

International School Anti-Discrimination Taskforce (ISADTF)

Governance Committee Guidance Document

2026



**INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL ANTI-DISCRIMINATION
TASK FORCE**



Governance Committee Draft Contributors

This first draft draws on the Governance Committee working document and the contributors referenced within those notes.

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ABSTRACT

The International School Anti-Discrimination Taskforce (ISADTF) is committed to helping schools address implicit bias and eliminate racism and discrimination in all forms. This effort represents a collaborative partnership between ECIS, the International Baccalaureate (IB), AIELOC, and Ecolint, working together to foster more inclusive and equitable school environments.

The ISADTF Governance Committee is focused on how boards can use their governance role to advance anti-discrimination, equity, inclusion, and belonging in international schools.

Because boards shape policy, strategic direction, oversight, accountability, and resourcing, they play an essential role in creating the conditions for DEIJ commitments to be sustained over time. This guidance document offers a practical framework to help boards move beyond general statements of support and toward clearer governance practices.

We recognize the challenge to create a unifying plan in that governance structures vary broadly from one international school to the next: from perpetual boards to frequent schoolwide elections, from appointees based on expertise to appointees based on founding supporters of the school, from schools that give educators seats on the board to schools that exclude educators from having a voice on the board, from nonprofit schools to for-profit schools, from individual stand-alone institutions to schools that are part of a group of over 100 schools, and so on. We have included an anti-discrimination framework of broad measures that all types of boards would be able to implement.

This framework is organized around five areas of board responsibility:

1. governance policy and foundational commitments,
2. community voice and strategic direction,
3. oversight, accountability and resourcing,
4. board composition and succession, and
5. board onboarding and continuous development.

We recognize that this work takes place in a broader context in which commitments to equity and inclusion are increasingly contested. This framework is designed to help boards sustain DEIJ efforts with clarity and confidence, especially when those commitments face external pressure or internal resistance. Governance-level commitment matters most when it is tested. Boards that have embedded equity and anti-discrimination into policy, oversight, composition, and culture are better positioned to hold steady, grounding decisions in their governing documents, community commitments, and the school's stated values.

Collectively and consistent with the collaborative and community-centered approach of the ISADTF, this framework is offered for voluntary adoption by international school boards. It is designed to support reflection, dialogue, and continuous improvement, while recognizing that the responsibility to advance anti-discrimination work is both timely and essential. Its strength and impact will depend on boards choosing to adopt, adapt, and sustain these recommendations so that stated commitments to belonging, integrity, transparency, and accountability are reflected in governance practice.

ISADTF Governance Committee Guidance Document for Schools

Introduction

The International School Anti-Discrimination Taskforce (ISADTF) is committed to helping schools address implicit bias and eliminate racism and discrimination in all forms. Within that broader effort, the Governance Committee is focused on the role of boards and other governance bodies in shaping institutional direction, expectations, accountability, and culture.

Boards are uniquely positioned to influence whether DEIJ commitments are treated as peripheral concerns or as core elements of how schools govern themselves. Through their responsibility for policy, fiduciary oversight, strategic direction, accountability, and resourcing, boards help establish the conditions that allow anti-discrimination and inclusion efforts to take root and endure. Many schools have made meaningful commitments in this area, but those commitments are more likely to be sustained when they are reflected in governance structures and board practice.

This framework is intended to help boards and school leaders consider how governance can more actively support anti-discrimination, equity, inclusion, and belonging. It is designed as a practical first-pass framework that schools can adapt to their own context as they review governance policy, strategic direction, oversight practices, board composition, and board development.

The framework is organized around five areas of board impact. Together, they encourage boards to view DEIJ not only as a programmatic or operational concern, but also as a governance responsibility that requires clarity, consistency, reflection, and accountability.

Goals

The goals of this framework are to:

- strengthen governance policy and board practice
- ensure community experience informs strategic direction
- support board-level accountability for implementation
- encourage more representative and well-prepared boards
- promote onboarding and ongoing development that build long-term governance capacity.

Key participants in this work include:

- boards and board chairs
- heads of school and senior leaders
- designated DEIJ leaders
- the broader school community whose experiences should inform board reflection and decision-making.

Recommendations

1. Governance Policy and Foundational Board Commitments

Governance policy is one of the clearest ways a board communicates what it values and what it expects. Boards can support DEIJ through governing policy that goes beyond general anti-discrimination language and more clearly defines the board's role in shaping inclusive, accountable school conditions.

Ensure governance policy supports DEIJ beyond anti-discrimination. Boards should review and strengthen governing policies so that equity, inclusion, belonging, anti-discrimination, and accountability are visible in governance expectations, rather than left only to operational documents or isolated statements. This may include governing policy language related to board culture, trustee recruitment, strategic oversight, ethical conduct, whole school community engagement, and reporting expectations.

Define governance language clearly. A shared governance vocabulary can support transparency, consistency, and understanding across the school community. Defining key terms such as DEIJ, anti-discrimination, belonging, fiduciary responsibility, stakeholder voice, and community alignment can help reduce confusion and strengthen accountability.

Review governing statements for alignment. When schools revise mission, vision, strategic frameworks, or other guiding statements, boards should consider whether DEIJ values are clearly reflected and whether governance language aligns with the broader commitments the school seeks to uphold.

Review alignment with external standards and expectations. Boards should consider whether their governing statements, policies, and practices align with the relevant DEIJ, anti-discrimination, inclusion, belonging, equity, and access expectations of their accreditation, authorization, and membership organizations. Terminology and formal requirements vary by organization and local context. Nevertheless, external frameworks increasingly connect non-discrimination, inclusive culture, stakeholder voice, equitable access, and evidence of implementation to educational quality. Alignment should reinforce, not replace, the board's own responsibility for policy, oversight, resourcing, community accountability, and continuous learning. See notes in the Appendix.

2. Community Voice and Strategic Direction

Boards should not approach DEIJ only as a compliance issue. Instead, boards should ensure that community voice is heard and that strategic direction reflects the lived experiences and aspirations of the broader school community.

