Handbook to establish a Mennonite school
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Forward

This booklet was originally compiled in 2009 through the partnership of Mennonite Schools Council (MSC) Executive Committee and Mennonite Education Agency (MEA). Contributors include:

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- J. Richard Thomas, former chair of MSC Executive Committee and superintendent of Lancaster Mennonite School

MSC was organized to interpret, coordinate and promote the work of Mennonite elementary and secondary schools among the schools, Mennonite Church USA and their sponsoring groups. MSC advances Christ-centered PreK-12 education by networking and equipping schools to implement the vision of Anabaptist/Mennonite education.

MEA provides leadership to the educational agenda of Mennonite Church USA in partnership with both churches and Mennonite educational institutions—MSC member schools, five colleges and universities, and two seminaries. MEA also coordinates educational events, provides support for leadership and scholarship programs, and works with leaders to discern trends in education.
MSC Mission, Distinctives, Educational Vision, and End Purpose

Mission

In partnership with the church, MSC advances Christ-centered PreK-12 education by networking schools and equipping them to implement the vision of Anabaptist Mennonite education.

Distinctives

MSC schools offer students a distinctive, nurturing educational experience that

is Christ-centered,
features educational excellence,
provides faith-infused opportunities,
takes place within caring community, and
emphasizes peace and service.
Educational Vision

MSC educators believe that God’s love is the most powerful force in the universe and that, in response to God’s love, we are called to live out the teachings of Jesus in daily life. In light of this conviction, MSC schools teach students to:

- respect and value all people—of varying abilities, socioeconomic levels and Racial/Ethnic identities—as unique creations of God;
- excel academically in accordance with their God-given gifts;
- build caring communities of teachers and students grounded in trust and hope, recognizing all as learners;
- live peaceably with others, resolve differences nonviolently, and practice restorative discipline;
- study the scriptures through the eyes of Jesus;
- grow in Christian maturity by practicing spiritual disciplines such as prayer, simplicity, meditation, service and worship;
- share faith stories;
- discover and own their Christian vocations through faith-infused opportunities and
- offer primary allegiance to God, respect the environment and all peoples of our world, and live generously and responsibly within their local communities.

End Purpose

Graduates of Mennonite schools follow Jesus Christ and, in response to God’s love, grow in grace, joy and peace so that God’s healing and hope flow through them to the world.
The Prekindergarten to Grade 12 Schools of Mennonite Schools Council

Western Mennonite

The Peace and Justice Academy

Hopi Mission School

Member

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Overview of MSC Benefits, Expectations and Programs

Introduction

The strength of MSC is the collaboration of school leaders at MSC events that develops a supportive network and empowers administrators between council meetings. MSC helps schools hold a niche in Christian school education that can be met by the Anabaptist Christian understanding of following Christ daily. A growing edge of the council is offering increased services to member schools in areas such as curriculum development and student activities.

To insure involvement by schools regardless of their location, MSC schools participate in travel pools for most events. Typically, major events are held in western Pennsylvania which provides the most economical travel costs for the pool. We believe the travel pool is a biblical concept—that of sharing equally the costs of a meeting.

There are many pressures on Anabaptist schools to leave our faith values and become elite prep schools or schools that reflect the American evangelical movement. We believe we best serve the church, the cause of Christ, and our community by being grounded in Anabaptist Christian faith that warmly welcomes persons from other faith traditions.

Active involvement by member schools, that share a common faith and mission, enables them to grow and develop in a manner that effectively challenges students to educational excellence through faith-infused, Christ-centered schools that develop attitudes of peaceful living, serving and growing in communities of grace, joy and peace.
Current MSC Goals

1. Develop K-12 Bible curriculum and do other curriculum work as was discerned together by member schools.
2. Provide leadership development for administrators.
3. Advocate for Mennonite schools in the church.
4. Encourage Mennonite colleges to offer Christian education courses and encourage student teachers to teach at MSC schools.
5. Articulate and publish MSC core values and study how school mission statements align with the MSC statement.

Expectations

• Members are expected to attend the MSC business sessions and participate in conferences/conventions sponsored by MSC.
• Member schools should make personnel available to serve on council committees as necessary.
• Member schools are entitled to participate in all MSC sponsored events, receive minutes of meetings, and receive surveys or research data.
• Children of employees of member schools are entitled to receive tuition discounts at participating Mennonite colleges.

More information is available at:
www.MennoniteSchools.org
www.MennoniteEducation.org/MSC

Professional Development Activities and Meetings

College Consultations
Meetings of teachers, administrators and guidance counselors take place on college campuses to exchange ideas that strengthen every level of Mennonite education. Conrad
Swartzentruber at Christopher Dock Mennonite High School is the contact person for this high school program. Costs are covered by MSC and the Mennonite colleges.

**School Partners**
In the 2008-2009 academic year, MSC re-introduced a partner school program to develop a strong support. Each school will partner with one or two other schools. The administrators will visit the other school for in-depth learning and relationship development—the core of MSC. Travel costs are covered by MSC dues.

**Mennonite Educators Conference (MEC)**
This event is planned for faculty, with meetings and staff development also planned for high school principals, middle school principals, elementary school principals and admissions staff held in February of even numbered years. Allan Dueck at Bethany Christian School is the contact person for this event. All expenses for the administrator are paid by MSC dues.

**Education Leaders Gathering (ELG)**
This event is for board members and chief administrators, with meetings and staff development also planned for advancement staff, business officers, recruitment staff and public relations staff. It is held in February of odd numbered years. Carlos Romero at MEA is the contact person for this program. The cost of the administrator attending this event is paid by MSC dues.

**Administrators Leadership Development Conference**
This event is planned during the odd numbered years (opposite of MEC). The focus rotates between student life, curriculum and program. Each school may send one person to this conference. Occasionally, the conference will be a college consultation. Schools will decide which administrator to send based on the agenda and program of the particular conference. It is normally held during the fall MSC meeting. Dick Thomas at Lancaster Mennonite School is the contact
person for this program. Costs for attending all MSC meetings are paid by MSC dues.

Anabaptist Learning Institute
ALI is graduate-credit professional development courses offered by MSC to train and develop the Anabaptist values and beliefs of MSC faculty and administrators, in cooperation with Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Bluffton University and Eastern Mennonite University. Faculty who complete the four-class core program will receive a MEA seal as an Anabaptist Educator. ALI is also available to present in-service events at individual schools. Gene Miller at Central Christian School is the contact person for this program. Information about upcoming courses is available at www.MennoniteEducation.org/ALI.

Student Programs and Activities

Dates and locations of upcoming festivals and other events are available online at www.MennoniteEducation.org/MSC.

