

Accreditation of Governing Boards of Educational Organizations: Goal, Objectives, Implementation Mechanism

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Abstract— The paper presents the results of a continuing study of the functioning and development of educational institutions' governing boards. The authors hereof substantiate a hypothesis that developing and implementing a voluntary, fair, and open mechanism for verifying the governing board's conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct will improve the confidence in such boards while optimizing the application of their potential to managing an educational institution. The paper defines the goals and objectives of accreditation as a way to verify the governing board's conformity to the basic principles of conduct. We have developed and described a mechanism for accreditation of educational institutions' governing boards for conformity to the basic principles of conduct; as such, we clarify such principles, set forth which bodies are authorized to accredit such governing boards, and present a Governing Board Accreditation Procedure. The governing board accreditation mechanism was tested in 2016–2018 in Moscow's educational environment. Test results enabled the authors to draft guidelines for the educational institution, its founder, and the governing board's members; such guidelines help ensure the board's conformity to the basic principles (Standard) of conduct, thus improving the key stakeholders' confidence in this board.

The research uses the common scientific research methods: systemic and functional approaches; special research methods, such as sociological (document analysis, observation, surveying, polling, experiment, and expert opinion) and statistical methods.

Keywords— Educational organization; governing board; accreditation of governing board.

1. INTRODUCTION

The current development of the civil society (G. Hegel, T. Hobbes, I. Kant, J. Locke, and K. Marx) actualizes a humanitarian approach to the organization of social institutions, which manifests itself in its focus on the human person, their rights and interests (UNESCO). The basic principles of this approach are openness and a democratic, governmental and public approach to administering the social

institutions, including educational ones. This is reflected in the UN Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the Federal Law on Education in the Russian Federation, and the State Program of the Russian Federation for the Development of Education in 2013–2020.

The governmental and public approach to management implies a fruitful state-society cooperation with respect to managing an educational institution, with emphasis being made on education efficiency, accessibility, and quality [1]; the congruence of education requirements and personal/social/public outcomes. [2] Seizing the opportunities of governmental and public administration implies establishing and operation of collegial bodies to govern the educational institution. Pursuant to the Federal Law on Education in the Russian Federation, mandatory collegial bodies including the pedagogical board and the general meeting that every educational institution is supposed to have in place. The best-represented non-mandatory types of collegial bodies are the governing boards, the board of trustees, and the advisory board (see *Figure 1*); those are not mandatory, and their presence is up to the educational institution and its charter.

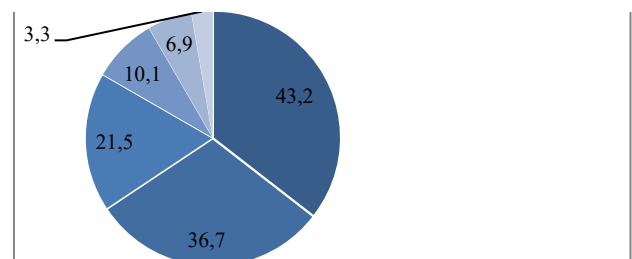


Fig. 1. Educational institutions having various types of collegial governance bodies, thousand units. **Legend (top to bottom):** pedagogical board, general meeting, governing board, other, supervisory board

Governing boards are the best-presented type of non-mandatory governance bodies at educational institutions. 21.5 thousand, or 47% of institutions licensed to provide educational services in Russia have such boards. Breakdown by Russian regions shows a discrepancy in terms of the proportion of educational institutions having established such boards. In this respect, the top-ranking regions are Moscow (100%), Belgorod Oblast (98%), Amur Oblast (87%), and Astrakhan Oblast (84%). The lowest-ranking regions are the Republic of Tatarstan (4), Smolensk Oblast (7%), Kirov Oblast (8%), and the Republic of Komi (13%). At the same time, despite such boards being or not being widespread, they are often merely a formality, which is indicated by a number of papers (L.V. Akimova [3]; L.N. Antonova [4]; S.G. Kosaretsky, A.M. Moiseyev, A.A. Sedelnikov, Ye.N. Shimutin [5]; Ye.A. Lenskaya, I.V. Brun [6]; N.V. Medvedeva [7]; O.V. Roháč, T.M. Ryabova, Ye.V. Frolova [8]; Ye.N. Shimutina, I.Yu. Ivanov [9]; D. Hamlin, J. Flessa [10]; G. Shatkin, A. I. Gershberg [11]). As for what causes governing boards to be inefficient, experts note:

- lack of the basic principles (the Standard), to which such boards shall conform;

- lack of willingness and ability of educational institutions' founders and heads to make use of the potential offered by such boards, which could be done by delegating some powers and responsibilities to them;

- non-development of science-based criteria for electing governing-board members;

- lack of competence and congruence in board members, caused by misunderstanding their own tasks and powers among other things.