Center DEIJ values in a strategic direction. Boards should ensure that strategic planning and governance discussions explicitly consider equity, inclusion, belonging, and anti-discrimination. Strategic direction should reflect both institutional priorities and the lived realities of the broader school community.

Use existing community feedback to inform board work. Boards should draw on the feedback, data, and community insight already gathered through school processes to provide context when setting strategic priorities, reviewing governing policies, and revising mission, vision, or guiding statements.

Review whether board discussions reflect a broad view of community experience. Boards should consider whether the information they receive represents a sufficiently wide range of perspectives across the school community. This helps ensure governance decisions are informed, balanced, and aligned with community realities.

Sustaining Governance Efforts

Sustaining governance-level DEIJ efforts requires more than a single policy statement or one cycle of training. Here are a few tools for reflection and alignment.

1. [Board Self-Analysis Tool](#). A board can use a tool that supports reflection along a spectrum of anti-discriminatory and inclusive practices. Boards can use a board-level DEIJ reflection and planning tool at [Board members self-evaluation tool 1.0](#). Boards that have an average score above 3 can then use [Board members self-evaluation tool 2.0](#).

2. [Community Analysis Tool](#). A companion tool could allow schools to compare their own views and aspirations with broader community perceptions, helping identify areas of alignment and disconnection: [Community members self-evaluation tool 1.0](#). Schools that have an average score above 3 should use [Community members self-evaluation tool 2.0](#).

3. Oversight, Accountability and Resourcing

One of the board's central responsibilities is oversight. Boards should play an active role in monitoring whether DEIJ-related commitments are being implemented, whether progress is being made over time, and whether the school's stated priorities are supported through clear accountability and appropriate resources.

Provide oversight and ensure accountability for implementation. Boards, in partnership with the Head of School, should establish a reporting structure that allows them to monitor anti-discrimination and DEIJ implementation in a meaningful and sustained way. This should move beyond general statements of commitment and include clear annual priorities, periodic leadership reports, relevant dashboard indicators, board review cycles, and expectations for follow-through. Reporting should help the board understand what progress is being made, where barriers remain, how community concerns are being addressed, and whether the school's practices are aligned with its stated commitments to belonging, equity, integrity, and accountability.

To support trust, schools should also be clear about how information is shared, when confidentiality is necessary, and how concerns or patterns will be brought forward responsibly. Confidentiality has an important role in protecting individuals, privacy, and due process, but it should not be used to obscure recurring concerns, silence community voice, or prevent appropriate accountability. Where concerns involve potential conflicts of

interest, schools should ensure that reporting and review processes allow for appropriate independence, so that individuals directly connected to a concern are not solely responsible for determining how it is addressed.

Prioritize DEIJ in regular board work. Boards can reinforce the importance of DEIJ by embedding it into the regular rhythm of governance, rather than addressing it only in response to incidents, tension, or community concern. This means considering DEIJ implications as part of strategic discussions, policy review, data analysis, risk oversight, resource allocation, and progress monitoring. When DEIJ is treated as part of the board's ongoing governance responsibilities, it becomes easier to sustain attention, identify gaps, and hold the school accountable for aligning practice with stated commitments.

Use reporting and indicators to monitor progress. Oversight is stronger when boards identify how progress will be measured, reviewed, and discussed over time. Boards should ensure that DEIJ-related goals, community commitments, and schoolwide efforts are supported by meaningful qualitative and quantitative indicators. Reporting should help the board understand whether commitments are translating into practice, where progress is evident, where barriers or patterns of concern remain, and what follow-through is needed.

Ensure DEIJ commitments are appropriately resourced. When DEIJ is a stated priority, boards have a responsibility to ask whether it is supported by the people, budget, structures, and professional learning needed to move from intention to implementation. Resourcing decisions are one way boards demonstrate that stated commitments are meant to be sustained in practice.

Review progress regularly and communicate appropriately. Boards should determine how progress will be reviewed over time and what information should be shared with the community to strengthen trust and transparency. Public communication should be thoughtful and appropriate to the board's role, while still signaling that DEIJ commitments are being taken seriously and monitored with care.

4. Board Composition and Succession

Board diversity is an important governance issue. Boards that aim to support inclusive school communities should also examine whether their own composition, recruitment practices, and succession systems reflect those aims.

Ensure board composition reflects the diversity of the school community. Boards should consider whether their composition brings a range of perspectives, backgrounds, lived experiences, and identities that help them govern well and understand the community they serve. Diversity does not require perfect representation of every group, but it does require intentional attention to whose voices and viewpoints are present in the boardroom.

Clarify how board members are selected. Board diversity is shaped not only by who serves, but by the structures that determine who gets on the board in the first place. Boards should review whether elections, appointments, nomination processes, eligibility

requirements, and informal networks are helping or limiting the goal of building a strong and diverse governing body.

Use intentional recruitment and succession planning to build board strength over time. Strong boards do not approach vacancies reactively. They plan ahead for future leadership, expertise, representation, and continuity needs, while working within the realities of their governance structure. Governance committees can use skills and perspective matrices, term planning, and succession tools to identify gaps and support more purposeful, transparent, and long-term recruitment.

Where board members are elected by the community or appointed by external agencies, this work should focus on what the board can responsibly influence: clarifying needed skills and perspectives, communicating the responsibilities of board service, encouraging broad and qualified participation, preparing future board leaders, and ensuring effective onboarding. This helps strengthen representation, support continuity, and build the board's long-term effectiveness.

Examine structural barriers to participation. Boards should reflect on whether existing processes or expectations unintentionally limit who is able to consider, pursue, or sustain board service. This may include election processes, trustee expectations, meeting times, language, time demands, financial expectations, informal networks, or assumptions about who is "ready" or "qualified" to serve. Building a more inclusive board requires attention not only to recruitment, but also to the structures and norms that shape access, participation, and belonging.

Create transparent pathways into board service. Diversity is strengthened when access to board service is clear, open, and well communicated. Boards should ensure that community members understand how board roles are filled, what the process involves, and what knowledge, skills, perspectives, and commitments are needed for effective governance. This is especially important in schools where board members are elected, nominated, or appointed through different pathways. Clear communication helps broaden participation, reduce perceptions of exclusivity, and build trust that board service is accessible to a wider range of qualified community members.

