

# WEST VIRGINIA SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION

## CATALOG OF BEST PRACTICES

July 2003

This document contains ideas for implementing the various components of W. Va. Code § 18-5-14. It is not a part of WVSBA's model § 18-5-14 policy. It is merely a resource.

New ideas will be added from time to time, and posted on the Association's Web site, **[www.wvsba.org](http://www.wvsba.org)**.

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## Direct Links Between the Board and Local School Improvement Councils

Listed below are ways to establish direct links between a board of education and its local school improvement councils. “Direct links” are processes which encourage local school improvement councils to communicate information, ideas, and opinions to a board of education about the board’s broad guidelines for oversight procedures, standards of accountability, and planning for future needs. Communication through direct links may be oral or written, one-way or two-way.

WVSBA feels that a board’s “broad guidelines for oversight procedures” should consist of practices and methods which enable the board to determine the general effectiveness of the school district’s programs. Also, WVSBA is of the opinion that a board’s “standards of accountability” are measures or assessments of quality which determine the effectiveness of certain programs and services. Monitoring and oversight procedures are used to determine whether the standards of quality are being realized.

1. Surveys of Local School Improvement Councils. Surveys are a formal means to obtain information or to evaluate board programs or proposed board programs, or to survey or study issues. If surveys are to be used as a direct link, WVSBA suggests that the board specify the format in which they will be used, written or telephone or other, e.g., focus group, and that the board establish the frequency with which they will be used. Policy language, however, should allow for flexibility since surveys are invaluable tools to gauge sentiment or acquire information in regard to unforeseen issues or events. Additionally, various surveys may be utilized for various issues and topics. Generally, survey results are reported, in some format, to the public.

2. Board Meetings Involving Local School Improvement Councils. A portion or portions of regular meetings (or special meetings) may be devoted to hearing from local school improvement councils, or particular local school improvement councils, or representatives of local school improvement councils. For purposes of effective meeting management, the board should itemize what it expects from the local school improvement council or its representatives. Additionally, time should be allotted for questions and for dialogue with the Board. If board meetings are held in various locales throughout the district, the board might meet with local school improvement councils or their representatives from the attendance area of the board meeting.

In its undertakings, the board should realize that an effective meeting conveys the board’s intent and ability to govern, to solicit and receive Information, and to communicate.

If this direct link is used, WVSBA suggests that the board develop and adopt a calendar and schedule of such meetings, well publicizing it in the district.

The annual meeting between the board and each of its local school improvement councils (required by statute and by WVSBA’s model policy) would be a direct link. However, be aware that W. Va. Code § 18-5-14 requires the county board of education to prepare the

agenda for this annual meeting, and that other sections of the statute relate to how such meetings are to be conducted.

3. Forums Involving Local School Improvement Councils. Forums differ from town meetings (described below) only in that they are convened by a board to address a specific topic. Those attending forums are “invited” by the board – usually district constituencies, including local school improvement councils, faculty senates and the community at large (or sub-groups of the community at large). The board may convene forums in regard to an issue, or to receive comments or information. Meeting structure is more formal in forums than in town meetings.

If this direct link is used, WVSBA suggests that a listing of forums be developed and publicized to the community. Of course, forums may arise and be scheduled in regard to emerging external issues and concerns. Thus, the policy should employ flexible language.

4. Linkages with Local School Improvement Councils Based on Designation. Such direct links include the appointment (designation) of a member of the board (or members of the board) and/or superintendent to provide or receive certain communications from local school improvement councils. The communications may be of a specialized nature, especially in furtherance of this policy.

Given the fact issues which quickly arise in school districts, WVSBA suggests that the board policy employ flexible, general language to the effect that direct links based on designation may be made from time to time by the board, as the need were to arise.

If, however, designation is the primary or sole direct link – quite unlikely – a listing and schedule of such direct links should be developed and adopted by the board, including but not limited to visitations to local school improvement council meetings.

5. ‘Town Meetings’ Involving Local School Improvement Councils. Town meetings may be defined as informal meetings (usually having no particularly identified agenda focus) which are held for the primary purpose of securing information from one or more constituencies, especially the community at large or from formal structures, including local school improvement councils and faculty. They are highly participatory, but also require good meeting management.

If town meetings are used as a direct link, WVSBA suggests that a calendar of town meetings be included in the policy.

The policy, however, should be flexible. Indeed, town meetings may arise in regard to specific issues or topics of external generation.

