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# ONcall

ready-to-use NEWS

## Policy refresher for school boards

Whether you are a new or experienced board member, everyone needs a refresher on board policy. Why? The board's primary function is to set policy that administrators put into action. Successful board members understand the importance of developing policy to guide the district, and they involve the community in the policy-making process.

### What is policy?

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) defines policy as “statements that set forth the purpose and prescribe in general terms the organization and program of a school system. They create a framework within which the superintendent and his/her staff can discharge their assigned duties with positive direction.”

Policy is the what, the why and the how — it tells what a board wants to happen and sometimes includes why it should happen and how it should be enforced.

### Why is policy needed?

In addition to the legal requirements for setting policy, school board policy also communicates the board's goals and philosophy to the public. It establishes a legal record and legal basis for board actions and saves time and effort. It ensures consistency in enforcement of the rules and administration of discipline. It can be a shield to protect staff and the district against accusations of unfairness or bias.

The NSBA's Center for Public Education published a research brief that listed eight characteristics of effective school boards. The brief states that effective school boards “are policy and accountability driven, focusing their time and energy on governance-level actions related to student achievement and classroom instruction.”

Read the full article here: <https://bit.ly/2IeK7Gg>.

### When is new policy needed?

A new policy is needed when a school board wants to give direction to the superintendent, when a district philosophy or stance is needed to provide clarity or direction, or when there is a new law and regulation. Board members must stay current on educational trends and federal and state statutes, regulations and court rulings.

A community expectation may also identify a need for a new policy. This year, school boards adopted new policies related to distance learning, the pandemic and race-related issues. After the recent worldwide protests against systemic racism, many school communities voiced their desire for school boards to create policies on Black Lives Matter, racism and equity, political

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speech and dress codes. Listed below are a few examples of school districts that adopted new policies this year:

- The Seattle Public Schools board adopted a new dress code policy in collaboration with the community to address racial inequities.  
<https://bit.ly/39T8yob>
- The Tigard-Tualatin school board in Oregon passed a bias-incident and hate-speech policy after students pressed for a resolution as the Black Lives Matter protests began.  
[www.ttsdschools.org/Page/9837](http://www.ttsdschools.org/Page/9837)
- The Sarasota County school board in Florida adopted a policy addressing the requirements to wear face masks during the pandemic.  
<https://bit.ly/36AG00y>
- For more examples of school board policies that address equity and diversity, the Puget Sound Education Service District has resources on achieving equity through policy.  
<https://bit.ly/3IEFYZQ>

### **How should you review policies?**

School boards review existing policy as needed or on a regular schedule. When was the last time your board reviewed its policies? Do you have a review process in place? Establishing a review cycle ensures your policies are relevant, legally compliant, reflect district practice and produce the intended results. School boards should be aware of state standards for any required review cycles. There also may be certain policies that must be reviewed more regularly to comply with current law. When adopting a new policy or reviewing an existing policy, ask these questions:

- Is it legal?
- Does it reflect current practice? Make sure the policy and the actual practice match. If it does not match, you may need to change your practice or revise your policy.
- Is it working? What needs changed?
- Do we need it?

Contact your state's school board association for policy guidance to ensure your policies meet legal requirements.

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*Contributed by Erin Good, communications consultant*