Consider board culture. Board diversity adds value when members are able to contribute fully to the board's governance work. Boards should reflect on whether the board's culture, leadership practices, and meeting dynamics allow different perspectives to be heard, respected, and meaningfully considered in decision-making. This requires intentional attention to participation patterns, board norms, leadership behaviors, and the ways boards engage with disagreement, dissent, and diverse lived experiences.

5. Board Onboarding and Continuous Development

Onboarding and DEIJ training as essential board responsibilities. If boards expect to govern inclusively, members need a shared understanding of the school's commitments, governance role, and community expectations.

Create a consistent onboarding framework for all trustees. Trustee onboarding should provide a shared foundation for effective, values-aligned governance. In addition to

orientation sessions, key governance documents, role clarity, board norms or agreements, and access to organized archives, onboarding should introduce trustees to the school's anti-discrimination and DEIJ commitments, relevant policies, expectations for ethical conduct, community context, and the board's role in supporting equity, belonging, and accountability. This helps ensure that all trustees begin their service with a common understanding of their responsibilities, shared language, and the board's role in sustaining belonging, integrity, transparency, and accountability.

Provide ongoing learning, not one-time training. Effective board development should be ongoing, intentional, and connected to the board's governance responsibilities. Trustees should have regular opportunities to deepen their understanding of inclusive governance, anti-discrimination commitments, ethical conduct, bias, decision-making, and community accountability. This learning should connect to board self-assessment, board goals, and ongoing governance review so that it leads to stronger board behavior, not only greater knowledge. When learning continues throughout a trustee's term, boards are better able to sustain shared expectations, strengthen governance practice, and respond thoughtfully to changing school needs and community realities.

Support new trustees beyond initial orientation. Onboarding should not end with an orientation session or access to documents. Boards should provide structured support during a trustee's first year of service so that new members have opportunities to ask questions, understand board culture, clarify expectations, and apply their learning in real governance discussions. This may include a board mentor, periodic check-ins with the Board Chair or Governance Committee, guided review of key decisions or past board work, and space to reflect on how the board's commitments to anti-discrimination, belonging, integrity, and accountability show up in practice. Sustained support helps new trustees move from awareness to confident, responsible participation.

Conclusion

The Governance Committee's recommendations position boards as an essential force in creating and sustaining anti-discriminatory and inclusive international schools. Through stronger governance policy, more community-informed strategic direction, clearer oversight and accountability, more intentional board composition, and stronger onboarding and continuous development, boards can help move schools from stated commitment to sustained governance practice.

This first draft is intended to organize the committee's working ideas into a more formal and usable guidance document. As the committee continues its work, future versions can be strengthened through examples, tools, anonymized case material, and closer alignment with related ISADTF guidance.

Most importantly, this work should be understood as ongoing. Governance-level DEIJ work is not accomplished through a single policy revision or one cycle of training. It requires sustained reflection, consistent monitoring, thoughtful board development, and continued alignment between community commitments and governance practice over time.

Appendix: Resources

1. Governance Policy and Foundational Board Commitments

Across accreditation, authorization, and membership organizations, the language varies — I-DEA, IDEB, EIA, DEIJB, diversity and anti-racism, equity and justice, and freedom from bias — but the direction is consistent: inclusion and non-discrimination are increasingly treated as matters of institutional quality, evidence, improvement, and accountability. The most explicit public governance expectations are currently found in COBIS and SAIS; ICAISA extends the signal to the accrediting associations themselves. [Summary findings from each agency can be found here.](#)

- Boardsource has several high quality resources on definitions including:
 - its [Glossary of Nonprofit Governance](#) (with a variety of terminology applicable to for profit schools as well)
 - their article on [Roles and Responsibilities](#)
 - their 33 page [Racial Equity Tools Glossary](#)
 - their list of [blogs on Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#)
- Additionally, there are three articles by Boardsource on “Conflict of Interest”
 - [Conflict of Interest Examples and Samples](#)
 - [Conflict of Interest for Nonprofits](#)
 - [Conflict of Interest Policy: Definition, Examples, and Template](#)
- Governance Policy template – page 19
- UNIS Hanoi School Policy Document
[https://www.unishanoi.org/uploaded/About Us/Board of Directors/Governance Documents August 2017/Approved SPD Updates 4th June 2019.pdf](https://www.unishanoi.org/uploaded/About%20Us/Board%20of%20Directors/Governance%20Documents%20August%202017/Approved%20SPD%20Updates%204th%20June%202019.pdf)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

2. Community Voice and Strategic Direction

- Boards can also support the leadership team to implement a whole-community DEIJ self-evaluation tool used to identify strengths, surface concerns, and inform school-wide improvement to inform strategic planning.
 - [Community members self-evaluation tool 1.0](#). Schools that have an average score above 3 should use [Community members self-evaluation tool 2.0](#).
- Boards can use a board-level DEIJ reflection and planning tool at [Board members self-evaluation tool 1.0](#). Boards that have an average score above 3 can then use [Board members self-evaluation tool 2.0](#).