• **High School Choral Festival and Regional Festivals.** Festivals are hosted by various schools. (Travel Pool)
• **Middle School Choral Festival and Regional Festivals.** Festivals are hosted by various schools. (Travel Pool)
• **Middle School Regional Arts Festivals.** The first festival was held during the 2008-2009 academic year and is now an annual event.
• **MSC Orchestra/Band Regional Festivals.** Festivals are the high school and middle school levels.
• **Y-LEAD.** This event seeks to educate, empower and enable youth to explore and develop their leadership abilities. It is held at one of the Mennonite colleges/universities.
Collaborative Programs for MSC Members

- **Accreditation** is provided to member schools through MEA in collaboration with regional accrediting agencies. The instrument used to prepare for a visit has helped to shape a holistic Christ-centered education program that builds confidence with the school’s stakeholders.

- **The Anabaptist Learning Institute (ALI)** has now completed a cycle of four classes to provide a Christ-centered professional development for teachers in Mennonite schools, empowering them to infuse faith into the daily curriculum.

- **Associated Mennonite Schools and Camps Benefit Program** offers a health and dental insurance program that provides significant savings for many member schools. It has also bound the schools together in biblical mutual aid.

- **Connection to Mennonite Church USA** includes member schools being listed in the online Mennonite Church USA directory.

- **MSC Directory** is currently online at www.MennoniteEducation.org/DIRECTORY. A printed booklet is also available.

- **The Fund for Peoplehood Education Grant** is available to member schools. Grants are awarded for projects that enhance church/school relations.

- **MEA staff** are available for school visits and for counsel by phone. Elaine Moyer, MEA senior director, is the contact person.

- **MEA Website Resources**, includes advertising staff positions, presentation materials from MEA events, board development resources, etc.

- **MSC Administrative Salary Survey** is completed from time to time.

- **MSC Data Instrument** has recently been revised and is a service provided to member schools.
• **MSC K-12 Bible Curriculum and Materials.** MSC employs a part-time staff person for curriculum work to implement curriculum goals discerned by member schools at the fall 2007 meeting in Pittsburgh. The curriculum is currently being updated and is available at www.MennoniteEducation.org/BIBLE. Part of the curriculum project will provide teacher training in using the K-8 *Journey’s With God* Bible curriculum.

• **MSC Website** Member schools are listed with links to each individual school’s website. This site has averaged over 7,000 unique visitors each of the past three years and comes up on a Google search of Mennonite schools, Christian schools, etc.

• **Scholarship Organization for Pennsylvania Schools.** Pennsylvania Mennonite Scholarship Organization, commonly known as PAMSO, is a valuable service provided for member schools in Pennsylvania.

• **Global Connection.** A current project is the development of a global network of Anabaptist schools.

• **Participation in the MEA Investment Committee** is offered to member schools. This fund pools money from Mennonite Church USA institutions (mostly education-related) to support their endowed and scholarship programs within the parameters of socially responsible investing.

Interest is growing in a number of communities to start a Mennonite school. These communities have been in touch with the MEA and MSC regarding their goal and have been asking for help. This handbook was developed to meet this need.

Updated July 2009
Making the Case for Mennonite Schools

In 16th century Germany, the State required that all infants be baptized in the State Church—an assurance that children would grow up to serve the State. The State was god and wanted total loyalty in order to build an empire.

Martin Luther recognized the heresy in this allegiance to the State and led the Reformation by tacking his 95 Theses on the door of the Wittenberg Church. Others including Menno Simons took it even further with the Anabaptist movement resulting in an emphasis on adult confession of faith in Jesus as Lord and confirmed this with adult baptism—a symbol of separation from the world and State, and totally separated under the Lordship of Christ.

Early Anabaptist forefathers and mothers were willing to forsake their homes and lands for Jesus’ sake even though it meant enduring untold hardships, sufferings and even death itself so they could retain this precious faith of Jesus Christ for themselves, their children and future generations.

E.K. Martin, lawyer and former member of the Pennsylvania bar, wrote about Mennonites years later, “There is scarcely a family among them which cannot be traced to some ancestor burned to death because of his or her faith. Their whole literature smacks of the fire.”

Now 500 years later in this 21st century, how do Mennonites remember this history? Are they called again to consider what they are willing to die for—whether their allegiance to God is founded in the death and resurrection of Jesus and whether they can retain this precious faith for their children and future generations—or has empire seduced them into conforming to this secular world?
How does Anabaptist history influence Mennonites’ view and response to Mennonite education? In a 1945 booklet entitled, *Promotional Manual Supporting Christian Day Schools for Mennonite Youth*, the editor and a Lancaster Conference bishop, J. Paul Graybill, wrote the following:

“Christian education for Christian people is so obviously evident that one must wonder how Christian people can fail to perceive it. We understand why people of the world can conceive of only a worldly education, but we can’t understand such a position for thinking Christian people. Certain it is that they do not arrive at this point by way of Scriptural conviction, for there is not one scripture in the Bible to commend it.”

In other words, why should God’s people—people who claim to be part of the Kingdom of God—choose to have their children trained and taught in state-run schools which have an incomplete philosophy of life and education? Secular schools do not nurture faith in God and the Bible. Educational systems and institutions, often indifferent or adverse to Christian principles, will not promote Christian character and virtue. Clearly, the goal of unchristian institutions is not producing Christian youth.

The state-run schools assure that children will be taught and trained in such a way to elicit loyalty and service to the American Empire. Yes, there is still religious freedom in this country, but Mennonites need to guard against the subtleties that pull them in and blind them to what might impact their total allegiance to God and the Kingdom of God.

Why do Mennonites not question the secularization, consumerism, standardization, passivity, docility and injustice that is sometimes practiced and supported in the state-run educational system? Why do Mennonites assume that the state-run system has Christian aspects because some Christian teachers choose to teach there? Do Mennonites unquestionably mimic and model some of the practices and
pedagogy used in the state educational system? Have Mennonites not noticed that success is measured by test scores and academic achievement rather than by lives dedicated to God, service, and learning servanthood leadership?

Discipline in state schools tends to be punitive rather than emphasizing restorative justice and reconciliation. Sometimes highly competitive sports can create “warrior-like” behaviors which support winning at all costs. Pushing for advanced degrees can support elitist professionalism—an idolized view of learning—that forgets the importance of godly wisdom learned in the crucible of daily living and life experience.

It is not enough for Mennonites to see the need of protecting and safeguarding their children from the evils of an unchristian educational system, good as it might be. The starting point in the education of their children is to understand that their children belong to God who gave them to parents to be taught, trained, nurtured in the faith and transformed by God so that they might grow and develop holistically (body, soul and spirit) to bring healing and hope to a broken world.

Christian education denotes education with a Christian emphasis in which “Christian conviction underlies not a part, but all of the curriculum of the school” and in which the curriculum is God-centered and expressive of God’s truth. In Paul’s letter to Christians living in the Roman Empire centuries ago, he wrote, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Romans 12:2a, NIV

*The following scriptures provide a biblical basis for Mennonite education:*

“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment.” Genesis 18:19a, KJV
“O that there were such an heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them, and with their children forever.” Deut. 5:29, KJV

“Memorize his laws and tell them to your children over and over again. Talk about them all the time, whether you’re at home or walking along the road or going to bed at night, or getting up in the morning. Write down copies and tie them to your wrists and foreheads to help you obey them. Write these laws on the door frames of your homes and on your town gates.” Deuteronomy 6:7-9, CEV

“You must be very careful not to forget the things you have seen God do for you. Keep reminding yourselves, and tell your children and grandchildren as well. Do you remember the day you stood in the Lord’s presence at Mt. Sinai? The Lord said, ‘Moses, bring the people of Israel here. I want to speak to them so they will obey me as long as they live, and so they will teach their children to obey me, too.’” Deuteronomy 4:9-10, CEV

“Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” Proverbs 22:6, TNIV

What is the source of all knowledge?

