



Faith Builders

Discipling the head, heart, and hands

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Called to Serve: The Role of the Christian School Board

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Kendall Myers, a teacher and administrator of 20 years, offers actionable ways a school board enables Christian education in local communities. Kendall is the current Resource Group administrator at Faith Builders, and wrote this article in tandem with three men with experience in school leadership.

The well-being and effectiveness of our churches fifty years from now will depend significantly on how well we have stewarded the task of raising a generation to love and serve God. The Psalmist describes our children as “arrows” who have the potential to be powerful weapons in the work of Christ. But they will not meet that potential unless we invest mightily in preparing them and sending them. This is a task that calls for the best energy of our homes, our churches, and our schools!

Many sources of influence converge to shape the values and capacities of our children. In this essay, we want to focus specifically on the role that the school board is called to play in enabling our communities to provide an education for our children that will sharpen and prepare them for the work to which God has called the church.

What is the school board’s job? What must every school board do to ensure the vitality and effectiveness of the school? We suggest that an effective school board does four things:

Clarifies the school’s purpose.

A clear sense of purpose gives energy and movement to the work of the school. Without that, the school will simply float along from year to year, aimless and apathetic. At the end of the day, what do we want our school to accomplish? What do we want our students to know and who do we want them to be by the time they complete the school’s program? A shared understanding of the purpose of the school helps to unify the staff, board, and parents around a common goal. While this understanding should reflect the values of the school community, it is the board that is positioned to discuss these questions, to discern the correct answers to them, and to put those ideas into writing.

One way to clarify the school’s purpose is to form a mission statement. Defining the mission of the school in the specific words of a statement is valuable for at least three reasons.

1. Putting exact words to the goals of the school requires the board to wrestle together with their priorities and values, resulting in a greater sense of shared understanding and vision.
2. Decisions and issues can be held up against the mission statement in such a way that it becomes a guiding light in decision-making.
3. A mission statement helps to give continuity of direction and increased effectiveness to the school over the long term.

The school board needs to identify not only what the school wants to accomplish but also hold up a vision for why it matters. Connecting the work of the school to the work of God in the home and the church illuminates the value of the school’s influence. Keeping the vision for the school in focus and communicating it regularly to the staff and patrons helps a community to sustain energy for the work of the school.

Clear written statements of purpose and vision establish a north star for the school. Clarity about these commitments enables the board to give leadership to the school. The board’s role is not that of guardrails positioned along either side of the school to keep it from running off the road, but rather that of a compass for the school that points the way toward a desired destination. In *Best Practices for Effective Boards*, the authors make the case that boards should “lead, not react.”¹ An effective school board does not wait around for the next crisis to deal with or problem to solve; instead, they provide leadership by identifying the desired destination and giving compelling reasons for going there. This vision and forward motion give the school momentum and stability even as staff members turn over, challenges arise, and circumstances change.

Delegates the work.

The board provides a clear vision for why the school exists and what the school should accomplish, but it does not implement the vision itself. Instead, it delegates the work of the school to school staff. The board’s job is to ensure that staff are in place, communicate clearly to them, equip them with what they need to accomplish their job, take care of them, and hold them accountable. In many cases, a school board hires an administrator or principal to be

the primary link between the board and the staff. This is an effective structure because it allows the board to delegate that person to lead the staff in the implementation of the board’s directives. The board communicates clearly to the administrator what needs to be accomplished (with a written job description), and it enables him by making sure that he has the resources and training that he needs for the task. By providing guidance through written policies, it supports and cares for him through regular communication and responding to his concerns and requests. It also holds him accountable for the

results of his leadership.

The administrator in turn is able to ensure that the rest of the staff understand their roles and responsibilities, make sure that they have the resources, training, and guidance that enable them to fulfil their responsibilities successfully, support them in their work by helping them find solutions for the challenges in their classrooms, and hold them accountable for doing their job. In some



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cases, it may not be possible for a school to have an administrator on staff. In this case, it is the responsibility of the board to appoint someone else to fill the role of administrating the directives and policies of the board in the daily operation of the school and to provide support and accountability for the staff. Whatever the situation and whatever title is used, it is imperative that the board make the administrative structure of the school clear so that there is a clear path for the flow of information and authority in the school. Everyone in the school should know who they are responsible for and who they are responsible to. By delegating an administrator or a point person, the board has a clear path for implementing their decisions and the staff of the school have a clear path for seeking direction and support.