3. Oversight, Accountability and Resourcing

- Reporting Dashboard example – page 30

4. Board Composition and Succession

- Succession Planning guide, including skills matrix – page 33

5. Board Onboarding and Continuous Development

- Onboarding sample program– page 35
- Board Member Role Description – page 38

Appendix: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

<https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention>

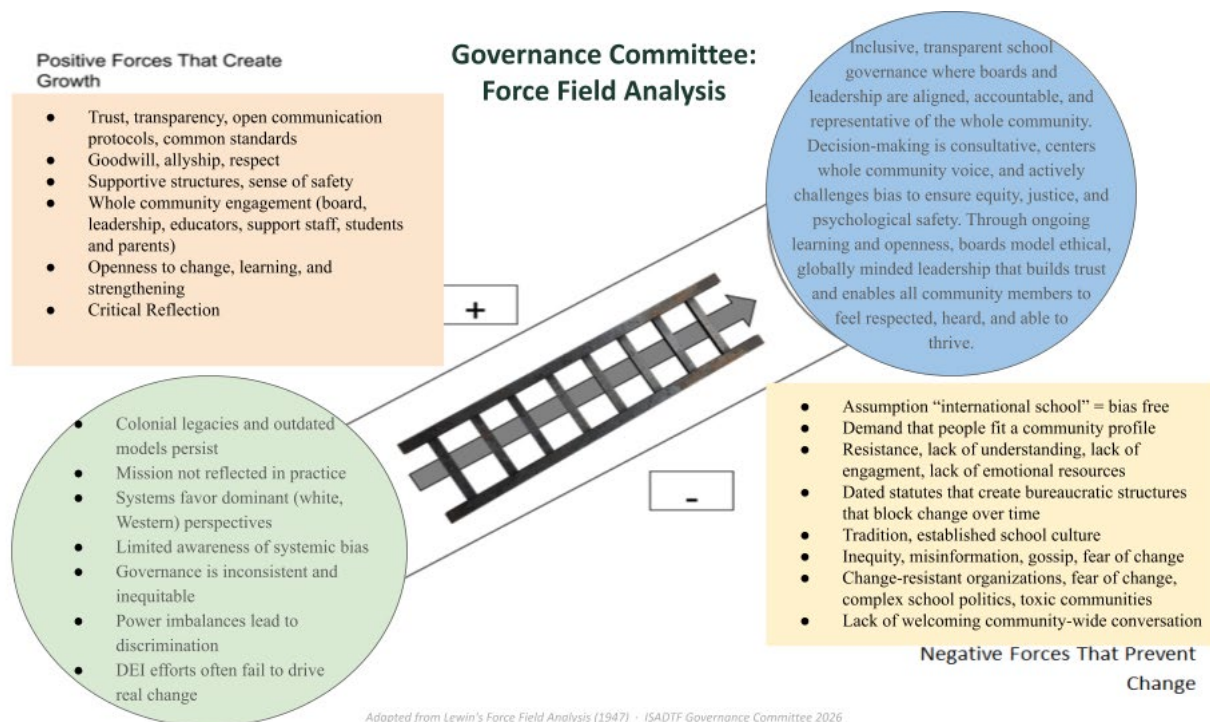
Ten international school accreditation and authorization agencies signed the International Task Force on Child Protection's Statement of Commitment to Child Protection on 7 February 2016 (ICMEC, 2016, pp. 5–7). These agencies included Cognia (then AdvancED), CfBT Education Trust, the Council of International Schools, COBIS, the International Baccalaureate, the Independent Schools Inspectorate, the MSA, the NEASC, PENTA International, and the WASC.

The agreement's first policy expectation states that schools must adopt "a values statement about the rights of the child" aligned with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (ICMEC, 2016, p. 6). Article 2 of the UNCRC affirms that education must be accessible to every child without discrimination based on race, sex, language, religion, nationality, disability, or other status (United Nations, 1989).

Thus, accreditation agencies serving thousands of international schools identify alignment with UNCRC child-rights values as a foundational expectation.

Appendix: History of Governance Committee Work

Our committee began with community members contributing to Force Field Analysis of positive forces, negative forces, where we feel we are (green) and where we want to go (blue).



(link to [Force Field Analysis](#) for larger view)

The summary goals and aspiration in the blue circle were and are:

Inclusive, transparent school governance where boards and leadership are aligned, accountable, and representative of the whole community.

Decision-making is consultative, centers whole community voice, and actively challenges bias to ensure equity, justice, and psychological safety.

Through ongoing learning and openness, boards model ethical, globally minded leadership that builds trust and enables all community members to feel respected, heard, and able to thrive.

Appendix: ISADTF Presentations

ISADTF Meeting Recording, Nov 6 2023-24

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1ATC2eKnzIxAjwneSddpZ2NvgZIBBKc6a>

ISADTF Leadership Committee presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9Hj0OQEfS4>

ISADTF Human Resources Committee presentation

Presentation coming on April 17

Guiding document: <https://isadtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ISADTF-Recommendations-for-Human-Resources.pdf>

ISADTF Accreditation Committee presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cADuHirQWL8>

Accreditation Committee guide - <https://isadtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/ISADTF-Accreditation-Committee-Guidance1.pdf>

ISADTF Humanizing Pedagogy Committee presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krpqt099JPM>

Guiding document: <https://isadtf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/ISADTF-Humanising-Pedagogy-Guidance-October-2024.pdf>

Microsite with examples/stories: <https://sites.google.com/view/isadtf/home%20>

ISADTF Student Agency Committee presentation

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DFdRG9UqJI>

NOTES TO CONSIDER FOR THE FUTURE ITERATIONS OR CREATION OF MONITORING SYSTEMS

Vision Statements

I've seen schools without a vision statement -- most often in Europe. When asking questions of why there's no vision to these communities, I've been told they feel mission plus "strategy" is enough.

In the event that this work does become part of ITFCP, I would be in favor of suggesting all schools should have a "vision". Strategies change more easily with changes in Board makeup. Vision is a north star the community points toward.

PDF Resources

The following resources are attached here.

- **Governance Policy Template** – page 19
- **DEIJ Reporting Dashboard Example** – page 30
- **Succession Planning guide, including skills matrix** – page 33
- **Onboarding Sample Program** – page 35
- **Board Member Role Description** – page 38

Governance Policies Template



Submitted by:
Kristi Williams

Introduction and Purpose

Many international schools have developed their governance documentation over time, often in response to immediate needs, specific incidents, leadership transitions, or changing community expectations. As a result, what is often called a “board policy manual” can become very large, difficult to navigate, and challenging to apply consistently. In many cases, these manuals contain a mixture of true governing policies, operational procedures, internal practices, and step-by-step processes. While all of those documents may be important, they do not serve the same purpose and should not live in the same place.

This Governance Policies document is designed to bring clarity to that distinction.

The purpose of Governance Policies is to establish the board’s governing expectations, define areas of authority and accountability, and provide a clear framework for how the school is to be led and overseen at the governance level. These policies are intended to be concise, durable, and practical. They should be easy to understand, easy to reference, and strong enough to guide decisions, clarify responsibilities, and hold the appropriate parties accountable.