## Direct Links Between the Board and Faculty Senates

Listed below are ways to establish direct links between a board of education and its faculty senates. “Direct links” are processes which encourage faculty senates to communicate information, ideas, and opinions to a board of education about the board’s broad guidelines for oversight procedures, standards of accountability, and planning for future needs. Communication through direct links may be oral or written, one-way or two-way.

WVSBA feels that a board’s “broad guidelines for oversight procedures” should consist of practices and methods which enable the board to determine the general effectiveness of the school district’s programs. Also, WVSBA is of the opinion that a board’s “standards of accountability” are measures or assessments of quality which determine the effectiveness of certain programs and services. Monitoring and oversight procedures are used to determine whether the standards of quality are being realized.

1. Surveys of Faculty Senates. Surveys are a formal means to obtain information or to evaluate board programs or proposed board programs, or to survey or study issues. If surveys are to be used as a direct link, WVSBA suggests that the board specify the format in which they will be used, written or telephone or other, e.g., focus group, and that the board establish the frequency with which they will be used. Policy language, however, should allow for flexibility since surveys are invaluable tools to gauge sentiment or acquire information in regard to unforeseen issues or events. Additionally, various surveys may be utilized for various issues and topics. Generally, survey results are reported, in some format, to the public.

2. Board Meetings Involving Faculty Senates. A portion or portions of regular meetings (or special meetings) may be devoted to hearing from faculty senates, or particular faculty senates, or representatives of faculty senates. For purposes of effective meeting management, the board should itemize what it expects from the faculty senate or its representatives. Additionally, time should be allotted for questions and for dialogue with the board, if board meetings are held in various locales throughout the district, the board might meet with faculty senates or their representatives from the attendance area of the board meeting.

In its undertakings, the board should realize that an effective meeting conveys the board’s intent and ability to govern, to solicit and receive information, and to communicate.

If this direct link is used, WVSBA suggests that the board develop and adopt a calendar and schedule of such meetings, well publicizing it in the district.

3. Meeting with Faculty Senate Chairs. If a meeting with faculty senate chairs is a direct link chosen by the board, the board should specify how the link would operate (procedures), followed by a timeline for meetings. Designated representatives may be named by the board to undertake such direct links. Such a direct link may be known as a “cabinet of faculty senates” or a “super-(faculty) senate.”

4. Annual Meeting with Faculty Senates and/or Representatives. To employ this direct link, the board should specify when and how the meeting will be held and how it will be conducted. Ample notice would be given to the faculty senates or representatives.

5. Forums Involving Faculty Senates. Forums differ from town meetings (described below) only in that they are convened by a board to address a specific topic. Those attending forums are “invited” by the board – usually district constituencies, including local school improvement councils, faculty senates and the community at large (or sub-groups of the community at large). The board may convene forums in regard to an issue, or to receive comments or information. Meeting structure is more formal in forums than in town meetings.

If this direct link is used, WVSBA suggests that a listing of forums be developed and publicized to the community. Of course, forums may arise and be scheduled in regard to emerging external issues and concerns. Thus, the policy should employ flexible language.

6. Linkages with Faculty Senates Based on Designation. Such direct links include the appointment (designation) of a member of the board (or members of the board) and/or superintendent to provide or receive certain communications from faculty senates and faculty senate representatives. The communications may be of a specialized nature, especially in furtherance of this policy.

Given the fact issues which quickly arise in school districts, WVSBA suggests that the board policy employ flexible, general language to the effect that direct links based on designation may be made from time-to-time by the board, as the need were to arise.

If, however, designation is the primary or sole direct link – quite unlikely – a listing and schedule of such direct links should be developed and adopted by the board, including but not limited to visitations to faculty senates meetings.

7. Town Meetings Involving Faculty Senates. Town meetings are informally structured meetings (usually having no particularly identified agenda focus) which are held for the primary purpose of securing information from one or more constituencies, especially the community at large or from formal structures, including faculty senates. They are highly participatory, but also require good meeting management.

If town meetings are used as a direct link, WVSBA suggests that a calendar of town meetings be included in the policy.

The policy, however, should be flexible, indeed, town meetings may arise in regard to specific issues or topics of external generation.

8. Forum Participation. In planning forums, as described herein, county boards may consider inviting representatives of faculty senates as part of the constituency groups participating in the forum. (See suggestions elsewhere in document.)