Part of delegating school staff to carry out the school’s mission is to provide job descriptions for each of the staff roles. A written job description that details the responsibilities of a staff member authorizes that person to do the work that is expected by the board. It also provides a basis for evaluation, feedback, and accountability. In addition, a written list protects the staff member from unreasonable demands or changing expectations. Yearly reviews of the job description of a teacher or administrator with that staff member gives that staff member a natural opportunity to discuss areas of concern or overload as well as for the board to discuss places for development and growth.

In addition to communicating with written job descriptions, the board is responsible for an ongoing flow of information between the staff and board. We think the most effective structure for this flow of information is board meetings. Face-to-face conversations in the context of board meetings provide the best avenue for the board to share its perspectives with the administrator and for the administrator to represent the needs and perspectives of the staff to the board.

The board also needs to enable its staff with a strong support system. Teachers deal with serious challenges on a regular basis—academic and behavioral difficulties in the classroom, students with emotional or spiritual needs, and relational stresses. Without good support, teachers face the risk not only of retreating into survival mode, but also of discouragement and burnout. Even though they are not responsible for the day-to-day operation of the school, boards must ensure that staff are being cared for and supported. They must

not walk away from difficult situations, but rather accept the responsibility of dealing with teachers’ stressors. Boards also enable by providing opportunities for teachers’ growth and development. This may involve sending them to training events and programs, providing books and resources, or providing a mentor for a staff member.

Effective delegation also includes written policies. In addition to telling staff what they are to do and making sure that they are equipped to do that work, the board is responsible for giving direction about how they are to accomplish the work. This is the place of written policy. Policies give direction to specific areas of concern within the school. These areas include academic expectations, behavioral/moral guidelines, legal issues, and more.² Written policies benefit the school in these ways:

1. They enable the school staff to be unified and consistent in their interaction with students and parents and with each other.
2. They relieve teachers of the weight of needing to make tough calls in certain areas.
3. They help to ensure even-handed administration, particularly in highly-emotional situations.
4. They help to cultivate the kind of environment and culture that are in line with the mission and vision of the school.

Gathers needed resources.

In order to achieve its goals, the school needs resources. Just as the as the heart pumps steadily away behind the scenes to supply oxygen-rich blood to every part of the body, the board works quietly behind the scenes to supply the resources needed for the work of the school. These resources include these categories: 1) personnel 2) funding 3) property and facilities 4) curriculum and textbooks 5) equipment and supplies.

While all of these areas take initiative to address, we feel the easiest category to neglect is giving guidance in the selection and use of curriculum. Finding curriculum that serves the needs of the students well and supports the values and beliefs of the community can be a daunting task, but whether the board appoints a committee to do this work or does the work itself, it is the board’s

responsibility to ensure that the school has an academic program that both accomplishes the educational goals of the school and that promotes its values. A healthy practice for a school board is to request a review of at least one component of the school’s curriculum every year.

The wise use of these resources requires strategic planning. Strategic planning is a process of thinking about how to use the school’s resources to grow more effective in carrying out its mission. Yearly meetings to look at the big picture and to do some strategic planning helps to move a school from maintenance mode into a growth mindset. Here are the kinds of questions that boards can consider in identifying areas where they should invest special energy: Where do we want to be in 10 years from now? What opportunities do we have at this moment? What threats or problems should we be responding to? What is going well in our school? These questions can surface ideas that can enable a board to take intentional steps toward the improvement of the school.

Accepts responsibility.

Although the weight and responsibility of the school falls on many shoulders, the board ultimately bears responsibility for what the school is and what it does. The board is where the buck stops. From a legal standpoint, it is the board that bears the weight of meeting the legal and financial obligations of the school. The board is responsible to educate itself about the local, state, and federal requirements that pertain to the school and ensure compliance with those requirements, the exception, of course, being violations of conscience. In addition to setting annual budgets for the school, the board ensures the wise and ethical use of school finances.



