



EDUCATION

# ALERT

## THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN POLICY AND PROCEDURE

One of the most fundamental issues involving school boards is their policy-making function. Successful school boards are policy-driven.

However, in the quest to be policy-driven, many boards and districts struggle with the role of a board in dealing with procedures versus policy. A fundamental understanding of the distinction between procedure and policy is required in order for a board to appropriately ascertain its policy-making function.

What follows are the definitional differences between policy versus procedure, along with a series of bullet points that distinguish between policy and procedure in order to get a better grasp of the situation:

### **DEFINITIONS OF POLICY VERSUS PROCEDURE**

**Policy:** The formal guidance needed to coordinate and execute activity throughout the district. When effectively deployed, policy statements help focus attention and resources on high priority issues - aligning and merging efforts to achieve the district's vision. Policy provides the operational framework within which the district functions.

**Procedures:** The operational processes required to implement district policy. Operating practices can be formal or informal, specific to a department or building or applicable across the entire district. If policy is “what” the district does operationally, then its procedures are “how” it intends to carry

out those operating policy expressions.

### **DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS**

The distinctions commonly drawn between policy and procedures can be subtle, depending upon the nature of the organization and the level of operations being described in the statements. Nevertheless, there are common characteristics that can help discern policy from procedures (or the practices used to implement policy). Here they are:

- Widespread application – Policy
- Narrow application – Procedure
- Changes less frequently – Policy
- Prone to change – Procedure
- Usually expressed in broad terms – Policy
- Often stated in detail – Procedure
- Statements of “what” and/or “why” – Policy
- Statements of “how,” “when,” and/or and sometimes “who” – Procedure
- Answers major operational issue(s) – Policy
- Describes process – Procedure

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