Direct Links Between the Board and  
Community at Large

Listed below are ways to establish direct links between a board of education and the community at large. “Direct links” are processes which encourage the community at large to communicate information, ideas, and opinions to a board of education about the board’s broad guidelines for oversight procedures, standards of accountability, and planning for future needs. Communication through direct links may be oral or written, one-way or two-way.

WVSBA feels that a board’s “broad guidelines for oversight procedures” should consist of practices and methods which enable the board to determine the general effectiveness of the school district’s programs. Also, WVSBA is of the opinion that a board’s “standards of accountability” are measures or assessments of quality which determine the effectiveness of certain programs and services. Monitoring and oversight procedures are used to determine whether the standards of quality are being realized.

Some of the ideas listed below are also designed to allow for community involvement at regular school board meetings. Others specify how a board may regularly communicate with the public regarding important issues.

1. Surveys of the Community at Large. Surveys are a formal means to obtain information or to evaluate board programs or proposed board programs, or to survey or study issues. Surveys need not be made of the entire community, but can be made of designated sub-groups of the community at large. If surveys are to be used as a direct link, WVSBA suggests that the board specify the format in which they will be used, written or telephone or other, e.g., focus group, and that the board establish the frequency with which they will be used. Policy language, however, should allow for flexibility since surveys are invaluable tools to gauge sentiment or acquire information in regard to unforeseen issues or events. Additionally, various surveys may be utilized for various issues and topics. Generally, survey results are reported, in some format, to the public.

2. Board Meetings Involving the Community at Large. A portion or portions of regular meetings (or special meetings) may be devoted to hearing from the community at large or sub-groups of the community. For purposes of effective meeting management, the board should itemize what it expects from the community at large or sub-groups. Additionally, time should be allotted for questions and for dialogue with the Board. If board meetings are held in various locales throughout the district, the board might meet with the community at large (or sub-groups of the community at large) from the attendance area of the board meeting.

In its undertakings, the board should realize that an effective meeting conveys the board’s intent and ability to govern, to solicit and receive information, and to communicate.

If this direct link is used, WVSBA suggests that the board develop and adopt a calendar and schedule of such meetings, well publicizing it in the district.

3. Techniques to Enhance Effective Meeting Management to Maximize Community Involvement. Community involvement at regular board meetings means that regular board meetings are conducted in a manner which maximizes involvement of the community at large, but in a manner consistent with laws regarding “open meetings.” In order that meetings are meaningful and productive, effective meeting management is highly prized and valued.

Additionally, board meetings should be characterized by attention to the value of public involvement, particularly in regard to receipt of information, comments or suggestions regarding the school system. To accommodate the desires of this policy and also to maximize utilization of time as a resource, the board should, to the degree possible, use consent agendas or similar tools of effective meeting management.

While the board may value delegations and formalized presentations, the board should also value singular contributions which may be made by citizens, school employees, students and others during its regular meetings.

The board, however, should realize that while community involvement is prized, it may lose effectiveness if not characterized and received within a spirit of effective meeting management. Accordingly, the board should periodically evaluate community involvement to ascertain its effectiveness, especially in regard to board agenda structure and format.

4. Forums Involving the Community at Large. Forums differ from town meetings (described below) only in that they are convened by the board to address a specific topic. Those attending forums are “invited” by the board – usually district constituencies, including local school improvement councils, faculty senates and the community at large (or sub-groups of the community at large). The board may convene forums in regard to an issue, or to receive comments or information. Meeting structure is more formal in forums than in town meetings.

If this direct link is used, WVSBA suggests that a listing of forums be developed and publicized to the community. Of course, forums may arise and be scheduled in regard to emerging external issues and concerns. Thus, the policy should employ flexible language.

5. Linkages with the Community at Large Based on Designation. Such direct links include the appointment (designation) of a member of the board (or members of the board) and/or superintendent to provide or receive certain communications from the community at large or sub-groups of the community. The communications may be of a specialized nature, especially in furtherance of this policy.

Given the fact issues which quickly arise in school districts, WVSBA suggests that the board policy employ flexible, general language to the effect that direct links based on designation may be made from time to time by the board, as the need were to arise.

If, however, designation is the primary or sole direct link – quite unlikely – a listing and schedule of such direct links should be developed and adopted by the board, including but not limited to visitations to faculty senates or local school improvement council meetings.

6. Town Meetings Involving the Community at Large. Town meetings are informally structured meetings (usually having no particularly identified agenda focus) which are held for the primary purpose of securing information from one or more constituencies, especially the community at large or from formal structures, including local school improvement councils and faculty. They are highly participatory, but also require good meeting management.

