Your thought leader in school governance

Undercurrents

Vol 8 No 8: 2 March 2018

PROCESS OF HANDOVER FROM AN OUTGOING TO AN INCOMING GOVERNING BODY

This, the fifth of our pieces on the SGB elections, looks at the action required once the new SGB has been elected. We are raising this matter now, as the information we are picking up suggests very strongly that schools should expect a more careful monitoring than has occurred in the past when it comes to the hand-over from the outgoing to the incoming governing body. In order to preclude any difficulties in this regard, we are providing you with some documentation that we trust will help you to get the process right.

Hand-over meeting

It is widely accepted (and generally expected in terms of the provincial regulations) that a hand-over meeting should be arranged between the incoming and outgoing SGBs as soon as is practicable. Such a meeting is crucial to the successful passing of responsibility from the old to the new, and to the meaningful induction and integration of the new governing body.

Unfortunately, there appears to be no general understanding on exactly what hand-over means. Things certainly differ from province to province, and it is so that some provinces have such guidelines and checklists, while others do not. Our concern is that the standard hand-over checklists put out nationally and by some provinces appear to be overly detailed and in parts also questionable, especially where they appear to indicate that governors should be given (and allowed to take away from the school) some critical documents which we believe cannot be allowed to leave the premises. ***Our belief is that there need not be a physical handing over of actual documents, but rather a passing on of "custodianship" of both authority and documentation to the new body.***

Our appended checklist gives you an idea of the documents which we believe need to be made available to the new governing body, but it is important to recognise that many documents – for example, face-value financial documents like cheques or receipts and also minute books – ***should certainly not be handed over and taken away from the school***. These documents are the property of the school, not of the SGB or any individual governor, and must be held in safekeeping at the school by the principal and his or her staff.

The principal, as a member of the outgoing and incoming SGB, could manage the handing-over process by doing the following:

- officially passing "custody" of all SGB minutes, information and files to the new SGB;
- conducting an initial induction session for new members (we will provide some further guidance in this regard next week); and
- answering any questions that the new SGB may have.

The document you will receive with the next edition of *Undercurrents* (*Now you've been elected*) and handouts based on the addendum to this document can together be used as the basis for the induction session, but we would caution against trying to do too much, too soon. We ourselves will be undertaking training sessions in various centres across the country early next term, and so will the provincial departments. One thus needs to guard against the very real danger of information overload!

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The following are our proposals on how a hand-over meeting could be run

- The meeting is formally called to order and opened by the principal. (In some provinces it is expected that this be done by a district official – check what your province requires.)
- The principal should have arranged for the meeting to be minuted, seeing that no secretary would have been elected as yet.
- Introductions take place, with a brief explanation of each person's relationship to the school and his or her particular field of interest.
- The chairperson of the outgoing SGB is given an opportunity to table that SGB's final report, which should, if practicable, already have been distributed to members.
- The outgoing chairperson will take the meeting through a brief but meaningful synopsis of the critical aspects of the report, with input and assistance from the relevant members of the outgoing SGB as may be necessary.
- At the conclusion of the report, the members are given an opportunity to ask questions.
- The meeting may formally wish to table a motion of appreciation and thanks to the outgoing SGB.
- A discussion could take place on whether and how the outgoing SGB members may be willing and able to make themselves available for a transitional period to continue with the handover and mentoring process for the new SGB.
- It is suggested that the new SGB then adopts the following resolution:

  "The incoming governing body of ABCDE School confirms that it adopts the ABCDE School's existing SGB Constitution and retains all school policies and codes of conduct or practice put in place by previous SGBs, which shall remain in force in the school until reviewed, replaced or withdrawn by the incoming SGB."

- If they don't follow this procedure, there will be no policies in place whereby people can be held to account, and any decisions based on policy, codes of conduct or the like will be all too easy to challenge.
- At a subsequent meeting a list can be tabled of:
  - ⇒ areas where there is no policy, and where one is needed;
  - ⇒ a list of policies which have failed, or proven to have shortcomings; and
  - ⇒ any policies where circumstances may have changed and conditions moved forward, and where these changed circumstances demand the revisitation of a policy.
- Governors can then work systemically through them. That alone could take a year or two!
- It could be useful to go into the meeting with some idea of which people are likely to fill which positions as office-bearers, and which portfolios are best suited to the skills and interests of the different members of the new SGB. If there is clarity on this, it should be possible at the initial meeting of the new SGB to elect office-bearers (the first task to be carried out by the new body) and then to allocate portfolios and membership of sub-committees: failing that the SGB should at least have a discussion around portfolios and committee positions, so that allocations can be finalized at the earliest opportunity.
- In the addendum to this edition, we have included some guidelines which outline the role of various office-bearers and committees. These could be used to guide the thought processes in this regard.

Don't forget to decide on new signatories and arrange to get the relevant people to meet at the bank to effect the necessary changes. Check with your bank in advance — certainly the GBF's bank requires both the outgoing and incoming signatories to be present when changes are to be made — and they also demand a copy of the minutes of the meeting at which the decision on new signatories was taken. Be prepared for all of this, otherwise the visit to the bank can turn out to be very frustrating — and ineffective.

- Finally, the meeting ***may*** be opened for any items under "General", but we do not recommend that these matters be discussed there and then: it is too easy to catch people unawares if this happens, and our preferred approach is that such items simply be tabled and then held over to the following meeting.
- The meeting will then normally be closed.

Concluding comments

- We trust that this edition and its addenda will provide some useful direction to you, but we remind you that these are our suggestions based on experience rather than a copy-and-paste from official documents, so you will need to ensure that your final moves are compliant with the regulations and documents in your province.
- The sooner you hold your hand-over meeting and the better you prepare for it, the more seamless will be the transition and the sooner you can get on with the job of governing the school. It is worth making hand-over a matter of high priority rather than a case of simply going through the motions.

Best wishes for a good and effective transition!