“My goal is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Colossians 2:2b-3, NKJV

“We announce the message about Christ and use all our wisdom to teach and warn everyone, so that all of Christ’s followers will grow and become mature.” Colossians 1:28, CEV

“Parents, don’t be hard on your children. Raise them properly. Teach them and instruct them about the Lord.” Eph. 6:4, CEV
Such a goal requires a strong educational program which will produce a Christian philosophy of life that becomes a living expression of the Gospel message and creates an educational environment that nurtures the church’s children and youth.

In a book entitled, *Transforming Your Children into Spiritual Champions*, researcher George Barna indicated that the wealth of research not only changed his personal perspective on the importance of ministering to young children, but also clarified why churches struggle to have significance in our culture. Barna explained:

“Adults essentially carry out the beliefs they embraced when they were young. The reason why Christians are so similar in their attitudes, values and lifestyles to nonchristians is that they were not sufficiently challenged to think and behave differently, based on core spiritual perspectives when they were children. Simply getting people to go to church regularly is not the key to becoming a mature Christian. Spiritual transformation requires a more extensive investment in one’s ability to interpret all life situations in spiritual terms.”

Barna’s research discovered that a person’s lifelong behaviors and views are generally developed when they are young—particularly before they reach the teenage years. As evidence of this, Barna provided research that showed four critical outcomes:

“First, a person’s moral foundations are generally in place by the time they reach age nine. While those foundations are refined and the application of those foundations may shift to some extent as the individual ages, their fundamental perspectives on truth, integrity, meaning, justice, morality and ethics are formed quite early in life.

“Second, a person’s response to the meaning and personal value of Jesus Christ’s life, death and resurrection is usually determined before a person reaches eighteen ... a majority of
Americans make a lasting determination about the personal significance of Christ’s death and resurrection by age 12.”

Third, Barna showed data indicating that “in most cases; people’s spiritual beliefs are irrevocably formed when they are pre-teens. Those beliefs included perceptions of the nature of God, the existence of Satan, the reliability of the Bible, perceptions regarding the after-life, the holiness of Jesus Christ, the means of gaining God’s favor, and the influence of spiritual forces in a person’s life.” In essence what you believe by the time you are 13 is what you will die believing. Their focus in absorbing religious teaching after that age is to gain reassurance and confirmation of their existing beliefs rather than to learn new insights that will redefine their foundations.

“Finally, the research revealed that adult church leaders usually have serious involvement in church life and training when they are young.” (www.barna.org)

The ultimate question might be: Is the Mennonite Church willing to pay the educational price for the sake of their future and for the sake of their children and youth? The matter of financing Mennonite schools in addition to paying public-school taxes becomes a consideration and issue for some.

J. Paul Graybill highlights this matter:
“Even though financial cost is real, must be met, and merits due consideration, it is nevertheless true that the more the need of Mennonite schools is investigated and realized, together with the possibilities of safeguarding and nurturing our children, the more we will appreciate the privilege we have of investing some of our God-given money to support our schools. What we give for Mennonite education is not an expense, but an investment—an investment in the spiritual welfare of our children and future generations. What we give for Mennonite schools is not a sacrifice, but an expression of our love for our King.”
Graybill continues,
“Let us never nurse the thought that in this richest of all countries, God has not given us the necessary funds to properly train the future church. Our ability to finance Mennonite schools does not depend nearly so much upon our income as it does upon our outgo. Instead of not being able to afford Mennonite schools, we cannot afford to be without them.”

Therefore, the question is not so much then, “What will it cost Mennonites to have their own Mennonite schools?” but rather, “What has it cost the Mennonite Church, or church at large, during the past century, to have allowed the state government to teach, train, implant and inculcate its philosophy of education and world view into the hearts and minds of our children?”

In short, it is time for Mennonite Church USA to ask, “What great educational needs is God calling us to meet? What paradigm shifts are needed? What new ways or structures should we engage in order to provide Mennonite education for all our children, youth and young adults?”

Connie Stauffer
January 14, 2009
Lake Center Christian School, Photo by Tom Livigni

Lancaster Mennonite School—Krabill campus, Photo by Jonathan Charles

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Philosophy of Mennonite Schools

Anabaptist/Mennonite schools are owned and operated by congregations, conferences or parents. However, regardless of their structure and ownership, they share a common vision that offers students a distinctive, nurturing educational experience shaped by the following enduring values:

- Christ-centered,
- educational excellence,
- faith-infused opportunities,
- caring community, and
- peace and service.

Anabaptist/Mennonite schools are dynamic, creative agile centers of education in touch with both church and society. They are able to offer value-added opportunities that make them attractive to both parents and congregations. Anabaptist/Mennonite schools work collaboratively through the activities of the Mennonite Schools Council.

The theology of Mennonite Church USA provides the foundation for Anabaptist/Mennonite schools. This theology is best articulated in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective¹* adopted by the General Assembly of Mennonite Church USA. The core values, mission, vision, philosophy and educational outcomes of Anabaptist/Mennonite schools are to be congruent with these foundational documents.

Anabaptist/Mennonite schools seek to practice discipline and pedagogical programs in keeping with Anabaptist/Mennonite pioneer educator Christopher Dock. His biography, written by Gerald Studer, continues to provide a vision for Anabaptist/Mennonite education.²
Following in this tradition, Anabaptist/Mennonite schools are shaped by restorative discipline practices—respecting the student as an individual in community and providing a common experience to create community. The teacher is a role model who selects educational practices that teach academic content through respect, mutual support and integrity.

Students are nurtured and taught to build community and to establish a community of common caring where the whole is greater than the sum of the individual parts. Community seeks a common vision of love, caring, forgiveness and grace. Students are empowered to build a network of connections that make them a vital part of the total community.

Teaching styles reflect an Anabaptist understanding of life together in community. According to Richard Hughes, director of the Center for Faith and Learning at Pepperdine University, this means that teachers do their work on behalf of the church. He further states that this vision calls for countercultural teaching that inspires students to countercultural commitments.

