

CharterBoardPartners

great boards for great schools

Case Study

All Stars Public Charter School is currently in its planning year. The board is comprised of five founding members, all close friends with a background in education who are passionate about making All Stars a success. After a long search for their first Executive Director, the board settled on Rachel Smith, a young, promising leader. The final decision did not come easily to the board, as Rachel's age and relatively limited breadth of experience caused concern among some of the members. However, she had a few champions among the group and eventually emerged as the person they felt was the strongest candidate in the pool of applicants.

Rachel has begun the hiring process for her staff, including the key positions of Principal and Director of Finance. She has narrowed her choices down to a few finalists for both positions. A few days before the next board meeting, Rachel is surprised to receive an email from her Board Chair asking to see the resumes of her finalists. She is taken aback, but she sends them over as requested. She hears nothing further until the board meeting when, at the conclusion of her report to the board, the conversation centers on her hiring process for senior staff. The Board Chair announces that she brought copies of the resumes Rachel sent her and begins to distribute them around the table. As the board members pour over the papers, making notes and exchanging comments, one member of the board asks Rachel to explain her recruitment process for candidates, stating that he has some real concerns about the lack of diversity represented in the finalists. Another member asks Rachel why she never even scheduled an interview with a very well-known member of the community who many potential parents would like to see as principal of All Stars. Finally, the Chair quiets the group and says: "You know, I've been thinking a lot about this and I think for such key positions, we are going to need to approve the hire and have him or her report directly to the board." She then quickly adds, "It will just be for these senior positions, and just this first year, Rachel, while you learn the ropes. It's not personal—we just want to help you—after all, we've all been at this a lot longer than you have!"

When Rachel responds, her voice is shaking and she looks to be near tears: "Hold on. When you hired me, I was clearly told I would be given the autonomy to build my team. Are you saying you don't trust me?" Some of the board members exchange worried looks—will they lose their leader over this? Can they give her the freedom she wants if they don't trust that she can make such critical decisions? The Board Chair doesn't relent, though—she asks for a vote on her suggestion to give the board final authority over senior level staff positions during All Stars' first year of operation.

Questions:

1. What are the key challenges here?
2. What structures or systems could have prevented both the board and Rachel from reaching this point?
3. What would you do if you were supporting Rachel and this board?