These factors do have a negative impact on the efficiency of governing boards and have contributed to the lack of confidence in them on the part of key stakeholders, i.e. the educational institutions' founders, staff, students and their parents (or legal representatives), and the public concerned. The authors hereof believe that developing and implementing a voluntary, fair, and open mechanism for verifying the governing board's conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct will improve the confidence in such boards while optimizing the application of their potential to managing an educational institution. Pursuant to this hypothesis, the purpose hereof is to develop and describe a mechanism to verify governing boards for conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct by means of accreditation. Doing so implies consecutively addressing the following issues:

- to define the goals and objectives of accreditation as a way to verify the governing board's conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct;

- to describe a mechanism for accrediting a governing board for conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct;

- to draft guidelines on implementing the accreditation procedure.

The research literature comprises papers by Russian and foreign scholars dedicated to the development of civil society (G. Hegel, T. Hobbes, J. Dewey, I. Kant, J. Locke, K. Marx, etc.) and governmental and public administration of educational institutions (E.L. Bolotova, S.G. Kosaretsky, N.V.

Medvedeva, A.M. Moiseyev, I.M. Remorenko, etc.), to governing boards of educational institutions (A.A. Pinsky, O.N. Ponomareva, A.A. Sedelnikov, A.Yu. Shkurov, etc.), and governing boards evaluation (L.V. Akimova, L.N. Antonova, T.A. Mertsalova, I.Yu. Ivanov, E.N. Shimutina, etc.); it also contains regulatory documents and guidelines, primary and secondary statistics of federal, regional, municipal, and local levels. The research uses the authors' previously obtained results [12, 13] and the common scientific research methods: systemic and functional approaches; special research methods, such as sociological (document analysis, observation, surveying, polling, experiment, and expert opinion) and statistical methods.

2. RESULTS

Scientific literature presents different definitions of the essential characteristics of educational institutions' governing boards. A.A. Pinsky believes that the governing board of an educational institution is a collegial body of governmental and public administration that consists of elected, co-opted, and assigned members, whose powers are set forth in the respective educational institution's charter and are necessary for addressing a number of important issues of the institution's functioning and development. [14] The governing board is therefore seen as a tool for direct public participation in administering an educational institution, a strategic management body, a kind of "strategic headquarters of the school, a source permanent constructive assistance and advice to directors helping them define and achieve the goals and their specific strategies." [15-17] The governing board is the leading body coordinating the rest of the institution's bodies and enabling them to set forth their requirements through their representatives in the governing body so as to come to an agreed-upon resolution. [18] Analysis of the theoretical frameworks and practices of governing boards' activities has enabled the authors hereof to describe the governing board as a representative collegial body of governmental and public administration, consisting of the representatives of businesses, professional communities, parents, students, sundry cohorts of society, while being empowered to represent, express, and protect the interests of such cohorts in the field of education at the level of the educational institutions.

When choosing a way to assess the governing board, the authors hereof took into account the existing approaches to designing a governmental and social administration system for educational institutions [1, 19, 20], as well as the organizational and legal capabilities of such institutions. In this regard, accreditation was deemed the most relevant way to assess governing boards. Accreditation is a procedure and result of the official confirmation of the subject's conformity to the established principles, criteria, and indicators (the Standard) [21]; it is the accreditation body's official recognition of a natural or legal person's competence and capacity to operate in a certain area, for which such competence is assessed (GOST R 51000.4-2011). In accordance with a clarified definition of accreditation, brought in line with the logic hereof, we defined the purpose of a governing board's accreditation as the official recognition of such board's conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct. Below are the objectives of such accreditation:

1) ensuring the meaningful combination of principles of unity and collegiality in administering an educational institution;

2) exercising the board's capacities in such administration;

3) incentivizing a better competency and congruence of the board members as applicable to administering the educational institution;

4) monitoring the objective data on the professional status of governing boards in the education system;

5) building key stakeholders' confidence in governing boards.

Pursuant to the goal and objectives of accreditation, as well as to the principles of voluntary objectivity and openness of its procedures, the authors hereof designed a mechanism for implementing such accreditation. The design process included:

- clarifying the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct for such governing boards, as well as the requirements an educational institution must fulfill as a candidate for accreditation;

- identifying the bodies authorized to accredit the governing board of an educational institution;

- developing a Governing Board Accreditation Procedure.

Pursuant to the Russian Ministry of Education and Science's *Guidelines on the Furtherance of Governmental and Public Administration of Education in the Entities of the Russian Federation*, the authors hereof clarified the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct for the governing boards of educational institutions. The basic principles (the Standard) of conduct were defined as a set of fundamental rules of organizing a governing board in such a fashion as to optimize the administration of an educational institution by:

- ensuring the transparency of the institution's operations;

- acting in the best interests of all participants to the learning process while minimizing the risk of conflicts;

- continuing to follow the governing board's strategy even if anyone of its members, the Chairperson, or the Head of the educational institution is no longer in the office.

The following basic principles, upon which the governing board should operate, were defined: voluntary membership, collegiality, and decision-making openness. Pursuant to these principles and educational law, the governing board's actions may cover all the key matters of running and furthering an educational institution, such as:

- education quality and accessibility;
- safety and health of those involved in the learning process;
- study programs and their resourcing;
- learning environment and infrastructures;
- modus operandi of the educational institution;

- HR policy of the educational institution;
- discipline, prevention, and resolution of conflicts;
- legal support for the educational institution.