**The Goal of Anabaptist/Mennonite Education**

*Mennonite Education: Why and How* describes the ultimate purpose of Anabaptist/Mennonite education as follows:

Students who graduate from Anabaptist/Mennonite schools should see themselves as part of the people of God who live as a covenant people, have been reconciled, and bear the fruits of the new humanity. They live as God’s servants and witness to God’s purposes for all humankind and all creation.
References

J. Richard Thomas
January 21, 2009

Sample of philosophy of education
*Source: Lancaster (Pa.) Mennonite School.*

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

Lancaster Mennonite School offers a comprehensive Pre-K–12 program designed to educate the whole person. The school warmly welcomes students and families desiring an education in a learning community shaped by the following distinctives: Christ-centered, educational excellence, peace and service, community, and faith-infused opportunities.*

Lancaster Mennonite School promotes excellence in a student-centered environment that is age and ability-appropriate and builds skills not only for further education but also for lifelong learning. Teachers provide academic support and challenge while guiding and encouraging students to develop their gifts and discover their calling. The faith-infused educational program nurtures students’ spiritual life, curiosity,
character and sense of responsibility. The school values teachers who invite students to transformational growth within the context of the local, national and global communities.

A diverse, multicultural environment that is welcoming, safe, trusting and respectful is an important component of the educational process. Lancaster Mennonite calls each student to personal faith and practices that value peacemaking and service. The school partners with the family and their congregation, Mennonite Church USA, other denominations and the wider community to transform students to change our world.

*The school’s theological foundation is expressed in *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.*
Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum

The Focus
The curriculum reflects the Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding of life: that all of life is under the Lordship of Christ and that Jesus’ call to follow is a call to develop the skills and find a vocation that enables each person to be Christ’s hands and feet in the church and world. To that end, the curriculum of a Mennonite school enables students to acquire basic Mennonite understandings of Christian faith and life, integrate these understandings into all areas of knowledge, and equip them for Christian discipleship in the church and world of the 21st century.

Teaching the Faith
Courses focusing on the essentials of Christian faith from the Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective form the heart of the curriculum. At each grade level, students take age-appropriate classes in Bible and Christian living that provide both academic understandings and the invitation for students to see the biblical narrative as existentially real for them—to own this story for themselves.

MSC offers a faith-based curriculum with materials for students in the elementary grades and high school. Journeys with God provides unit-based, age-appropriate Bible/Christian living curricular materials for elementary students. MSC also provides a high school curriculum that focuses on the Old Testament in grade 9, the New Testament in grade 10, Christian church and Mennonite history in grade 11, and kingdom living in grade 12. MSC offers a Mennonite history text, Through Fire and Water, written for juniors.

In addition to classes in Bible, Christian living, and church history, Mennonite schools teach faith through music classes...
and not-for-credit chapel/small group programs. Music classes equip students with basic choral and instrumental skills and, in addition, place emphasis on sacred music for worship and to teach the faith. Chapel and small-group worship experiences add instruction in basic understandings of faith and Christian living, and enable students to develop skills and appreciation for participating in worship.

**The Broader Curriculum**

The basic Anabaptist/Mennonite understanding that all of life stands under the lordship of Christ has profound implications for curriculum. Mennonite schools invite students to learn the best knowledge available in our present context, but they do so from the perspective of Anabaptist/Mennonite understandings of faith.

In practical terms, this means that the curriculum of Mennonite schools includes current best thinking and best practices to equip students to become productive, successful adults in society. Therefore, they gain a thorough grounding in the core curriculum in English, math, social studies/history and science as well as enrichment subjects such as world languages, visual art, music and drama. However, that’s not all—always, Anabaptist/Mennonite perspectives are comprehensively integrated into these classes. Convictions related to peace and justice, reaching out to the needy and downtrodden, serving others, and giving a cold glass of water to the thirsty find their way into all courses.

For instance, in English classes, students might read a novel by an atheist or a poem by a Hindu. Students should seek to understand these works in their own right, and also view them from a Christian perspective. What can we learn from these authors? How do our views differ? Where can we find common ground? Another illustration in studying U.S. history, Mennonite schools examine the dominant culture’s interpretation of that history but also explore the untold stories—the abuses of African-American slaves, the
destructive realities of war and the witness of Mennonites and other Christians during key periods of our nation’s history. In science classes too, Mennonite schools teach current best understandings of the discipline but view the issues from the perspective of faith and help students understand scientific ways of knowing as compared to religious ways of knowing.

Skills for the 21st Century
The curriculum in a Mennonite school is forward-looking, equipping students to bring the best knowledge and skills to bear as they seek to follow Christ in daily life. To prepare students for discipleship in the 21st century, Mennonite schools strive to teach them to utilize new sources of information and new technologies, think critically and “outside the box,” collaborate with others and solve problems, know and respect the language and culture of peoples across the globe, value diversity, and develop people skills to facilitate communication and peaceful relationships.

Pedagogy

Teaching as Christian Vocation
Ideally, teachers at Mennonite schools are persons with a calling to teach there. They are committed followers of Christ who understand faith from an Anabaptist/Mennonite perspective. Not only are they experts in their disciplines, but they are knowledgeable about the Bible, church history and Christian living. Those who teach religious studies courses have studied these materials in college and/or seminary, while those who teach other subjects are educated in their own disciplines and thoughtful in integrating faith into their academic discipline.

Teachers in Mennonite schools function as role models for and mentors of students. Many of the deepest learnings and insights of students come through their relationships with teachers rather than course content. Students learn from what
teachers do more than from what they say: how to respond to stress, how to deal with conflict, how to handle discipline, how to live day-to-day, how to play soccer, how to think of the world, and so on.

The concept of mentoring is central to church schooling. Young people have different needs at different stages of maturation. With each passing year, students search for greater autonomy and increasingly look beyond parents and the church to discover who they are and what they believe. It’s really important that the significant adults and mentors relating to young people hold values similar to those of parents and the church if students are to make faith commitments that are genuinely their own. Just as the Twelve learned Jesus’ way by walking and living with him on a daily basis, students in Mennonite schools learn Jesus’ way by rubbing shoulders with Christian teachers.

**Preparation to Teach in Mennonite Schools**

One of the challenges for Mennonite schools is to find teachers with the appropriate credentials, training, aptitudes and attitudes for their task. Those educated in secular colleges and universities have typically been educated in a discipline-centered approach and from a secular dominant-culture perspective. Even those who have taken teacher training at Mennonite colleges and universities often lack formal preparation for the particular challenge of integrating faith into all aspects of school life and mentoring students—pedagogical skills so essential for Mennonite schools.

To prepare teachers for Mennonite schools, MSC, in collaboration with MEA, offers the Anabaptist Learning Institute (ALI). The program consists of four courses:

- Learning the Language of Community
- Understanding the Roots of Community
- Building Caring Communities
- Shaping a Community of Learners
Offered by Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Bluffton (Ohio) University, and Eastern Mennonite University, the ALI courses qualify for graduate credit and equip teachers with pedagogical know-how for Mennonite schools.

**Approach to Teaching**
Among other things, the approach to teaching in Mennonite schools is:

- **Person-centered**—Relationships with students are more important than covering the material. In his ministry and teachings, Jesus lived and taught this way.

- **Holistic**—Since all of life is under the lordship of Christ, Mennonite schools do less compartmentalizing than many other schools. For instance, in Mennonite schools, students’ religious convictions have implications for whether they cheat or how they treat each other.

