

Evaluating Board Performance: A Concrete Roadmap to Dramatically Improve Governance

National Charter Schools Conference
June 23, 2008
10:00 -11:30 am

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Top 10 Characteristics of a Highly Effective[©] Charter School Governing Board

1. Passionate, unwavering belief in the charter school's mission and core values.
2. Clarity of collective vision – where the school is and where it wants to be in the future.
3. A firm understanding of the charter promises and a clear, consistent way to measure them.
4. Clarity of roles and responsibilities
 - a. Role of the full board
 - b. Role of individual board members
 - c. Role of committees
 - d. Role of the School Leader
5. Demonstration of a clear understanding of the difference between governance and management
6. Focused on results
7. The right structure
 - a. Board size
 - b. Composition
 - c. Committee structure
 - d. Officers
8. Board meetings – focused on strategic questions not just reporting
9. A School Leader who assists in the creation of effective governance
10. A strong partnership between the board and the School Leader that is built on mutual trust and respect.



Key Components of Board Evaluation

1. Annual Evaluation of the Full Board

Compared to:

- a job description
- stated goals

2. Annual Evaluation of Individual Trustee Performance

Compared to:

- Self-evaluation compared to a job description
- Annual performance expectations

3. Honest discussion of the evaluation results

4. Annual action plan to strengthen governance



Who should lead the process?

Role of the Board Chair

Role of the Governance Committee

Involvement of the School Leader?

Other stakeholders?



Governance Committee

General Purpose

The Board governance committee is commissioned by and responsible to the Board of Trustees to assume the primary responsibility for matters pertaining to Board of Trustees recruitment, nominations, orientation, training, and evaluation in accordance with the bylaws of the school as well as established policies and practices approved by the Board of Trustees. This committee is also responsible for developing and revising Board the Board handbook as needed.

Appointments and Composition

1. Appointments of the chair and members of the Board governance committee shall be made annually by the Chair of the Board with the advice and consent of the Board in accordance with the Bylaws.
2. The chair of this committee shall be a member of the Board of Trustees.
3. Other members of this committee shall be members of the Board of Trustees.
4. Additional committee members may be appointed and need not be members of the Board of Trustees.

Responsibilities

1. Analyze the skills and experience needed on the Board.
2. Recruit members to serve as members of the Board and develop a slate of trustees for consideration by the membership at the annual meeting in accordance with selection/election procedures outlined in the bylaws.
3. Develop and review annually the procedures for Board recruitment.
4. Develop an orientation and training plan for new Board trustees and assist in the planning of the annual Board retreat.
5. Develop and revise a Board member handbook outlining the responsibilities of the Board and Board members, board policies, and other relevant information.
6. Conduct board education as needed.
7. Coordinate board retreats with the Board chair as needed.
8. Annually conduct an evaluation of the full board and individual trustees.
9. Annually evaluate its work as a committee and the objectives it has committed itself to and report on same to the Board of Trustees.
10. Report to the Board of Trustees at regular meetings of the Board in a manner determined by the Board.



The ABC Charter School Board of Trustees Job Description[©]

General Responsibilities:

Responsible for ensuring that the academic program of ABC Charter School (ABC) is successful, that the school's program and operation are faithful to the terms of its charter, and that the school is a viable organization.

Specific Responsibilities:

1. Determine the mission and purpose of ABC and keep it clearly in focus¹.

- Create and periodically review the mission statement which:
 - a. Serves as a guide to organizational planning, board and staff decision-making, volunteer initiatives, and setting priorities among competing demands for scarce resources.
 - b. Is used as the vehicle for assessing program activities to ensure that the organization is not drifting away from its original purposes.
- Understand and support the mission statement.

2. Select the School Leader

- Reach consensus on the School Leader's job description.
- Undertake a careful search process to find the most qualified individual.
- Oversee and approve contract negotiation and renewal.

3. Support and review the performance of the School Leader

- Provide frequent and constructive feedback.
- Assist when board members overstep prerogatives or misunderstand their roles.
- Compliment for exceptional accomplishments.
- Provide for an annual written performance review with a process agreed upon with the School Leader well in advance.

