



**Transitioning to Policy Governance
Moving the Board out of Administration
Headmaster: Greg Scheck**

Mount Juliet Christian Academy
Mt. Juliet, TN 37122

The goal of this project is to transition the School Supervisory Committee (Board) from the philosophy of a typical church school committee involved in day to day issues to a paradigm of Policy Governance in which they govern the direction of the school through the policies it establishes.

The results of this process are a School Supervisory Committee that concentrates their efforts on the governing and not the administration of the school, clarification of the roles of the SSC and the administration, a governance policy manual, and an employee handbook that has been streamlined.

Project Focus

Mt. Juliet Christian Academy, a ministry of the First Baptist Church of Mt. Juliet, has been in operation for over 30 years. Over time, the School Supervisory Committee (SSC), the church appointed governing body, became dissatisfied with the way that it functioned and interacted with the administration in the day to day affairs of the academy. For too long the School Committee had focused on running the school and not on growing the school. The individuals on the SSC understood the charge from the church to provide guidance and oversight of the school, but did not have the time, desire or ability to administrate on a day to day basis. This led the SSC to the realization that they needed to make a transition to the Policy Governance paradigm.

The committee developed a plan that involved, over a period of 2-3 years, a commitment to transition to Policy Governance. This plan included a number of elements: the selection of a new headmaster, an institutional assessment conducted by an outside firm, revision of the mission and vision statements as well as the core values, a restructuring of the role of the SSC and its subcommittees, and the development of a long range plan for the academy.

Methods and Process

The new headmaster was selected and began his ministry in July of 2007. The first year was devoted to establishing a healthy working relationship with the SSC and establishing trust with various groups: faculty, staff, parents, students, pastoral staff and the church body. During this time, the institutional assessment was conducted and the findings were presented to the committee. From this assessment, priorities were established which included the commitment to complete the transition to Policy Governance and the revision of our mission and vision statements and our core values. During this first year, committee members were given selected readings describing the characteristics of Policy Governance.

The next step, which occurred during the headmaster's second year, was to establish a time line and guide posts so that the new policy could be written and approved in the one year time frame. The initial step was for the headmaster to prepare a template that was used for the basis of new policy. This template was a compilation of policies from several schools that had been functioning under policy governance for a number of years. We then selected dates for all policy writing work days, which in our case meant that some of our committee members would be completing their term of service and we would have to orient several new committee members to the process. This meant that we would have to spend additional time educating the new

committee members in the fundamentals of Policy Governance. Throughout this process the headmaster received counsel from a consultant that was experienced in Policy Governance.

The next move in the process was the appointment of sub-committees to draft policy change for the church constitution. We needed to maintain the integrity of both documents. It was the goal of the committee to write and approve this new policy by June of 2009. After four all day Saturday sessions, a few evening subcommittee meetings, as well as much individual time spent on the part of each committee member, reading and assessing the new structure of governance, we were pleased to see the actual approval of new policy and the implementation of the new governance completed in April, 2009.

Project Results

As we look back on this year, we believe that a great deal has been accomplished. In this time, we have revised our core statements (vision, mission and core values) as well as created a new structure and set of policies under which the SSC will function. As a result, the lines of authority and the function of the SSC and the administration have been clarified. Healthy team relationships between the SSC and the administration have been formed that, we believe will assist the Academy as we move forward to grow our programs and student body. We have empowered and encouraged individuals to invest their time and resources into the Academy. By creating a set of policies by which the SSC will function, we have given the administration the freedom to lead within the given policy. An additional positive byproduct of this process is that we have revised and streamlined the employee handbook. The process has been rewarding and challenging. We are optimistic about our future as a ministry that devotes itself to the development and nurturing of the generations to come.

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What We Have Learned

The Academy has undergone tremendous change in the last three years with the selection of the new headmaster, the change to Policy Governance, the change in school committee members, and the revision of our mission and core values. These changes have been positive, and have involved many people and many hours of work, meetings and decisions. It was essential for the SSC to develop a basic understanding of Policy Governance through the various publications they were required to read. This part of the process was essential in that it led to the commitment on the part of the committee to make the transition.

Naturally in any new venture it is important to evaluate what things could be done or changed to make the process smoother and more efficient. In regards to the actual writing of policy, one suggestion would be to utilize a subcommittee to do the preliminary writing and have the board approve the final document. While this may expedite the process there is great benefit in the full

board (SSC) working through each policy and having the necessary dialogue as the policy is drafted. We benefited because our SSC members were willing to ask the tough questions when concepts were not clear or in conflict with our values. Of course, as with any meetings, we learned the importance of remaining on task and deferring certain questions or issues to another meeting.

Another important lesson we learned from this process is the importance of trying to complete the writing of policy during the regular term of service for the committee members. It was difficult to bring new members up to speed in the middle of such an enormous and significant process. In the end it worked out, but a good bit of time was spent on dealing with issues and questions with the new members that had already been covered in previous meetings. Changing committee members midstream created additional work for all involved.

Making a shift from one governance style to another is a huge project and not one to be entered into lightly. If it was not the conviction of the entire SSC as well as the administrative team that

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this change was in the best interest of the school; not only for today, but for the future as well, we might not have embarked on this arduous task. It is imperative, first and foremost, that any such undertaking should be the result of much thought and prayer on the part of the leadership of the institution. Thankfully, in our case, we had this conviction on the part of

all parties involved and consequently it was a great success. It is a joy to be part of an organization that is actively seeking to improve itself and its effectiveness in reaching its goals.

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