- **In process**—As disciples walking in the footsteps of Jesus, teachers are lifelong learners who seek to keep learning and growing.

- **Invitational, not coercive**—Anabaptist theology stresses that faith is not inherited but that each person is free to make his or her own decision about what to believe and how to live. This offers an ideal stance for Mennonite educators—as mentors, teachers invite, encourage and affirm interest in faith questions and commitments.

Allan Dueck
January 19, 2009
Essentials of a New School Startup

Mission

A mission for a new school may or may not come fully born into the world. Most likely it will gain clarity over time. But it’s crucial to know why you want to start a Mennonite school. Start working right away on your mission statement. You will need it every step of the way! When you decide the direction you are going, tell everyone about it, and be as clear as you can!

Community (Connect, Connect, Connect)

Form a board of directors early in the process and include educators (if possible), pastors, local business people, and people involved in other organizations locally. Whether the school is initiated by a board of directors hiring an administrator or administrators who gather together a board, it is crucial to have the support and council of a wider community.

Important people to get acquainted with/contact/lean on:
• Two to three local public school district superintendents and/or principals
• Local pastors of all denominations (as many as possible)
• Someone on a local school board and (if possible) active in a church
• Local business people who give back to the community (as many as possible)
• Accountant with experience in non-profit work and willing to give some time
• Lawyer willing to give some legal advice
• Others who are excited about your mission opportunity
• An organization like MSC that offer benefits for your school and administrator
Be as transparent as possible, and make your community feel that the school’s vision is their vision. Consider using a web-based community site, like Google Groups or Yahoo! Groups—free sites where interested parties can keep informed. Conduct regular community meetings where everyone can provide input and act as a sounding board. Community provides your school with the foundation of prayer without which you dare not continue.

**Timeline**

Starting a new school doesn’t involve a million different things, but it does involve over 100 different things. That’s still a lot, and it’s easy to overlook some crucial tasks unless you have them organized into an action plan.

You may prefer some sort of dedicated project planning software, or you can enter your tasks into a basic spreadsheet. In the left column list everything you can think of that needs to be done. Over time, you will adjust the list as things come up or become irrelevant.

Assign someone to be responsible for each task. Determine what date you will open the school and work backwards. (It’s difficult to imagine how one could open a school without at least one-year prep time, and two years would be even better.) Add a column for each week between the week you open the school and the current week. For each task, calculate how many weeks it will take to achieve it, start at the date of anticipated completion, and mark your spreadsheet backwards. Review each task every month and make adjustments. This is a great document to share with the community.

Once you have created a timeline, remember to revise it often! Be willing to “fudge” on your goals as you feel led. Don’t underestimate God’s moving in unexpected ways!
**Facility**

Perhaps this might be listed later, but until you have an actual physical site for your school, you will not have a school. The first question asked by potential parents is “Where is your school?” They want to know two things—Is it close enough that I can get my child to school, and is it attractive (or attractive enough)?

It can take many months to find a space, and until you do, you won’t know your need for things like desks, chairs, whiteboards, etc. Start your search right away. Often new Christian schools will start up in the Sunday School classroom space of a local church. Make the host church aware of your mission and try to establish more than a landlord/tenant relationship.

**Legal Paperwork**

It may be possible to work under another non-profit’s tax-exempt status, but there is no easier time to get your own 501(c)3 tax exemption letter from the Federal Government than _before_ you open your doors. You’ll need the application form 1023. With this status, you will mostly be providing the IRS with predictions and estimates. These don’t require the explanations and evidence of a program that has been in operation and now wants to obtain their own tax-exempt standing. This process can be done without a lawyer, but at least get a good book on the subject to guide you. And of course, you’ll need to follow up with your state’s paperwork. After non-profit recognition, your state sales tax exemption varies from state to state.

Remember that without 501(c)3 status, your school will have to pay taxes like a standard for-profit corporation, and any donations you receive will not be tax-deductible for the donor. You will also not be eligible for 99.9% of all grant money.
Budget

Not knowing how many families will be bold enough to join you for your first year is the most difficult part of budgeting for a new school. This means your revenue is a complete mystery—so how can you match expenses? Pick a number and go with it. Ask yourself “What is our maximum class size, no matter how many students want to come?” Twenty? Fifteen? Then ask “How few students can sign up and we will still open the school?” Ten? Five? Pick a number midway between your minimum and your maximum, decide how many teachers you will need for that many students, and fill in your budget. A first-year budget is all guesswork. But you will use it over and over again as you move forward, so put something on paper early and adjust as you go forward.

Funding

A modest Mennonite school can be started with little money. It cannot be started with no money. At a minimum, there are costs for filing legal paperwork, establishing banking and telephone services, stationery, and especially marketing. This cost will likely run to several thousands of dollars.

If the cause is right, people will give generously, but you need to show them what they are giving towards. People are more likely to give to a specific need than to an “organization.” You will need to rely on your community to provide volunteer hours, free labor and whatever expertise they are willing to donate. That also draws them into the mission. Along the way, God will provide unexpected blessings and all will rejoice.

Of course, the other approach is to have a large grant, say $250,000 to start a school. This requires less faith, but don’t turn it down just because of that!
Marketing

Realistically, a Mennonite school will not be for everyone. Who will most benefit from your school is directly tied back into your mission. But even families who might be willing and able to join you in a school launching will not attend your school if they don’t know it exists. Marketing may be the most neglected and misunderstood part of starting and operating a school. Most of your initial seed money should be spent here. If you can afford it, hire a professional marketing firm to work with you—it only takes one or two enrollments to pay for this level of attention.

Job one is your website. This is certainly the case if you are opening in an urban area. Do not scrimp here. This first impression cannot be undone. This is the hub of all you do and where you send all interested parties.

Also consider a direct mail campaign. You will need a non-profit mailing permit and professional guidance through the labyrinthine post office regulations. Send brochures to churches, Sunday School departments and youth groups in the area.

Develop relationships with the admissions departments of other private schools in your area; they may be willing to direct the families they turn away to your website. Can you get local newspapers to write about you? Would local churches allow you to speak to their congregation, or put an insert in their bulletins?

Academics

Few parents would sacrifice a rigorous education for whatever else we offer at a Mennonite school. Providing a high-level, college prep curriculum has become the standard equipment of any private school, secular or parochial. Developing your
school’s course of study and scope-and-sequence needn’t be the first thing you do since initially, parents will trust your promise to provide strong academics. Of course, at some point you’ll need to deliver on the promise. You may decide to go with non-credentialed teachers, but choose your academic director, or whoever is developing your academic program, with care. Find out what the other private schools in your area are offering and think about how you are going to stack up against the competition. It is okay to supplement direct instruction with online courses. A small school can’t teach everything, and these Web-based resources are continually growing.

Look at requirements from your state board of education; these requirements are different in different states. Do you need to register? Do you work with the local school district, a regional district and/or directly with the state? Is any funding available that does not have “strings” attached?