4. Ensure effective organizational planning

- Approve an annual organizational plan that includes concrete, measurable goals consistent with the charter and accountability plan.

¹ Note the 10 titles in this description come from the BoardSource “Top Ten Responsibilities of a Nonprofit Board and have been adapted to the charter school context. Thanks to the Hill View Montessori Charter School of Haverhill Massachusetts for their model.



5. Ensure adequate resources

- Approve fundraising targets and goals.
- Assist in carrying out development plan.
- Make an annual gift at a level that is personally meaningful.

6. Manage resources effectively

- Approve the annual budget.
- Monitor budget implementation through periodic financial reports.
- Approve accounting and personnel policies.
- Provide for an independent annual audit by a qualified CPA.
- Ensure adequate insurance is in force to cover students, staff, visitors, the board and the assets of the school.

7. Determine, monitor and strengthen the programs and services

- Assure programs and services are consistent with the mission and the charter.
- Approve measurable organizational outcomes.
- Approve annual, attainable board and management level goals.
- Monitor progress in achieving the outcomes and goals.
- Assess the quality of the program and services.

8. Enhance ABC's public standing

- Serve as ambassadors, advocates and community representatives of the school.
- Ensure that no board member represents her/himself as speaking on behalf of the board unless specifically authorized to do so.
- Provide for a written annual report and public presentation that details ABC's mission, programs, financial condition, and progress made towards charter promises.
- Approve goals of an annual public relations program.

9. Ensure legal and ethical integrity and maintain accountability

- Establish policies to guide the school's board members and staff.
- Develop and maintain adequate personnel policies and procedures (including grievance mechanisms).
- Adhere to the provisions of the school's bylaws and articles of incorporation.
- Adhere to local, state and federal laws and regulations that apply to the school.
- Ensure compliance with all federal state and local government regulations.

10. Recruit and orient new board members and assess board performance

- Define board membership needs in terms of skill, experience and diversity.
- Cultivate, check the credentials of and recruit prospective nominees.
- Provide for new board member orientation.
- Conduct an annual evaluation of the full board and individual trustees.



ABC Charter School Individual Trustee Performance Expectations[©]

General Responsibilities:

Each trustee is responsible for actively participating in the work of the ABC Board of Trustees and the life of the school. Each trustee is expected to affirm and strive to fulfill the performance expectations outlined below. These expectations are to be clearly articulated prior to nominating any candidate as a board member. The ABC Board will nominate the candidate only after s/he has agreed to fulfill these expectations. In addition to the responsibilities below, individual trustees are expected to help each other fulfill the tasks outlined in the collective Job Description of the Board of Trustees.

Specific Responsibilities:

1. Believe in and be an active advocate and ambassador for the values, mission, and vision of ABC.
2. Work with fellow board members to fulfill the obligations of board membership.
3. Behave in ways that clearly contribute to the effective operations of the Board of Trustees:
 - Focus on the good of the organization and group, not on a personal agenda
 - Support board decisions once they are made
 - Participate in an honest appraisal of one's own performance and that of the board
 - Build awareness of and vigilance towards governance matters rather than management.
4. Regularly attend board and committee meetings in accordance with the absenteeism policy. Prepare for these meetings by reviewing materials and bringing the materials to meetings. If unable to attend, notify the board or committee chair.
5. Be prepared to contribute approximately 8-10 hours per month toward board service which includes:
 - Attending a month board meeting (2 hours)
 - Participating on a board committee (2 hours)
 - Reading materials, preparing for meetings (1 hour)
 - Attending events at the school, assisting with fundraising and other ambassador tasks as needed (1-2 hours)
6. Keep informed about the school and its issues by reviewing materials, participating in discussions, and asking strategic questions.
7. Actively participate in one or more fundraising event(s) annually.
8. Use personal and professional contacts and expertise for the benefit of ABC.
9. Serve as a committee or task force chair or member.
10. Give an annual financial contribution and support capital campaigns at a level that is personally meaningful.



