

School Boards— A Key Role

HUMBERTO M. RASI

Seven groups are involved in the successful operation of an Adventist school, college, or university: faculty, students, administrators, support staff, pupils' parents or relatives, the constituency or stakeholders, and the governing board. Obviously, without the first two—students and teachers—there would be no school. But without the latter—the board—the educational institution's stability, continuity, and success are at risk.

School boards are elected directly or indirectly by the owners of the school—the constituency—to provide overall guidance and direction to the institution on their behalf. A basic axiom is that educational boards govern, while administrators (who are appointed by the board) manage the institution. These two roles—governance and administration—must be kept separate. When they are confused, the educational enterprise suffers.

The growing complexity of academic, financial, and legal issues involved in operating an educational entity, as well as the increasing number of government regulations affecting schools, and the higher expectations of parents and students require that boards be composed of individuals who are both knowledgeable in a variety of areas and have a strong commitment to the mission of the school. Thus, the constituency of every school must exert great care in selecting board members.

Traditionally, board members have been expected to provide wisdom, work, or wealth—and preferably two or more of the three! In other words, board members must bring the following qualities to their task: (1) seasoned knowledge about the operation of a school, in areas such as education, management, finances, marketing, development, and law; (2) willingness to devote time and energy before, during, and after board meetings to ensure the success of the school, and (3) a commitment to contribute from their own resources or secure funds from other sources to ensure the continuity and growth of the school. Care must be taken to ensure that board members represent the various sectors that make up the constituencies of an Adventist school, including church leaders.

The main duties of the governing board of an educational institution can be summarized as follows:

1. To refine, clarify, and define the mission of the school.
2. To select and appoint the principal/president and his or her associates in administration.
3. To provide guidance, counsel, and support to the principal/president.
4. To approve policies for the operation of the institution.
5. To approve institutional long-range plans and their timely implementation.
6. To approve or discontinue educational programs, as recommended by the administration.
7. To select, upon recommendation of the administration, new faculty and support staff.
8. To ensure the financial solvency of the institution, approving and monitoring its budget.
9. To protect and enhance the good name of the institution.
10. To interpret for the school administration the needs and expectations of

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the constituency.

11. To serve as the court of final appeal in institutional matters.

12. To regularly assess its own performance.

Educational boards have various names in different institutions and countries, such as board of directors, governors, regents, or trustees. The latter designation perhaps defines more clearly than others the important role of its members—trustees.* Indeed, they have been entrusted with the solemn responsibility of ensuring that the mission of the school, college, or university will be successfully carried out

and perpetuated, in order to serve current and future students and the church. This is a noble task, to be approached prudently, intelligently, and enthusiastically.—H.M.R.

* The Education Department of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists has prepared a model Handbook for College or University Boards of Trustees that can be adapted for use in different settings. It is available free of charge to board chairmen or college/university presidents who request it in writing from the department (12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904 U.S.A.).

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