**Distinctives**

How is your school different than a public school? A secular private school? A Christian school outside the Mennonite tradition? Understand what makes you special and *be who you are*. Promote your distinctiveness. This is the theme you expound upon over and over again. For example, “We believe the world is craving the Anabaptist heritage of community, service over power, pacifism, simple living, justice and reconciliation.” How do you exemplify this at your new school? How do you lead your students to internalize these values? These distinctives will inform your marketing materials and form the centerpiece of any presentations you make to potential parents.

Randy Christopher and Joshua Horning
March 31, 2009
Financial Matters

Article 21 in the *Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective* (1995) is titled Christian Stewardship. Some excerpts from this article are appropriate to cite in a discussion of finances.

- “We believe that everything belongs to God, who calls us as the church to live as faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us.”
- “We acknowledge that God as Creator is owner of all things.”
- “We are called to be stewards in the household of God, set apart for the service of God.”

Mennonite values of simple living and economic justice, along with our responsibility to be good stewards, are all central in the area of school finance. The commentary on Article 21 states, “…the term stewardship has come to refer to our responsibility both for sharing the gospel and for managing time, material things, and money.” All of these concepts translate well into a Mennonite school setting.

A topical search of the Bible on “money” or “finances” will yield numerous verses and passages which indicates the importance placed on the effect of money and wealth in our lives. The Bible teaches how to be good stewards, which is especially important when dealing with other people’s money in the form of tuition and donations. Good business practice, within the context of God’s teaching, must be maintained in order to maintain a strong financial base and a good testimony within the community.

As in most areas of starting a school, it is wise to examine models of schools already in existence. Finance is no exception and MSC members freely share information for the good of the body. It is appropriate to ask other schools for copies of documents such as: board policies regarding finance,
tuition schedules, salary schedules and step schedules for years of experience, yearly budgets, and fundraising data.

The internet has also made a tremendous amount of useful information accessible and will be helpful in establishing financial parameters for a new school. Some potentially helpful resources and websites are:

- Marketing Christian Schools: The Definitive Guide - graceworksministries.com
- Major Donor Game Plan: Rounding Third and Heading for Home - timothygroup.com
- Starting a Christian School: Exploring the Benefits - aop.com
- Faith Based School Finance, ABC’s of Starting a Christian School - churchsolutionsmag.com
- How to Fund Christian Education for the Next Generation – ffin1.com
- christschools.com

While these are not Anabaptist-related resources, they can be helpful in planning and should be viewed through a Mennonite understanding.

MSC is affiliated with the Associated Mennonite Schools and Camps Benefit Plan, a medical coverage plan for employees. In addition, there are helpful church resources such as Mennonite Mutual Aid (MMA), mmaonline.org, for services such as investments, charitable giving, banking and insurance. Mennonite Retirement Trust information is also available at the MMA site and is utilized by many MSC schools for retirement benefits of employees.

Finding an existing Christian school that fits the general demographic characteristics of the school you plan to open is a very helpful tool in researching questions related to financing a new school. The aforementioned Christian websites are also full of information and checklists that will assist in knowing what questions to research and what tools to develop. The following is a list of some key points to consider in the area of school finance.

MSC Handbook to establish a Mennonite school—page 42
Full Tuition verses Discounted Tuition
There are two schools of thought in regards to tuition. The first is to charge the full amount it costs to educate the child and develop a substantial tuition assistance program to provide aid to lower income families. The alternative is to charge a percentage of the actual cost (in order to keep tuition lower) and rely on fundraising to make up the difference.

Annual Fund
This is a common name for the amount of money needed to be raised when full tuition is not charged (the difference between the actual cost of education and the tuition charged).

Marketing
How will you market your school? This includes areas such as school logo, website, announcement of opening, and all topics related to how you are going to get the word out about the new school. In addition—once the school is open and running—how do you continue to attract students?

Recruitment
Who is your target audience and how will you get the message to them?

Development
Will the school have a development or advancement office? How will fundraising be organized and implemented?

No-Debt Policy
When buildings are built and equipment is purchased, will you operate on a no-debt basis or are there methods of financing that you will consider?

Partnership Plan
This is a common understanding with many Mennonite churches and MSC schools. The church takes up offerings for education and pays the tuition for all students from their church.
Conference Affiliation
Is there a Mennonite conference that will support the school and contribute to the school’s annual budget?

State and Federal Support
Some states are very generous in their support for private schools. Research the state and federal support that might be available to Christian schools in your location.

Contingency Fund
Plan a certain percentage of your budget for unexpected needs.

Budgeting
A finance committee should be a subcommittee of the board for the purpose of establishing and maintaining good financial practices with regards to a school operating budget.

Strategic Plan
All schools should develop a working strategic plan with finance being a key piece of the plan.

Key Performance Indicators
Establish measures that will help evaluate progress towards your financial goals.

There are many models available for establishing a budget, setting tuition rates and salary schedules, raising start-up funds, and developing financial policies. Don’t reinvent the wheel when a reasonable amount of research will provide models as a starting place. Financing a Mennonite school will vary depending on the variables related to your location.

Matt McMullen
June 1, 2009
Many are familiar with boards and have either been part of one or have related to an organization which has a board. Growing up and attending school, most likely there was a board that provided oversight for the school. In the church—although a variety of names are used (church council, church board, congregational oversight board, etc.)—a group selected by a particular method helps to provide oversight.

Perhaps you have even asked why boards are needed. A Google search using terms like “non-profit board,” “board roles and responsibilities” or “board development” results in pages and pages of responses. A significant amount of literature has been written in this area—the many “governance models” like Carver or the different type of boards that exist, particularly in the education arena.

The reality is that boards do matter. In the past number of years, particularly in the private sector, we have become familiar with the result of ineffective oversight. It only takes the mention of one name—Enron Corporation—which has become synonymous with lack of effective oversight and executive abuses.

Although there is much already written about board work that we can learn and borrow from, Mennonite educational boards have unique features which reflect their theological understandings. How people work together, discern situations and make decisions; the type of members who sit on a board; and their Anabaptist lens that shapes how they view the world and understand their own sense of calling are a few of many unique characteristics of Mennonite educational boards.

This section is not intended to be a full descriptor of “everything you need to know about boards” but rather to
present basic principles of board roles and responsibilities as well as items that should be considered in the creation of a board.

**Key Concepts**

**Mission/Vision/Purpose**

Boards carry the responsibility and authority to make decisions on behalf of the organization. One of the primary responsibilities of a board is to ensure that the organization has a clear, compelling and focused mission statement that clearly articulates the reason of the organization’s existence. The following are some of the basic questions that need to be asked:

- What is our mission and purpose?
- Why is the school being created?
- Whom are we trying to reach? Is the school primarily to serve Christian students? Non-churched students?
- How do we communicate our mission and purpose to our stakeholders?
- What are the core values?
- How does our theology shape our mission?
- Does the board have a clear and common understanding of what the mission is? Can all board members articulate it clearly?