A well-designed Governance Policies document is not meant to describe every task, process, or administrative step required to run the school. Instead, it provides the higher-level direction within which the Head of School and administration lead and operate. It also sets clear expectations for conduct, responsibilities, and standards across the school community, including board members, employees, students, and parents, where governance-level expectations are appropriate. In this way, Governance Policies help protect the distinction between governance and management while strengthening the partnership between the board and the Head of School.

Why Move Away from a Traditional “Board Policy Manual”

Many schools have what they call a “board policy manual,” but the name itself is often in contradiction to what the document has become. A policy manual frequently contains both governing policies and detailed operational guidance, even though those are different kinds of documents serving different purposes. Policies should establish expectations, authority, accountability, and standards. Manuals and handbooks should provide the procedures, processes, and practical guidance for implementation. When these are combined into one large document, governance becomes harder to navigate, harder to uphold, and more likely to drift into operational detail. A stronger approach is to maintain a concise Governance Policies document supported by separate manuals, handbooks, and procedural guides.

What Governance Policies Are

Governance Policies are the board’s formal statements that define the framework for governing the school. They communicate what must be upheld, who has authority, what standards apply, and how accountability is maintained. They also establish important expectations for the school community, including standards of conduct, boundaries of responsibility, and principles that guide how board members, school leaders, employees, students, and parents engage with the life of the school.

Good Governance Policies are:

Clear

They are written in straightforward language so that board members, the Head of School, employees, parents, and other stakeholders can understand what is expected.

Concise

They focus on the governing principle or requirement, not on every step involved in implementation.

Governance-focused

They address board authority, delegation, accountability, conduct, oversight, risk, strategic direction, and key institutional expectations rather than day-to-day administration.

Durable

They are designed to remain relevant over time, even as operational practices, staffing, tools, or structures change.

Usable

They can be easily referenced when making decisions, resolving questions of authority, clarifying expectations, or reviewing whether standards have been met.

At their best, Governance Policies create alignment. They help the board govern with greater discipline, help the Head of School lead with greater clarity, and help the broader school community understand the structures, expectations, and behaviors that support institutional integrity and long-term sustainability.

What Governance Policies Are Not

Governance Policies are not detailed operational manuals. They are not intended to prescribe the exact administrative process for every issue or decision. They are also not meant to replace employee handbooks, parent-student handbooks, committee procedures, crisis protocols, or internal administrative guidance.

This distinction matters.

A policy might state that the school will maintain a fair and timely grievance process and that unresolved matters will follow a clear escalation pathway.

A procedure would describe exactly how a grievance is submitted, who receives it, how many days each level has to respond, what forms are used, where records are stored, and how appeals are documented.

Both are important, but they serve different purposes and should be maintained differently.

The Relationship Between Governance Policies and Procedures

Governance Policies and procedures should work together, but they should not be confused with one another.

Governance Policies answer questions such as:

- What does the board expect?

- What standard must be upheld?
- Who has authority for what?
- What are the expectations for behavior, conduct, and accountability?
- What is delegated?
- What must be monitored or reported?
- What are the boundaries or non-negotiables?

Procedures answer questions such as:

- How is this carried out in practice?
- Who does what, when, and in what sequence?
- What forms, systems, or tools are used?
- What operational steps must staff follow?

In a healthy governance structure, the board approves and upholds Governance Policies. The Head of School is then responsible for implementing those policies through leadership decisions, internal procedures, handbooks, and operational systems, unless a specific area is reserved to the board by policy, bylaws, or law.

This separation strengthens governance in several ways. It allows the board to stay focused on purpose, oversight, and accountability. It gives school leaders the appropriate authority to manage implementation. It also allows procedures to be updated more efficiently as school needs evolve, without requiring the board to repeatedly revise governance documents for operational reasons.

Policy Versus Procedure: Illustrative Examples

Below are simple examples to show the difference between a governance policy and a procedure.

Area	Governance Policy	Procedure
Financial Oversight	The board approves an annual budget, monitors financial performance, and requires regular reporting on the school's financial health.	The finance office prepares monthly reports using specific templates, submits them by a set date, and follows defined approval and reconciliation steps.
Grievances	The school will maintain a fair process for addressing complaints, with matters addressed at the lowest appropriate level and escalated when necessary.	A complaint is submitted in writing to the relevant administrator, responded to within a defined timeframe, and escalated step-by-step through a stated process.
Risk Management	The board requires the school to identify, monitor, and report on significant institutional risks.	The leadership team maintains a risk register, updates it quarterly, assigns risk owners, and presents summary reports to the board.

A Final Note on Intent

The goal of Governance Policies is not simply to shorten a document. The goal is to strengthen governance.

A shorter, clearer governance document helps everyone. It helps boards stay focused on the work only they can do. It helps Heads of School lead with appropriate authority. It helps employees, parents, and students better understand the standards and expectations that shape the school community. It helps future leaders and trustees understand the governing framework they are stepping into. Most importantly, it helps the school build a culture of clarity, consistency, and accountability.

When governance policies are written well, they provide enough structure to guide decisions and uphold standards without overreaching into day-to-day management. They create a stable framework for responsible leadership while leaving space for professional judgment, operational adaptability, and institutional growth.

That is the purpose of this Governance Policies document: to provide a clear governing framework that is easy to navigate, easy to uphold, and strong enough to support the long-term health, integrity, and effectiveness of the school.

Following is a recommended outline and sample policies

Recommended sections/policies to be included.

1. Introduction – defining the framework
2. Purpose/Foundational Statements
3. Governance
4. Finance
5. Assets
6. Risk Management
7. Admissions
8. Educational Program
9. Personnel
10. Students
11. Community

As you develop these sections, it will help to keep each policy at the level of:

- expectation
- authority
- accountability
- boundary
- standard

rather than:

- process
- steps
- forms
- timelines
- implementation details

1. Introduction

This section should explain the purpose and nature of the Governance Policies document itself. It should clarify that the document provides the board's governing framework for authority, accountability, expectations, and oversight, while operational procedures and handbooks sit elsewhere. It can also explain the distinction between governance and management and how the document should be used by the board, Head of School, and broader community.

