

Georgia School Boards Association



Policy Services

The Georgia School Boards Association has more than 50 years experience providing programs and services to the state's boards of education. A primary service to local boards is in the area of policy. GSBA provides numerous ways to assist local boards with their policy manuals from putting manuals online to a total review of an existing policy manual. All local boards are not alike and neither are their policy manuals. That's why GSBA can customize its services to match the needs of a local board. Read on for more information on GSBA's policy services.

GSBA'S ePOLICY SERVICE

More and more boards of education are posting their board policy manual online so that it is accessible to the board, school administrators, staff, parents and community. An online policy manual is a vital part of the culture and governance of a school system, representing to the staff and community the philosophy of the board of education and its commitment to a sound governance process.

GSBA is the leading provider of online board policy manuals in Georgia. Whether GSBA assists with the policy manual revision or not, GSBA can assist a local board in placing and maintaining their manual online. The initial price for getting a manual online is \$3,000, which is waived for any district engaging GSBA to conduct a complete revision to their board policy manual at a cost of \$10,500. After the setup of an online manual, there is an annual maintenance fee between \$1,500 and \$3,000 (depending on level of service chosen).

GSBA'S POLICY MAINTENANCE SERVICE

GSBA's policy service does not stop with the completion of a policy manual review or setup of an online manual. Since the policy process is one that never ends, GSBA provides a vital maintenance service to ensure that you are informed of policy related matters and that your policy manual stays current. GSBA can provide various levels of ongoing policy support ranging in costs from \$250/year to \$3,000/year. Services provided include:

- **Policy UPDATE Newsletter** – a quarterly publication providing pertinent information related to policy implications
- **Policy ALERT email** – a monthly notice of policy implications resulting from litigation, changes to state or federal law and state board rules.

- **Proposed Policy Review** – GSBA will review your draft policies before they are presented to the board for final approval.
- **Board Minutes Review** – monthly review of board minutes to confirm that board action on policies are included in the current hard-copy or online manual.
- **Formatting of policies to match online or hard-copy manual**
- **Hosting of District’s policy manual on GSBA’s web server**
- **Maintenance of links to legal references by policy code**



BOARD POLICY MANUAL REVIEW

The enactment of sound policy to govern a school system is among the most important functions of a board of education. A vital part of this function is the ongoing review and revision of existing policies. For many boards of education, this process begins with an overall review of its existing policy manual. An effective policy review requires careful analysis using a systematic process designed to remove policies which no longer serve their intended purpose or which are outdated, revise policies to meet current legal or regulatory requirements and add new policies where laws or changes in the school system have created the need.

GSBA’S POLICY REVISION SERVICE

GSBA can provide assistance in many ways to a board of education as it engages in a policy manual review process. Once a board of education engages in a carefully planned process of policy review, led by its superintendent and involving staff and community as appropriate, the process becomes contagious. A board of education, focused on the development of policy and aware of its own policy, begins making decisions with a constant awareness of the policy implications.

For a cost of \$10,500, GSBA will facilitate the revision process using the services of its general counsel, Harben & Hartley. This assistance will include meeting with appropriate school officials for a section by section policy manual review over whatever schedule may be set by the school system. An overview of GSBA’s revision process is as follows:

THE REVIEW PROCESS

When a board of education undertakes to review its existing policy manual, the following process is often useful:

STEP 1

Each policy in a policy manual can usually be designated in one of three ways:

- **a mandatory policy** required by federal or state law or State Board of Education rule;
- **a discretionary policy** not required by law but which serves a useful governing function for the school district; or
- **an unnecessary policy** which either attempts to restate a statute or regulation which the board is required to follow (but where a policy is not required) or which serves no useful function in governing or managing the school district.

- (A) **Mandatory policies.** More and more frequently, federal statutes, state laws or regulations from a federal or state agency require a policy on a certain subject. Sometimes the content of these policies is described in detail and other times, the board has some discretion as to the content of the policy.
- B) **Discretionary policies.** There are many areas where a board of education may feel that a policy is useful in governing a school district. This group of policies is likely to vary from one board of education to another depending upon the particular needs of the school system. For example, some boards of education need a policy on school attendance zones while other boards do not; some boards provide a specific procedure through policy when a reduction in force is needed while other



boards wish to deal with this issue on a case by case basis; and some boards of education have detailed policies about the development of a board agenda while others rely upon a less formal practice or procedure. These are just a few of many examples of discretionary policies, not mandated by law but certainly within the authority of a board of education. GSBA does recommend policies governing certain areas as a part of its Standards for Local Boards of Education.

(C) **Unnecessary Policies.** Boards of education should generally avoid policies which do nothing more than attempt to restate an existing law which the board is already obligated to follow. Laws

frequently get amended and sometimes policies do not, causing conflicts which can have serious consequences. Attempts to rephrase the law within policy can also lead to conflicts, whereas a policy which does nothing more than restate the law verbatim is unnecessary. Other policies adopted by the board may provide no help or guidance to citizens, staff or administration. Policies which contain broad, general or vague language often create more confusion than assistance. Finally, policies which appear to be created solely to deal with one specific situation in the past may prove problematic in the future when a similar, but different, set of facts arises.

STEP 2

Dividing the policy manual review into sections helps make the task manageable and allows the district to focus the appropriate personnel on each section's review. Smaller school districts often designate a "team" to review the entire policy manual section by section. In other school districts, the superintendent may be involved in reviewing each section while the finance director may be only involved in section D, the human resources director in section G, the student services director in section J and the curriculum director in section I. Whatever process is chosen, the board of education should ensure that each section is reviewed carefully, policy by policy, not only to determine whether it is mandated, discretionary or unnecessary but also to determine whether the policy matches with the current practice of the school system. This process of authenticating the policies with the practice of the system is vital to avoid unintended conflicts in the future.

STEP 3

It is vital that the board of education involve and include legal counsel in the policy review process. The school board's attorney should be someone knowledgeable of all legal issues addressed by policy and should provide advice either as part of the review team or separately on any policy with legal implications.

STEP 4

Dividing the policy manual into sections also allows the manual to be presented to the board of education over a period of time so that the board can be involved in reviewing each and every policy and making the ultimate decision as to the policies which will govern the school district.

STEP 5

Once a manual is reviewed, section by section, and finally adopted by a board of education, the process does not end. As laws and rules change, policies must be adapted. As school systems change, policies must be constantly reviewed to ensure that they continue to serve the purpose originally intended. In addition to reacting to these changes, boards should have in place systematic procedures for reviewing various sections of the policy manual on a regular basis to make sure that the policy manual continues to be current.



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