

Seven Fundamentals of High-Performing Charter School Boards

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All of us can learn to be great board members. Are you having the best board experience you've ever had? If not, these signs of a dysfunctional board may be in play:

- Directors unaware of duties
- Board members not asked to participate
- Board dominated by "renegade" member
- Board won't hold leader accountable
- Board not constructed properly
- Board manages operations
- No strategic plan
- Board end runs school leader or staff



Former Minnesota state senator Ember Reichgott Junge is author of the first charter school law in Minnesota and the nation, and the book, *Zero Chance of Passage: The Pioneering Charter School Story* (ZeroChanceOfPassage.com). A member of the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame, she is a national leadership and education policy coach, presenter, trainer and messenger.



Effective Governance Can Be Key to the Success of YOUR Charter School!

1. Structure is Your Friend

- Create procedures that work and use them
- Use committees wisely
- Officers are more than a title

2. Board Decides and Strategizes; School Leader Implements

- Board members lead policy and strategic planning
- School leader implements plans, hires staff, manages operations
- Board chair and school leader are partners and gatekeepers

3. Focus on Mission

- Advocate for constituency, but serve organization as whole

4. Lead Change: Create the Future

- Strong governance is engine that drives organizational change
- Poor governance is like riding the brakes

5. Request Good Governance Information

- A board given useless information will be largely useless board

6. Everyone Shares Accountability for School Performance

- Evaluate board performance and school leader performance annually

7. Empower and Engage Board Members

- Create well-trained ambassadors for your school

Governance Tools and Principles for Immediate Impact!

Structure

- Set meeting agendas, time limits, and procedural limits ahead of time.
- Request a motion! Bring endless debate to a close with a vote. Votes bring closure.
- Refer issues that need work to a board committee.
- Require conflict of interest disclosures in writing from board members annually.
- Use committees wisely; create committee charters denoting functions, membership.
- Create a Nominations/Governance committee for year-round board member recruiting.
- Consider a Community/Parental Advisory Committee with specific mission-based tasks.
- An experienced board chair is key. Is the Treasurer literate in financials?
- Board Minutes are brief, concise, and a record of action, not debate. No editorials.
- Is there a leadership succession plan?

Clarity of Roles

Board Members: Lead policy and strategic planning, approve budget and work plan, and ensure adequate resources through fiduciary and fundraising roles.

School Leader: Implements operations, makes day-to-day decisions, hires staff.

Ultimate Decision-Maker: Majority of board, not individual members.

Reporting Relationships: School leader reports to board chair, staff reports to school leader.

Mission

- Can board members, without notice, verbalize mission, and is it the same?
- Are board members proactively tracking academic performance goals?
- Do board members advocate for constituencies (staff) to detriment of school as a whole?

Create the Future

- Does board spend at least 2/3 time creating the future (forward thinking, strategic planning, setting policies, visioning) and less than 1/3 time reviewing the past (monitoring)?

Information

- Voluminous reports and technical information don't help
- School leader and board chair identify information relevant to board's role and strategic deliberations
- Financials with narrative are most helpful

Performance Accountability

- Board conducts annual evaluations of board performance, orients new board members, ensures continuity in board succession
- Board provides periodic, constructive reviews of school leader and is proactive with improvement plan, if needed
- Board chair and school leader work as team in mutual support
- Board ensures school leadership succession plan

Engage Board

- Teach board members how to tell your school's story
- Keep board members informed
- Ensure board members understand "Chartering 101"

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