Sample Policies

- The Board of Governors, in consultation with the Head of School, is responsible for the definition of the Governance policies which are consistent with the purpose of the School as defined by the Statutes and Bylaws.
- The Board of Governors has the authority to modify these Governance policies.
- The Governance policies will be reviewed according to the cycle defined in the Board Manual, or as required, to ensure that they are appropriate and relevant to the current strategic and operating environment.
- The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that organizational processes and operational procedures are aligned with and adhere to these policies and is responsible for the development and maintenance of Handbooks and Procedure Manuals which outline the specific guidelines for the processes and practices. The Board of Governors should be informed if a change is being considered which may not be in alignment with these policies.

2. Purpose

This section should capture the school's core identity and the board's responsibility to protect it. It typically includes the school's mission, vision, values, philosophy, and any foundational commitments the board wishes to uphold over time. It should also make clear that major shifts to these foundational statements require board oversight and approval.

Sample Policies:

- The Board of Governors together with the Head of School is responsible for defining the School's Foundational Statements and strategic objectives.
- All School goals and related activities shall be driven by the defined foundational statements and strategic objectives.

Foundational Statements

- Mission
- Vision
- Values
- Strategic Goals

3. Governance

This section should define the board's authority, structure, responsibilities, ways of working, and relationship with the Head of School. It should include matters such as board role, delegation, board conduct, committees, policy authority, confidentiality, and the principle that the board speaks with one voice through its formal decisions.

Sample Policies:

- The Board of Governors will act as a collective body. Individual members have no authority to act on behalf of the Board (unless so directed by the Board).
- The Board of Governors is committed to maintaining and encouraging membership that is diverse in nationality, gender, skills, experience, affiliations and perspective.
- The Board of Governors is committed to continual development and training to improve its effectiveness and will conduct annual assessments of its performance.
- The Board of Governors will hear grievances after the proper process has been followed. The board will determine whether school procedures have been upheld and if the decision is aligned with Board policies.
- Working with the Head of School, the Board of Governors will focus on matters of strategic significance, including legal and financial, to ensure the future sustainability and health of the School.

Head of School

- The Board of Governors will entrust the execution of the strategic objectives, adherence to policy, and the daily operations of the School to the Head of School.
- The Board of Governors is committed to recruiting, developing, and retaining the most highly qualified Head of School and providing a competitive compensation package in order to accomplish this objective.
- The Head of School will establish an appropriate and effective organizational structure that best supports the School's purpose and foundational statements.
- There is a co-operative and effective working relationship between the Board and Head of School so as to establish and sustain high morale, quality relationships, and a positive climate for teaching, learning, and student wellbeing throughout the School.
- The Head of School is responsible for ensuring that transparent grievance procedures are in place (and defined in the school operating regulations) to ensure that all School stakeholders (especially students, staff, and parents) have due process to appeal decisions taken by the School.

4. Finance

This section should establish the board's expectations for financial stewardship, sustainability, oversight, and accountability. It should address the board's role in budget approval, tuition philosophy, financial reporting, reserves, borrowing, audits, and long-term financial health. It should stay at the level of governance expectations rather than accounting procedures.

Sample Policies

- The Board The board shall approve the annual operating and capital budgets of the school.
- The school shall maintain sound financial controls, transparent financial reporting,

and appropriate independent review or audit processes.

- The board shall safeguard the long-term financial sustainability of the school, including appropriate attention to reserves, cash flow, and major financial risk.
- The fiscal year of the School will begin on 1 July and end on 30 June of each year. The budgets and all financial reports, including the audited financial statements will be prepared using this fiscal year calendar.
- The Head of School in consultation with the Finance Committee, is responsible for preparing an annual operating budget which best meets the needs of the School's programs for the upcoming year.
- The Head of School will ensure that the Business Office follows internationally accepted accounting standards as they apply to non-profit educational institutions, and that the School is in compliance with Host country regulations.
- The Board of Governors must approve the establishment of depository accounts with banks where such depository accounts did not previously exist.
- The Board of Governors has sole authority to authorize any loans taken out on behalf of the School.
- The Head of School in consultation with the Treasurer/Board Finance Committee, is responsible for developing and overseeing specific investment strategies in support of the School's overall investment objectives and to periodically review and adjust these strategies as appropriate.
- A single fee structure (including tuition and capital levies) will be established.

5. Assets

This section should address the stewardship and protection of the school's physical, financial, intellectual, and reputational assets. It should include expectations related to property, facilities, technology infrastructure, major purchases, disposal of assets, and the responsible use of school-owned resources.

Sample Policies

- School assets shall be used in support of the mission and for authorized school purposes only.
- The board shall exercise oversight of significant capital assets, major property transactions, and material asset disposal.
- The school shall maintain and protect its facilities, resources, records, and intellectual property in a responsible and sustainable manner.
- When not in conflict with the primary use, the Head of School may make the School's facilities available for appropriate community-based activities and to external groups for their activities as long as this is consistent with the School's purpose and foundational statements as a non-profit, educational institution.

6. Risk Management

This section should define the board's expectation that the school identify, assess, manage, and report on major institutional risks. It should cover broad categories such as financial risk, operational risk, safeguarding, reputational risk, health and safety, legal exposure, geopolitical instability, and strategic risk. It should focus on oversight and reporting rather than response protocols.

Sample Policies

- The school shall maintain a process for identifying, assessing, and monitoring significant institutional risks.
- The Head of School shall report regularly to the board on major risks and mitigation efforts.
- The board shall ensure that appropriate crisis response, business continuity, and safeguarding frameworks are in place and reviewed periodically.

7. Admissions

This section should define the board's expectations for fair, mission-aligned, and sustainable student enrollment practices. It can address non-discrimination, mission fit, enrollment capacity, access, inclusion, and the authority of school leadership to make admissions decisions within board-approved parameters.

Sample Policies

- Admissions practices shall align with the mission, values, and educational program of the school.
- The school shall maintain fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory admissions practices, consistent with applicable law and school policy.
- The board delegates admissions decisions to school leadership, within the framework and expectations established by policy.

8. Educational Program

This section should define the board's expectations for the quality, alignment, and integrity of the educational program. It should address mission alignment, accreditation expectations, student learning, curriculum oversight at a high level, and the board's role in ensuring that the program remains strong, relevant, and sustainable without managing pedagogy or daily academic operations.