Is Your Charter School Board Effective?®

Take this quiz and see how you do!

	YES	NO	Don't Know
1. I know the key charter promises we have made to our authorizer and our community.			
2. I know how we measure these charter promises.			
3. We have a job description that details the roles and responsibilities of the full board.			
4. We have individual performance expectations for trustees that are written down and hold each board member accountable to these.			
5. Our board is large enough to have several active, well-functioning committees, who dive into substantive strategic issues and bring information back to the full board for further discussion and decision-making.			
6. Our board consistently demonstrates a clear understanding of the difference between governance and management.			
7. The leadership structure at our school allows our School Leader to take an active role in shaping effective governance.			
8. We have a strong partnership with our School Leader that is built on mutual trust and respect.			
9. We have an effective process for evaluating, communicating with and supporting our School Leader.			
10. Our board meetings are always well attended.			
11. We have a system in place to deal with chronic non-attending and underperforming board members.			
12. Our organization uses academic achievement data to make decisions and improve results.			
13. Our board has formal tools and measures in place to measure organizational performance.			
14. We have a succession plan for both board and school leadership.			
15. We review financials monthly and every board member has a firm grasp on the school's financial health.			
16. Our board spends most of its time setting the stage/creating the future rather than reacting and responding to immediate needs.			
17. Our board conducts an annual performance appraisal of the full board and of individual trustees.			
18. Annually there is 100% board giving to the best of personal ability to the school's fundraising efforts.			
19. Each year the board establishes strategic board level goals that are specific and measurable.			
20. The majority of our board meeting time is focused on strategic issues rather than reporting on past events.			



Individual Trustee Appraisal

How effective are you as a trustee?

How does your performance compare to these typical expectations of trustees on a board?

On a scale of 1-5 – with 5 being highest – please type the number that reflects how you rate your own performance compared to each expectation. Please comment where noted. Thank you.

Typical expectations of trustees on governing boards	Your self-evaluation
1. Demonstrate belief in and actively advocate for the values, mission and vision of the school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please give an example. 	
2. Work cooperatively with fellow trustees to fulfill obligations of trusteeship articulated in Board job description and in these performance expectations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please give an example. 	
3. Act in ways that contribute to the effective operation of the Board of Trustees, including but not limited to: focus on what’s good for the school not your personal opinion or agenda and support board decisions once made. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please give an example. 	
4. Prepare for and regularly attend and participate in board meetings.	
5. Serve on a committee, prepare for and regularly attend and participate in committee meetings.	
6. Participate in additional school start-up activities such student recruitment events, community meetings, and other ambassadorial events.	



Typical expectations of trustees on governing boards	Your self-evaluation
<p>7. Reach out to diverse constituencies and help identify and cultivate relationships to support the school as donors, volunteers and advocates.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please give an example. 	
<p>8. Use your personal and professional contacts and expertise for the benefit of the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please give an example. 	
<p>9. Give an annual financial contribution to the best of your personal ability.</p>	
<p>10. Inform the school’s Board of any potential conflicts of interest that you may have, whether real or perceived, and abide by the decision of the Board related to this situation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please give an example. 	



Suggested process for completing the individual trustee appraisals:

- Timing—ideally at the end of year, before setting goals for the next year.
- The full board would agree on a tool to use (see sample).
- Each trustee would complete and send to the Chair of the Governance Committee or the Chair of the Board.
- Then the Chair of the Board/Chair of the Governance Committee would also complete a form about the trustee's performance.
- Together you would sit down/ or schedule a check-in call with each trustee to review the results, raise any issues that needed to be addressed, etc.
- The School Leader should not be part of this process. It is important that this process be peer-to-peer. Although the board chair should solicit their feedback on each trustee's performance to date.