Confidentiality and unity are essential for the integrity and effectiveness of a board.

The board’s responsibility extends to the spiritual and moral climate of the school as well. The Christian school board has the heart of a shepherd, ensuring that the school is a safe and flourishing environment for the student, physically and spiritually. It will remain vigilant to the enemies of peace, joy, and Christlikeness and offer guidance to the staff in times of crisis or conflict. Through its staff selection, directives, and policies, the board will cultivate a school culture of respect, love, and humility.

In all of its work and responsibilities, it is critical that the board acts as a single unit. The board responds to situations and makes decisions as a group, not as individual members.

An individual board member has no authority outside of a board decision. Confidentiality and unity are essential for the integrity and effectiveness of a board. Even though a member may disagree with a decision, it is his responsibility to throw his full support behind the decision once it is made and show his support for the decision.

To clarify the role of the school board further, we can note four areas that are not on the school board’s job description:

1. Managing the details of day-to-day operations in the school.
2. Serving as a clearinghouse for complaints.
3. Rubberstamping the administrator or point person.
4. Bypassing the administrative structure.

In summary, the board provides energy and direction for a school by identifying the school’s purpose and enabling the school’s administration and staff to implement that mission. It ensures that the staff have the resources and training and the support that they need to do their work effectively and gives oversight to that work. Finally, it owns the results of the school and takes responsibility for them.

Does the work of the school board matter? We can answer with a resounding yes! The impact of a Christian school board striving faithfully year after year to cast a vision for Christian education and to provide a sound foundation and infrastructure for equipping our children for lives of God-honoring service is eternal. We stand at a moment of both opportunity and peril as an Anabaptist people. Resources and opportunities for the rising generations abound, but voices of all kinds are vying for their attention and allegiance. Now more than ever, we need to rise to the challenge and commit ourselves to the work of raising our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

¹ Fairbanks, Gunter, and Couchenour. *Best Practices for Effective Boards*. Beacon Hill Press, 2012.
² For samples of school policy, job descriptions, and additional resources, go to **THEDOCKFORLEARNING.ORG/CONTRIBUTIONS/BOARD**.

Personnel Needs

We are seeking applications for these staff openings:

- mentoring coordinator
- ministry apprenticeship coordinator
- graphic designer
- student recruitment coordinator

For information about these job descriptions or to request an application, contact Steven Brubaker:

srb@fbep.org · (814) 789-4518, ext. 239

Upcoming Events

Open House · APRIL 13-14

Be a student for a day! Find details and registration at **FBEP.ORG/OPEN-HOUSE**.

FB Chorale Spring Program & Tour

MAY 19

All are welcome to attend this choir program in the FBCS gym at 7:00 PM. Follow the choir’s tour itinerary May 21-28 at **FBEP.ORG/CHOIR-PROGRAM**.

FBTI Commencement · MAY 20

At commencement, 20 students plan to complete their tracks of study and disperse to contribute to the Kingdom!

Summer Term · JUNE 26-JULY 28

Find the course list and applications in January at **FBEP.ORG/ST**.

College Student Weekend

JULY 7-9

This weekend supports conservative Anabaptist college students. Register to attend at **FBEP.ORG/CSW**.

Teachers Week · AUGUST 1-4

This week provides practical tools for new and experienced teachers. Registration opens in early April at **FBEP.ORG/TW**.

Two-Year Studies Begin · AUGUST 21

Invest two years of preparation for a lifetime of service! Download an application at **FBEP.ORG/ACADEMICS/SEMESTER**.



Training Institute Expansion

The FBTI Expansion will create spaces that facilitate interaction between instructors and students and will provide additional spaces for classes and study. Work on the first area is scheduled to begin in spring 2023.

RAISED: **\$2,566,435** PROJECT ESTIMATE: **\$3.5 million**



Three apartments in the center section will be converted into a large classroom, an office, and flexible study space for student use.



The east wing gym will become a learning commons with instructor offices adjacent.

Planned Giving

There are various ways to give from non-cash assets, both during and after one’s lifetime. With careful planning, non-cash gifts can benefit both Faith Builders and a donor’s estate. Contact Vivian Mast vivianm@fbep.org 814-789-4518 ext 220 for additional information.