Sample Policies

- The school shall maintain an educational program that is mission-aligned, appropriately resourced, and focused on student learning and wellbeing.
- The board shall oversee the overall direction and effectiveness of the educational program, while delegating implementation to the Head of School.
- The school shall operate in alignment with applicable accreditation expectations and its stated educational philosophy.

9. Personnel

This section should outline the governance-level expectations related to staffing, leadership accountability, and employment standards. It should focus on the board's role in relation to the Head of School and the broader expectation that the school maintains fair, lawful, safe, and mission-aligned employment practices. Detailed HR procedures should remain in employee handbooks and HR manuals.

Sample Policies

- The Head of School will ensure that the School provides a recruitment and hiring process that upholds child safeguarding practices and does not discriminate in employment.

- Employees are expected to uphold the standards of conduct, professionalism, and safeguarding required by the school.
- The Board of Governors and Head of School shall make every effort to ensure that salary and other benefits are competitive in the region and enable the Head of School to attract and retain the necessary personnel to effectively deliver the School's mission and educational program.

10. Students

This section should establish the board's expectations for student rights, responsibilities, wellbeing, conduct, and access to a safe learning environment. It should stay at the level of principles and standards rather than disciplinary procedures. It may include safeguarding, student behavior, inclusion, attendance expectations, and the right to a respectful and supportive school environment.

Sample Policies

- The School will have suitable structures, resources and processes for emotional support, goal setting, and personal reflection for all students.
- The school shall maintain clear expectations for student conduct, wellbeing, and community responsibility.
- The Board of Governors and Head of School shall make every effort to ensure that salary and other benefits are competitive in the region and enable the Head of School to attract and retain the necessary personnel to effectively deliver the School's mission and educational program.
- The Head of School has the authority to dismiss any student whose behavior or whose family and/or legal guardian's behavior is detrimental to the welfare of the school, the students, employees and/or the school Community. The Head of School will inform the board.

11. Community

This section should address the school's relationship with parents and the wider school community, including expectations for conduct, communication, partnership, and community belonging. It can also include non-discrimination, complaint escalation principles, DEIJ commitments, and the expectation that all community members contribute to a respectful school culture.

Sample Policies

- The Parents and community members are expected to engage with the school in a respectful, constructive, and mission-aligned manner.
- The school shall foster a community culture that reflects the values of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging.
- The school shall maintain clear channels for communication, feedback, and resolution of concerns at the appropriate level.

Reporting Dashboard Example

Data Dashboards

Dashboards can play a crucial role in enhancing board governance by providing a clear and concise view of key performance indicators (KPIs) that enable school boards to stay informed and make data-driven decisions easily.

Key Benefits of Dashboards for Boards:

- **Data Consolidation:** Dashboards present critical information and data in one place, helping board members focus on high-priority issues.
- **Strategic Focus:** Dashboards streamline meeting discussions by highlighting only the most relevant data, allowing boards to concentrate on long-term strategic goals rather than getting lost in details.
- **Time Efficiency:** By pre-filtering and presenting the key data points, dashboards reduce the need for extensive reports, speeding up board meetings and decision-making processes.

Some dashboards can be very colorful and elaborate and have great graphics. Dashboards can also be clear and simple. An excel sheet is a great start

DEIJ Governance Dashboard

A DEIJ dashboard can help boards monitor whether key commitments are being implemented, resourced, and reviewed over time. The dashboard should provide a concise view of selected indicators so the board can focus on oversight, ask informed questions, and track progress without moving into day-to-day operations.

Once the board and head of school determine success indicators to monitor for progress, you can easily plug them into a simple excel dashboard.

Success Indicator Planning Example

Dashboard Area	Possible KPI	Definition / What it measures	Data source already used by school	Reporting cadence	Notes
Strategic Priorities					
Community Experience					
Equity of Access					
People and Culture					
Reporting and Response					
Resourcing					

DEIJ Report Dashboard

DEIJ Governance Dashboard Example

Simple board-level dashboard template. Schools should define their own indicators, data sources, and reporting cadence.

Reporting Period	Semester 1 / Term 1 / Quarter				
Prepared By	School Leadership / DEIJ Lead				
Board Review Date	Insert date				
Dashboard Area	School-Defined KPI	Current Status	Trend	Board Note / Question	Data Source
Strategic Priorities	Insert KPI	Insert status	Insert trend	What does the board need to note or ask?	Strategic report
Community Experience	Insert KPI	Insert status	Insert trend	What does the board need to note or ask?	Climate survey / existing feedback
Equity of Access	Insert KPI	Insert status	Insert trend	What does the board need to note or ask?	Enrollment / program access data
People and Culture	Insert KPI	Insert status	Insert trend	What does the board need to note or ask?	HR / staffing report
Reporting and Response	Insert KPI	Insert status	Insert trend	What does the board need to note or ask?	Incident / case trend report
Resourcing	Insert KPI	Insert status	Insert trend	What does the board need to note or ask?	Budget / staffing / PD report
<i>Suggested board discussion: Where is progress evident, where are concerns emerging, and what follow-up reporting or governance action is needed?</i>					

Succession Planning

Succession planning is the intentional process that a board ensures continuity of effective governance by identifying, recruiting, and preparing new members and leaders.

Succession planning is proactive, not reactive, it helps avoid disruption, supports smoother transitions, and ensures the board remains strategic, skilled, and mission-aligned over time.

Succession Planning

It involves not only replacing board members when terms end, but also thinking about:

- the skills and experiences the board will need in the future,
- the diversity and representation necessary to reflect the community, the mission
- and the leadership pipeline for key roles like Board Chair, Treasurer, or committee leads.

