

# GSBA

Georgia School Boards Association

# Revising Your Policy Manual

How GSBA Can Help You.



One of GSBA's primary services to local boards is in the area of policy from a total review of an existing policy manual to providing sample policies to meet new requirements.

Local boards are not alike and neither are their policy manuals. GSBA can customize its services to match the needs of a local board whether it is a traditionally organized system, a charter system, a strategic waiver system, or any other arrangement.

### **REVISING YOUR POLICY MANUAL**

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 task is the ongoing review and revision of existing policies. 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using a systematic process designed to remove policies which no longer serve their intended purpose or which are outdated, revise policies to meet current legal or regulatory requirements and add new policies where laws or changes in the school system have created the need.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 encourages members to follow a carefully planned process of policy review, led by the superintendent and involving staff and community as appropriate. A board of education, focused on the development of policy and aware of its existing policies, can begin making decisions with a constant awareness of the policy implications of its decisions.



### **HOW GSBA CAN HELP**

GSBA can provide assistance to a board of education as it begins the policy manual review process. For a cost of \$14,500, GSBA will facilitate the revision process using the services of its general counsel, Harben, Hartley & Hawkins. This assistance will include conferring with appropriate school officials for a section-by-section policy manual review and adoption on whatever schedule may be set by the school system in accordance with the signed GSBA agreement. An overview of GSBA's revision process is as follows:

## STEP 1

Going section by section, each policy in the manual will be reviewed and categorized 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.

(C) **Unnecessary Policies.** GSBA recommends boards of education generally avoid policies which do nothing more than repeat or attempt to restate an existing law or rule which the board is already obligated to follow. Laws and rules 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 arise.

**GSBA makes recommendations, but the local board decides which policies to keep in their manual. While a policy may seem unnecessary from a legal perspective, it may be highly desirable in a particular community, and we respect that.**

## **STEP 2**

GSBA will send preliminary recommendations for all policies to the superintendent. The superintendent and appropriate staff will review the information in preparation for a conference call with a representative from Harben, Hartley, & Hawkins. Some school districts 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 the manual is reviewed carefully with these three questions in mind:

- whether each policy is mandated, discretionary, or unnecessary
- whether the policy matches with the current practice of the school system
- whether policies are consistent throughout the manual

One of the most common problems is inconsistent policies in different sections of the policy manual. This process of authenticating the policies with the practice of the system and eliminating inconsistencies is an important part of avoiding unintended conflicts in the future. 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.

**If the district has become a charter system or a strategic waiver system, it is very important that the policy manual be reviewed for consistency with the contract(s).**

## **STEP 3**

A representative from Harben, Hartley, & Hawkins will confer with the district as scheduled to discuss recommended revisions and alternative suggestions, outline the revision schedule, and finalize decisions for the majority of the manual. Follow-up on any remaining issues will be provided by phone and/or email.

## **STEP 4**

The manual can 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. Some boards do, however, prefer to adopt it as a whole. GSBA provides assistance as needed and finalizes the project in accordance with our agreement.

## **STEP 5**

Once a manual is reviewed, and 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.

### **GSBA'S POLICY MANUAL REVISION UPDATE SERVICE**

Over time, people sometimes forget the principles of good policy development described above, and the board finds it has an outdated manual again. If GSBA has done a full manual revision, we offer districts two options within the next five years of the full revision.

**Option 1:** We will check your policy manual for the policies listed in your chart of "Required Policies and Others To Be Considered" to ensure you are up to date in these crucial areas (\$7000)

- Receive notification of any policies that need revising
- Receive recommendations on what revisions need to be made to bring your policy manual up-to-date
- Be assured that these policies in your manual are in line with current legislation and state board rules and regulations.

**Option 2:** In addition to the analysis listed in Option 1, GSBA will review the content of any policies that have been added since we completed your manual revision. We will make recommendations as needed to ensure that the added policies are in line with current legislation and state board rules and regulations. (\$9,500)

**Each of these contracts is payable in three installments. An online site will be established to allow policies and drafts to be posted. The district can easily communicate with the policy reviewer from this site throughout the process. Training will be provided to the designated personnel in the use of the site.**

**For additional information, contact Sandy Vanags at:  
(770) 962-2985 • (800) 226-1856 - Toll Free  
svanags@gsba.com  
www.gsba.com**