If town meetings are used as a direct link, WVSBA suggests that a calendar of town meetings be included in the policy.

The policy, however, should be flexible. Indeed, town meetings may arise in regard to specific issues or topics of external generation.

7. Regularly Communicating With the Public Regarding Important Issues. To regularly communicate with the public regarding important issues means that the board should communicate to the public in regard to issues of decisive importance to the board, the school system and/or certain constituents, especially to meet the requirements of the board's § 18-5-14 policy.

8. Web-based Communications. Another effective means of communicating with the public is through Web-based communications, including the school district's Web site or other Internet-based sites. These two-way communications can include surveys of the public, responses to 'questions' or 'issues' posed by the county board, inventories or assessments of county board programs and the like. These type communications may precede or enhance other linkages with the public.

Such communications should be systematic in approach and with regard to Issues deemed of importance. The community and various constituent groups, among others, may be consulted generally in regard to determination of such issues, the means of communication, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the communication.

The traditional local news media could serve as the channels for the board's communication with the public. The policy might designate a media contact person who works for the board. It might also identify specific media, schedules, and types of contacts that will be used.

## Periodic Review Of Personnel Policies

Listed below are ways by which a school board may provide for the periodic review of its personnel policies in order to determine their effectiveness.

1. Review of Existing Board Policies. If this procedure is chosen, the board would assemble several or a few policies per meeting for the purpose of evaluating the policies' timelines, equity, equality, fairness and the degree to which they meet specified board personnel objectives. WVSBA provides this service to its members, and is entering into a more formal policy service with NEOLA Inc., an Ohio firm that specializes in policy development.

2. Review of Grievance Procedure Information. By examining the "history" of grievances in the district, the board can pin-point areas of contention regarding certain personnel practices. A pattern or patterns of action may be discerned.

3. Consolidation of Policy Categories. Often undertaken as an adjunct to policy review, consolidation of policies allows the board to acquire a few specific personnel policies. Policy consolidation is a continuous process. It may be enhanced by grievance procedure review.

4. Policy Development. Under this approach, goals and objectives (determined largely by the board's § 18-5-14 policy), are used, with input from local school improvement councils, faculty senates, the community at large, and various constituent groups, to develop policies which will implement § 18-5-14. The various groups may also have input in the process and procedures. The board should also call upon administrators for direction and valued input.

## Broad Guidelines For The School District

Eventually this portion of the catalog will list ways in which a board of education may set broad guidelines for the school district. (One idea is already incorporated into WVSBA's model policy.) The guidelines include the establishment of specific oversight procedures, development and implementation of standards of accountability, and development of long-range plans to meet future needs as required by W. Va. Code § 18-5-14.

WVSBA feels that a board's "broad guidelines for oversight procedures" should consist of practices and methods which enable its to determine the general effectiveness of the school district's programs. Also, WVSBA is of the opinion that a board's "standards of accountability" are measures or assessments of quality to be used to determine the effectiveness of certain programs and services. Monitoring and oversight procedures are used to determine whether the standards of quality are being realized.

Development of the "Broad Guidelines for the School District" will inevitably involve some of the same direct links which the board establishes with local school improvement councils, faculty senates, and the community at large.

## Use Of School-Based Accreditation And Performance Data

Listed below are ways in which a school board may use school-based accreditation and performance data from the State Board of Education, and other available data, in making decisions to meet the education goals of the state and such other goals as the board may establish.

1. Annually, the Board must devote a portion of a regular meeting or meetings to discuss individual school “report card” results, results of the “district report card,” and all other information and findings related to performance-based accreditation of relevance to the district.

2. The board could also elect to receive periodic reports regarding data-based information which may be included as part of the W. Va. Education Information System (WVEIS) and/or which generally may be available to the board, including but not limited to research reports of the Appalachia Educational Laboratory, the W. Va. Graduate College, Marshall University, W. Va. University, the W. Va. Education Alliance, the W. Va. School Boards Association and other entities.

3. Data of particular quality, purpose and standing could be used by the board for the purpose of meeting specific board goals, and for consideration in decisionmaking.

4. At least once annually, the board might evaluate the effectiveness of utilizing data in its decisionmaking and the viability and usefulness of research received and utilized.

5. A report of such meetings and any findings by the board can be made to all local school improvement councils, faculty senates and the community at large.

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