principals Association of BC offers a retreat in the fall and a conference in the spring every year. These are listed on the SCSBC website as details become available.

WORKSHOPS AND INSERVICE SESSIONS - These sessions are offered regularly and may also be arranged upon request either for individual school communities or combined groups. Topics can be tailored to fit your community's needs.

Effective Board and Committee Leadership – 2½ hour interactive governance workshop for School Board members, Committee Chairs, and Administrative teams.

Principal Evaluations and the Role of the School Board- 1½ hour workshop that examines SCSBC External School Review process and focuses particularly on the evaluation of school administrative teams.

Partnering with Parents: What does this mean for Boards, Administrators and Teachers? 1½ - 2 hour workshop that explores various issues in the Parent-Partnership relationship and focuses on practical ways to nurture and strengthen this key relationship.

Re-examining Admission Policies: Open, Closed or Invitational? 1½ - 2 hour workshop that explores the issues and implications of changing your school admission policies. This workshop can be adapted for a general workshop suitable for a School Society AGM or general parent meeting.

Working with Difficult Parents 1 ½ - 2 hour workshop that explores strategies for how Board and Administrative teams can work with "difficult parents".

Strategic Visioning Retreat- Typically a 1-1 ½ day board/staff/community retreat designed to assist a school community in the development of a long term strategic plan.