Summer Term

JUNE 26-JULY 28

Summer Term offers courses designed to equip teachers in K-12 schools. Academic coursework and relational connections provide a rich, growing experience for men and women who teach the rising generation.

Teachers are life-long learners. Learn with us this summer!

For a full list of course descriptions and schedule:
Visit **FBEP.ORG/ST**
Email fbep@fbep.org
Call (814) 789-4518, ext. 220

courses offered in 2023

Foundations of Education
Steven Brubaker

Principles of Teaching
Christopher Brode

Teaching the Middle Grade
Christopher Brode

Teaching History/Social Studies
Peter Goertzen

Algebra
John Mark Kubns

Research Skills for Teachers (audit only)
John Mark Kubns

Growing into a Godly Woman
Marie Mullet

Teaching Secondary English Language Arts
Josh Nisley

Reading and Responding to Literature
Josh Nisley

The Exceptional Learner
Lynell Nissley

Mathematics for Elementary Teachers
Lynell Nissley

World Geography
Stephen Russell

Early & Medieval Church History
Stephen Russell

Child Development
Jonas Sauder

Art Appreciation
Jonas Sauder

Writing to Communicate
Anita Yoder

Teaching Reading
Anna Zebr

Children’s Literature
Anna Zebr



APPLY FOR
College Student Weekend

JULY 7-9

Anabaptists who develop their skills by attending college sometimes face overt temptation and opposition. Just as serious, however, are the messages hidden within the college experience. Who determines what is real? What does it mean to be a human? How is community built? Perhaps most important of all, how do we get answers for these questions?

In the 42 hours we have together, we seek to explore these questions and nurture a faithful, reverent pursuit of learning that deepens love for God and equips us to serve His people. Experienced instructors discuss topics such as Christian anthropology and bioethics. Attendees share their stories in small groups and pray for each other. Speakers, staff, and students mingle for food, fellowship, and recreation.

breakouts include

Loving Truth: How to Approach Data Reasonably
— Abigail Wingard, *librarian*

Science as a Cultural Phenomenon
— John Mark Kuhns, *teacher*

When Pseudoscience Rules
— Curvin Gordon, *ER physician*

Walking the Valley: Supporting Patients and Families in Death
— Ryan Hoover, *RN and Mountain View administrator*

Faith, Formation, and College: A Personal Reflection
— Wendell Glick, *composer*

Flannery O'Connor and the Unsettling of the Self: An Uncomfortable Invitation
— Lori Eby, *housewife and lover of literature*

Responding to Identity Confusion
— John Coblenz, *author and pastor*

Schoolwork as Soulwork: Simone Weil and the Spiritual Potential of Study
— Josh Nisley, *literature instructor*

plenary session

Secular Exhaustion and Christian Hope: Becoming Truly Human in an Anti-Human World
— Josh Nisley

Register at [FBEP.ORG/CSW](https://fbep.org/csw).



Faith Builders

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The Faith Builders newsletter is published quarterly and serves to inform, inspire, and equip its readers. Subscription is free upon request.

Looking for education that prioritizes spiritual growth?

Faith Builders Training Institute offers rigorous course work, apprenticeship, and discipleship in our two-year study programs. In an increasingly fragmented society, we commit ourselves to contributing to flourishing churches, effective schools, and joyful homes.

Students choose from three tracks of study:

Teacher Apprenticing cultivates the core skills, knowledge, and postures needed to serve in the classroom.

Christian Ministries equips students for committed Christian service in varied contexts.

General Studies cultivates the skills and commitments students need to thrive in post-secondary education.

Each track includes our core curriculum that helps students to see themselves and the world in proper relation to God. We want students to develop the capacities and skills needed to join the work God is doing in the world through His church.

Those seeking a college degree can build on this foundation and complete a bachelor's degree in as few as four or five additional semesters.

We are accepting applications for studies beginning in August 2023! Find more information and begin applying at [FBEP.ORG/ACADEMICS/SEMESTER](https://fbep.org/academics/semester). We'd love to hear from you!

Browse options for scholarships and apply at [FBEP.ORG/ADMISSIONS/SCHOLARSHIPS](https://fbep.org/admissions/scholarships).