**Resources**

One of the greatest challenges a board faces is the ability to ensure that the organization has the resources it needs to fulfill its mission. This would include finances, human resources and a good governance structure that creates trust among those being served.

**Finances**—It is not the responsibility of the board to raise or fund all the money needed, but it is their responsibility to establish policies relating to income generation. It is also their
responsibility to establish policies that govern the financial management of the organization. For example, boards should require an annual audit of the institution’s finances. It is also important for board members to financially support the organization. When the administrator/CEO is able to state that the board has a 100% participation in donating to the institution, it not only helps in fundraising efforts but also demonstrates the level of commitment and belief in the mission by the board. Some questions to consider:

- How does the board educate itself about the organization’s finances? Fundraising strategy?
- Why is it important for every board member—apart from their contribution of skills, time, and energy—to also contribute financially?
- Do we have adequate financial expertise among the board members?
- What kind of financial reports does the board need to receive in order to provide appropriate oversight?
- What internal controls need to be established?

Human resources—One of the most important responsibilities of the board is to ensure that the organization has a CEO in place who will effectively lead the organization. This includes the necessity of the board making sure that it is providing the CEO/administrator with the resources he or she needs to do the work. The board needs to carefully think about how it provides support and care for the CEO. Part of the process is to include adequate structures for oversight and accountability.

Institution and board with a reputation of integrity—To be an effective organization and be able to survive, the organization needs to build a reputation of integrity with those they serve, as well as the broader community. An organization that does not have a good reputation for managing its finances would find it very hard to raise money. This means that the board must ensure that adequate polices are in place, i.e. requiring an
annual audit and making the report available on their website. This also means that the board members serve as ambassadors on behalf of the institution such as using their connections in the community to help build a stronger organization.

**Oversight**

One of ways oversight is defined is “management by overseeing the performance or operation of a person or group.” This concept relates to the establishment of appropriate checks and balances in order to ensure that the institution is well-managed, the funds are used appropriately and the organization operates both legally and ethically. In today’s climate, the governmental regulations and oversight for both profit and not-for-profit organizations continue to increase. Oversight also includes monitoring the organization’s progress as well as the CEO’s performance. It is also recommended that boards take time to assess their own performance. The following are examples of the basic questions that need to be asked:

- Does the board have clear and measurable goals to assess progress and performance?
- Has the board worked at articulating and distinguishing which are the board’s responsibilities and which are the CEO’s responsibilities?
- What indicators would be helpful for the board to monitor its work?
- How will the board assess its own work? How will it assess the work of the CEO?
- Does the board have an understanding of the legal requirements (and forms/report) for which the organization is responsible?

The following chart might be helpful in working through the definition of roles.
Responsibilities of the Board  
(not intended to be an all-inclusive list)

*Define the vision/mission of the institution.*

*Approve the major goals and desired results including:*
  - Delegation for the implementation of the vision
  - Planning (Richard Celeste said, “Planning should be reality-based and vision-driven.”) - What is planning?
    - Planning is simulation.
    - Planning anticipates.
    - Planning is dynamic.
    - Planning involves delegation.
    - Strategic planning ... creates **focus** and a **shared vision** that stakeholders can buy into.
  - The board guides planning by:
    - Reviewing vision/mission.
    - Evaluating what works.
    - Reviewing priorities.
    - Establishing parameters for staff.

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*MSC Handbook to establish a Mennonite school—page 49*
Maintain board policies on all aspects of governance.
(Note differentiation between board policies and staff/institutional policies.)
- Ideally compiled in one document (See end of this section for a sample outline of a board manual.)
- Speaks to how the board functions.
- Provides clarity to administrator/principal/CEO.
- “Policy” = instruction to the future, based on experience and collective wisdom. Good polices should be:
  - Explicit and always in written form.
  - Centrally available and kept in one document (not in years of minutes).
  - Current, changing after each board meeting to reflect new data and wisdom.
  - Literally mean what they say—not full of legal jargon.
  - Brief and never exceeding 15 to 20 pages.
  - Consistent with law, its articles of incorporation and its bylaws.
  - Comprehensive, encompassing the entirety of that which is governed.
  - Limited, leaving details to management policies written later by CEO.

Select an administrator/principal/CEO and hold the person accountable. Questions the board should ask:
- How do board and chief executive responsibilities differ?
- What are the expectations for the CEO? What are the CEO’s expectations of the board?

Ensure financial solvency and integrity. (Set wise financial policies.) Questions the board should ask:
- How closely do we monitor our financial activity compared with what was budgeted?
- What internal controls are in place in our organization?
- What is our strategy to ensure the long-term financial health of the organization?
Concerning the establishment of wise financial policies, the board should:

- Approve annual budgets.
- Require annual external audits.
- Have a policy on suspected misconduct and dishonesty.
- Appoint an audit committee—give it power and authority; and make it independent from the CEO.
- Handle risk management.
- Adopt a code of ethics (including a conflict-of-interest policy) and enforce compliance.
- Create a confidential complaint mechanism relating to financial issues.
- Document and evaluate internal controls.

As a result of the excesses in corporate governance, the **Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002**—one of the most important pieces of legislature affecting corporate governance—was passed by Congress. This act required a higher degree of financial exposure than ever before and changed accounting practices in significant ways. While the act was originally intended to be a response to the excesses of private corporations like Enron, its requirements also affected public and not-for-profit organizations. One of the roles of the board members is to provide financial oversight to the institution.

Fiduciary responsibility is defined as managing the assets for the benefit of others rather than for his or her own profits. Board members provide oversight to its assets on behalf of the greater community. This fiduciary responsibility extends beyond what happens during the board member’s term to the custodianship of the institution’s assets and liabilities that were accumulated prior to becoming board member.

It is true, that “financial expertise of board members varies,” and not all board members will be financial experts. What should be expected of all board members is an essential understanding of financial terminology, the ability to read...
financial statements and the willingness to ask questions about the financial status of the institution.

Andrew S. Lang, in *The Financial Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards* (BoardSource, 2003), suggests that the following are key questions that board members should ask:

- Have we run a gain or a loss?
- Are our key sources of income rising or falling?
- Are our key expenses, especially salary and benefits, under control?
- Do we have sufficient reserves?
- Is our cash flow projected to be adequate?
- Where are we compared with budget?
- Is our financial plan consistent with our strategic plan?
- Is our staff satisfied and productive?
- Are we filing all needed reporting documents on a timely basis?
- Are we fulfilling all of our legal obligations?

Some additional questions could be:

- How does the financial plan strengthen the mission of the institution?
- Are there reserves enough to cover operational costs of the organization and for how long? (An institution should have a policy that specifies the amount of the financial reserves.)
- Does the institution have an adequate financial system to protect the integrity of its finances?