The powers specific to this or that governing board are set forth in the Charter and local regulations of the educational institution. The board's decisions and resolutions on matters within its competence per the Charter are binding on the Head and staff of the educational institution as well as on all those involved in the learning process. The board's decisions and resolutions on matters outside its competence shall be of recommendatory nature for the Founder and the Head of the educational institution, as well as for those involved in the learning process.

Educational institutions applying for voluntary accreditation to confirm their governing board's conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) presented herein must:

a) have a governing board in place, established pursuant to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct;

b) have constituent documents and local regulations to govern the establishment and conduct of the governing board pursuant to the basic principles (the Standard);

c) have public administrators trained in majors of governmental and public administration in education;

d) apply for accreditation of its governing board.

Analysis of the organizational capacities present in the education system identified the body authorized to accredit the governing board; this is the Public Council of the educational institution's Founder. The Public Council shall within its competence adopt resolutions, establish rules, regulations, and criteria, give explanations and recommendations, cooperate with educational institutions and their Founders on the matters of governing board accreditation; on the basis of the expert commission's opinion, it shall adopt a resolution whether to accredit the governing board.

The Governing Board Accreditation Procedure drafted by the authors hereof comprised the following stages:

1. The applicant (the educational institution) applies for the voluntary accreditation of its governing board and attaches constituent documents, local regulations, and the governing board's meeting minutes to prove the board's conformity to the basic principles (the Standard).

2. The Public Council's Expert Commission validates the applicant and application conformity to the requirements. When reviewing the application, the Expert Commission shall check whether (i) the documents submitted meet the requirements to their contents and formality; (ii) the applicant's governing board conforms to the basic principles (the Standard).

3. The accrediting body (the Public Council of the educational institution's Founder) then adopts a resolution whether to approve or deny such voluntary accreditation. Based on the Expert Commission's opinion, the accrediting body shall adopt one of the following resolutions in absentia: (i) to accredit the governing board for three years if it meets the requirements of the basic principles (the Standard) of

conduct; (ii) to deny accreditation, which denial shall come with a reasoned opinion on which deficiencies and observed problems shall be addressed by the applicant within one month.

4. The resolution is registered, and the applicant is issued a Certificate to certify the publication of data in the Accredited Governing Boards Registry.

Each subsequent stage of accreditation is only proceeded to if the preceding stage has had a positive outcome.

The governing board accreditation mechanism was tested in 2016–2018 in Moscow’s educational environment. Over this period, 100% of Moscow-based state institutions of general education completed voluntary accreditation of their governing boards for conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct. Accreditation was performed by the Public Council of the Moscow Department of Education; applications, expertise, and registry management were handled by the Moscow Center of Educational Law, Moscow Department of Education. Test results enabled the authors to draft guidelines for the educational institution, its founder, and the governing board’s members; such guidelines help ensure the board’s conformity to the basic principles (Standard) of conduct, thus improving the key stakeholders’ confidence in this board. In particular, it is now recommended that:

1) Educational institutions’ Founders draft, approve, and publish on their official websites:

a) the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct for governing boards, as well as the requirements an educational institution must fulfill as a candidate for accreditation;

b) Procedure for the voluntary accreditation of educational institutions’ governing boards’ conformity to the basic principles (standards) of conduct;

c) Regulations on the Public Council of the Educational Institution’s Founder, which state the powers and responsibilities of the Public Council applicable to the accreditation of governing boards;

d) a sample application for the voluntary accreditation of the educational institution’s governing board;

e) Accredited Governing Boards Registry.

2) Educational institutions and their heads:

a) create an environment, in which a governing board might be established, function, and develop in accordance with the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct;

b) have public administrators trained in majors of governmental and public administration in education as of the application time

c) publish the constituent documents, local regulations, and the governing board’s meeting minutes to prove the board’s conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) on the official website of the educational institution.

3) The governing board members know and make use of:

a) basic regulations in the field of education and science, including the regulatory matters of governmental and public administration in education;

b) fundamentals of economics and management in education;

c) basic regulations on the organization of the learning process at an educational institution.

3. DISCUSSIONS

The authors hereof agree with A.A. Pinsky that the governing board of an educational institution is nothing exotic but a normal (or even trivial) requirement to a modern school in a country on the way to democracy and civil society [22]. Analysis of theory and practical experience gained from this effort has produced a finding that accreditation of a governing board for conformity to the basic principles (the Standard) of conduct enables: providing a meaningful combination of the principles of unity and collegiality in administering an educational institution; making use of the board’s capacities in administering an educational institution; incentivizing a better competence and congruence of the board members with respect to administering an educational institution; timely and objective monitoring of the professional status of governing boards in the education system.

Note that the presented mechanism for accreditation of governing boards is no cure for the unwillingness of educational institutions and their founders to establish governing boards and delegate specific powers and responsibilities to them; such unwillingness is certainly observed in some regions of the Russian Federation. The authors hereof believe that this problem could be solved by designing and implementing a system for the development of managerial staff able and willing to ensure that the educational institution is administered in a democratic fashion with due conformity to the principles of governmental and public administration.

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