For an excellent example of a full board evaluation:

<http://www.simonejoyaux.com/resources/PDFs/GovAssessmt.pdf>

For an outstanding example of an individual board member self-evaluation tool & process:

<http://www.simonejoyaux.com/resources/PDFs/BdMemberAssessmt2.pdf>



Expectations of a board member

1. Governor

Fulfilling governance functions

2. Ambassador

Reaching out to the community

3. Sponsor

Giving time and money

4. Consultant

Using skills and expertise on behalf of the organization



What does our charter school really expect from you as a board member in 2008?

Use this handy-dandy checklist and you'll be guilt-free!

Governor

- Attend 10 board meetings a year.
Dates remaining include: _____
- Attend the annual meeting and board retreat scheduled for _____
- Come to board meetings having read the packet ahead of time. *We'd like to shift and have board meetings really talk about substantive issues instead of reporting and will be relying on you to read the packet ahead of time.*

Consultant

- Actively serve on a board committee, using your talents and expertise and/or
- Complete a specific project(s) using your expertise.

Sponsor

- Each member of the board shall make an annual cash to the best of their means, at a level they would personally consider generous.
- Assist with fundraising by completing a quarterly³ sponsor tasks. This quarter's sponsor task is to complete one of the following by March 1, 2006.
 - Donate (or encourage a friend) to donate an item for the auction (see attached wish list.)
 - Secure a sponsor for friend/fundraising events (see list of dates and dollar amounts.)
 - Send personal Annual Fund notes to 10 people (or businesses).

³ You could make this monthly, or bi-monthly.



Ambassador



Help our school reach out to new and diverse audiences by completing a quarterly ambassador task. This quarter's ambassador task is to do one of the following by March 1, 2006:

- Attend and 5 bring people to scheduled friend raising events.



Tips for Keeping Strong Board Members Engaged

Tighten up your board meetings:

- Keep them to no more than two hours
- Keep to your agenda
- Focus on the strategic not the minutiae

Provide opportunities for board members to participate in school activities.

- They need to come in contact with the mission to stay engaged.

Conduct board member evaluations to gauge member satisfaction.

Conduct board retreats and outings so individuals develop rapport and feel comfortable challenging one another.

Task your governance committee with developing a simple annual board building program. (see tips and activities on the next page).



Board Team Building Exercises

1. Guilt-free Board Member Activity

- Board members often lament that they don't know what they are suppose to be doing month to month. School Leaders wish their board members were doing more.
- Adapted the attached guilt-free board member action plan to your board's needs.
- Come up with an easy way to chart progress towards actions/goals at each board meeting.

2. Board Member Book Club

- I haven't met a board yet that didn't wish they were doing more fundraising with individual donors. Buy each board member one or both of these books. You can really read them in less than 30 minutes. They are fun and inspirational. Then have a 20 min. book club discussion at a board meeting.

Big Gifts for Small Groups: A Board Member's 1-Hour Guide to Securing Gifts of \$500 to \$5,000 by Andy Robinson

Asking: A 59-Minute Guide to Everything Board Members, Volunteers, and Staff Must Know to Secure the Gift, by Jerold Panas



3. Read a provocative article:

These articles are from the excellent web site

www.Help4NonProfits.com –look in their free nonprofit library for other articles.

- a. Riding the Horse the Way it is Going**
- b. Fundraising for Small Nonprofits**
- c. Founders Syndrome**

4. Envisioning the Future

- Ask board members to think about what the charter school will be like in 20 years. Pretend that you a visitor to the future. You go to see your charter school—write down what it looks like, what is happening there, who is there, etc. Then share your thoughts. Discuss how to create a bridge from where you are now to where you want to be. What is the role of the board in getting there?

5. Board Meeting Evaluation

- Evaluate your board meetings on a regular basis.
- Rotate through the board with each board member taking a turn at evaluating the board meeting by sharing observations and feedback at the end of each meeting.
- Ask a few key questions:
 - What did we do tonight to further our mission?
 - How much of our time was spent reporting on the past vs. planning our future?
 - Did we stick to the agenda?
 - Was there equal participation by board members?
 - Was this meeting effective? Why or why not?
 - What could be done to improve the board meeting?