*Encourage and nurture administrators, faculty and staff.*

(primarily through good policies, fair compensations, appropriate involvement)

- Monitor—Is it happening?
- Evaluate—Is it having the desired effect? Boards should evaluate/assess at least the following three things:
Itself
- Do we add value to the process or are we mostly along for the ride?
- Do we make decisions or do we just mostly observe?
- Do we do more than react to what staff brings us?
- Do we proactively engage the future?
- Are we a learning organization? Are our learnings reduced to writing and a manual readily available to be consulted?
- Is our board representative of the membership? Does it have the requisite skills? Is continuity of leadership provided?
- Are our meetings productive?
- When do we celebrate our accomplishments?

Program—It is through the program that members’ expectations are realized. Remember, organizations exist to do.
- Is the mission happening?
- How could it happen better?
- What is winding down or wearing out? (vulnerabilities)
- What is waiting for its turn? (vision, opportunities)
- Are we well-positioned for the future?
- The process is completed when the evaluation results have been incorporated into the annual planning process.

Administrator/principal/CEO—The board provides three things:
- A job description (outcomes-based, not activities)
- Annual performance evaluation with a review that includes affirmation, areas for growth/improvement and a review of salary, benefits, training, tenure, etc.
- Administrative reviews summarized in writing and reported to the board in executive session.
- Support
Effective Meetings
(Good boards have good meetings; lousy boards have lousy meetings.)

Seven signs of good board meetings
1. Meetings are short and focused.
2. Important decisions are made.
3. There is ample discussion not dominated by a few persons.
4. Attendance is great.
5. Re-appointments include an evaluation process of the board member.
6. There are no secrets and everyone is involved.
7. The meeting atmosphere is relaxed.

Four practices that contribute to a positive institutional board culture
1. Consciously recognizes the differences in its ranks and seeks to understand them with an open mind.
2. Creates opportunities and allows the time for diverse directors to become personally acquainted.
3. Cultivates an atmosphere of open-mindedness, tolerance and respect.
4. Keeps focused on a shared vision, driving differences into insignificance.

Things not to do at meetings
• Don’t spend quality time doing staff work.
• Don’t spend much time on the past or the present. The board’s domain is the future. What should the allocation of board meeting time be towards past, present and future?
• Don’t avoid or ignore problems.
• Don’t violate the doctrine of completed staff and committee work. There is no need for the board to redo the work that has already been done.
Meeting time
As a rule, it is suggested that board meeting time should be broken up in the following way:

- 20% Reviewing reports (Past: This already took place.)
- 20% Business in progress (Present)
- 60% Planning (Future: What will happen in 5, 10, 15 years from now?)

(A sample chart for the board to evaluate how meeting time is being spent can be found at the end of this section.)

Role of the Board Chair

First Principle
The chairperson manages the board. The principal/school administrator manages the school.

Desired Traits
Knowledge of organization, leadership qualities, fair and objective, able to delegate and motivate volunteers, good facilitator of meetings, willing to make difficult decisions, positive communicator, etc.

Time Required
Normally 50% more than other active board members.

Primary Role
The job “product” of the chair is primarily the integrity of the board’s process. The chair “leads the board.” The chair ...

- is the only board member authorized to speak for the board as a group (other than in rare and specifically authorized instances).
- models involvement.
- interprets board’s feelings to the principal/school administrator.
- develops board meeting agendas with the principal/school administrator.
- insists on good board training.
Enforcement Role

- The chair ensures that the board behaves consistently with its own rules.
- Meetings deal only with those issues which belong to the board to decide.
- The chair minimizes cliques within the board and deals with division or dissatisfaction as appropriate. The chair makes sure everybody participates.

Special Authority

The authority of the chair consists only in making decisions on behalf of the board which fall within and are consistent with any reasonable interpretation of board policies on governance process and on the board-principal/school administrator relationship. The chair has no authority to make policy-related decisions beyond policies created by the board.

Relationship with CEO

The chair is expected to maintain close communication, offer advice, provide feedback from board members, ensure a good performance and compensation review, and provide encouragement.

Helpful Principles and Tips for Board Committees

- Have only the committees the board absolutely needs.
- Reassess every couple years.
- It is often best that each director serves on only one committee (except the executive committee).
- Bylaws should authorize committees, but other policies could list and define their roles.
- Common committees: executive, program, finance, fundraising, board development (nominating, member orientation/training, evaluation, bylaw review, etc.).
- Normally the board chair appoints committee members/chairs for one-year terms with board approval. Keep great committee chairs as long as possible.
• If an executive committee is used, other committee chairpersons often sit on it to improve coordination and communication. Its authority should be limited in bylaws or policies.
• Consider allowing non-directors to be appointed to committees as a way to tap special expertise and groom people for future board membership.
• Each committee needs a clear job description approved by the full board.
• Specific, one-time tasks doable in specific number of weeks/months (e.g., whether/how to refurbish a building) should be assigned to ad hoc task forces—volunteers on or off the board with special abilities—rather than to a standing committee.
• Both board members and staff need to reinforce the concept that committees should not make policies independent of the board and are not there to “manage” staff.
• Someone must keep good, brief minutes of committee meetings for board reports.
• Beyond board committees or task forces, the CEO often appoints and convenes other volunteer groups to help staff plan or implement board-approved programs. Some board members, wearing their volunteer hats, might be asked to serve on those groups as well.

**Board Building Cycle**

**Step 1:** Identify the needs of the board—the skills, knowledge, perspectives, connections, etc., needed to implement the strategic plan.
**Step 2:** Cultivate potential board members.
**Step 3:** Recruit prospects.
**Step 4:** Orient new board members both to the organization and to the board.
**Step 5:** Engage all board members.
**Step 6:** Educate the board.
Step 7: Rotate board members.
Step 8: Evaluate the board as a whole, as well as individual board members.
Step 9: Celebrate! Recognize victories and progress, no matter how small.

Carlos Romero
June 26, 2009

Samples

A sample index for a board policy manual:
New Mennonite School
Board of Directors Governance Policies

Index

Section 1: Mission, Purposes and Outcomes
Mission: Why we exist
Purpose: What we will do
Outcomes: What will we accomplish

Section 2: Governance Process
Governing Philosophy
Board Job Description
Agenda Planning
Role of Board Officers
Board Members Code of Conduct
Board Committee Principles
Board Committee Structure
Development of Governance Capacity

Section 3: Board of Directors & Principal Relationships
Accountability of the Principal
Delegation to the Principal
Monitoring/Evaluating Principal
Section 4: Principal Authority, Responsibility and Limitations
Relationships with Constituency
Relationship with Parents
Relationships with Staff
Financial Planning/Budgeting
Financial Management and Conditions
Asset Protection
Compensation and Benefits
Communication and Support to the Board
Succession Plan

A sample chart for the board to evaluate how meeting time is being spent (The percentages are just suggestions. Adaptations to local needs and situations will be necessary.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Time presently spent</th>
<th>What should it be?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reviewing Reports</strong> (Past: This already took place)</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Business in Progress</strong> (Present)</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Planning</strong> (Future: What will happen 5, 10, 15 years from now?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you may discern the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.”
Romans 12:2

Adopted as the vision of Mennonite Education Agency, the education agency of Mennonite Church USA