Step One:

- Identify board members with expiring terms
- Determine next term parameters (to stagger or not to stagger)

Step Two:

- Develop and implement a skills matrix
- Identify any gaps in skills and expertise needed for the next 1-3 years

Step Three:

- Recruit new board members that fill skill and expertise gaps

Step Four:

- Successful onboarding new members

Skills Matrix

	Board Members								
Expertise	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Lawyer									
Financial / Investment									
Government Relations – host country									
Publicist / Media									
Construction / Architect									
Others: Social Services, Economics, Philanthropy / Fundraising									
Skills									
Good Communicator									
Implementer									
Strategist									
Mediator / Consensus builder									
Organized									

The beauty of succession planning is that it not only helps design your next election but helps you design the most effective board for years to come.

It can help with high turnover too.

Example Onboarding Process

Why onboarding matters

When someone joins a school board, they're stepping into a highly complex and often unfamiliar environment.

- They're expected to make strategic decisions, steward the mission, oversee finances, and support leadership—all while understanding their boundaries and building trust with the rest of the board.
- And yet... many new members are handed a packet, maybe invited to a meeting, and left to figure it out as they go.

Without onboarding, new members often:

- Hesitate to speak up because they're unsure of context
- Confuse governance with operations
- Miss key responsibilities or step into the wrong ones
- Feel disconnected from the mission, strategy, or board culture

Strategic Onboarding

Onboarding is a *process* that sets the tone for how new board members engage, contribute, and lead.

Onboarding does three big things:

1. It provides **context**—why the school exists, where it's going, and what challenges it faces.
2. It clarifies **expectations**—what the board does, what members are responsible for, and how meetings function.
3. And most importantly, it helps build early **trust** and cohesion so new members feel equipped to contribute, not just observe.

4 Pillars of Effective Onboarding

1. Planning
2. Curriculum
3. Mentorship
4. Growth

1. Planning

1. Determine **who** is facilitating the onboarding
 - Governance Committee, Chair, Taskforce?
2. Determine **what** you want to accomplish
 - Understanding of the school, the role of the board & members, board culture and norms
3. Determine **when** you want to provide information
 - It starts during recruitment and continues for at least a year
4. Determine **how** you want to provide information
 - Providing documents, 1:1 meetings, using mentors, professional development, etc.

2. Curriculum

Onboarding curriculum should include

1. **School Strategy**
Strategy curriculum helps provide new board members with a deep understanding of the school, its history, the mission and strategic focus.
2. **Board Structure**
Structure curriculum helps provide new board members with a deep understanding of the structure of the board and the roles & responsibilities of the board and board members.
3. **Board Processes & Culture**
Process curriculum helps provide new board members with a deep understanding of the board's processes to complete the work, and the board culture, dynamics and norms.
4. **DEIJ Training / Bias Training**
DEIJ Training helps provide new board members with a shared understanding of the school's commitments related to diversity, equity, inclusion, justice, and belonging, while also building awareness of bias, discrimination, and the board's role in fostering an inclusive and accountable governance culture.

3. Mentorship

- Mentorship helps new board members acclimate quickly, understand their roles, and navigate the board's culture and processes effectively.
- Mentorship provides personalized guidance, supports faster integration, and enhances the overall effectiveness of the board.
- Assign a board mentor to new board members. Select experienced and knowledgeable board members who exhibit strong leadership and communication skills.

4. Growth

Once you've had a successful year of onboarding new members, an essential component for **all** board members is continued growth and professional development.

- Offer training on board governance, financial oversight, strategic planning, and other relevant topics.
- Provide access to experts, resources, workshops, and seminars that support ongoing development.

Board Member Role Description

The role of a Board Member is to contribute to the effective governance of the school by working collaboratively with fellow Board members to safeguard the school's mission, values, educational quality, and long-term sustainability.

Board members govern the school. They do not manage it. They contribute their experience, judgment, and diverse perspectives to the Board's collective decision-making. Authority rests with the Board acting collectively rather than with individual Board members.

Key Responsibilities

Board members contribute to the Board's work by:

- Safeguarding the school's mission, vision, values, and long-term interests.
- Helping shape the school's strategic direction and monitoring progress toward agreed priorities.
- Exercising sound fiduciary oversight by helping ensure the school's financial sustainability, legal compliance, and effective management of risk.
- Contributing to the Board's responsibility for appointing, supporting, developing, evaluating, and, when necessary, transitioning the Head of School. This responsibility is typically coordinated through the Board Chair and/or an appropriate committee, with all Board members contributing to the Board's collective oversight.
- Preparing for and participating actively in Board and committee meetings.
- Reviewing information thoughtfully, asking constructive questions, and contributing to informed, respectful, and future-focused Board deliberations.
- Supporting Board decisions once they have been made.
- Participating in ongoing Board development and governance learning.

Expectations of Board Members

Effective Board members:

- Act in the best interests of the school and its mission.
- Understand and respect the distinction between governance and management.
- Respect the authority of the Head of School to lead the day-to-day operation of the school.
- Maintain appropriate confidentiality.
- Declare and appropriately manage conflicts of interest.
- Listen respectfully, value diverse perspectives, and contribute constructively to Board discussions.
- Support a culture of trust, integrity, inclusion, accountability, and continuous improvement.

Individual and Collective Responsibility

Individual Board members do not direct staff, become involved in the day-to-day management of the school, or make decisions on behalf of the Board acting alone.

Instead, each Board member contributes to the Board's collective responsibility for governing the school effectively by bringing their experience, judgment, curiosity, and commitment to Board discussions and decision-making. Strong governance depends upon Board members who prepare well, participate thoughtfully, and work collaboratively in the best interests of the school.

Indicative Time Commitment

While expectations vary from school to school, Board members should normally expect to:

- Attend approximately **X** Board meetings each year.
- Serve on at least one Board committee or task force, where appropriate.
- Prepare for meetings through advance reading and review of Board materials.
- Participate in Board orientation, ongoing governance learning, and periodic Board self-evaluation.
- Attend occasional school events, strategic planning sessions, and Board retreats.
- Be available, when appropriate, for occasional consultation between meetings.

Personal Qualities

Effective Board members typically demonstrate:

- Commitment to the school's mission and values.
- Sound judgment and strategic thinking.
- Integrity and ethical behavior.
- Respect for diverse perspectives and cultures.
- A willingness to ask thoughtful questions and engage in constructive dialogue.
- Collegiality, humility, and a commitment to collective decision-making.
- Curiosity and a commitment to continuous learning.