

CharterBoardPartners

great boards for great schools

GOVERNANCE FAQs

Question	Answer
What is a board?	<p>A board is an organized group of volunteers who, collectively, are legally and morally accountable to the community for the health, vitality, and effectiveness of the organization. As representatives of the public, the board is the primary force pressing the organization to realize its potential for service and fulfill its obligations to its constituencies.</p> <p><i>Governance is Governance</i>, Independent Sector, 1998.</p> <p>For charter schools, the board is the body that holds the charter—meaning they are the entity ultimately held responsible for the school delivering on its mission.</p>
What is governance?	<p>Governance is the distribution of legitimate authority to influence and enact policies and decisions; it defines who has the power, who is in charge, and who is responsible; its primary roles are setting the direction, ensuring adequate resources and overseeing the health of the organization.</p> <p><i>C.A. Trower, Govern More, Manage Less. Harnessing the Power of Your Nonprofit Board (2010)</i> (published by BoardSource)</p>
How is governance different from management?	<p>If management is about running the business, governance is about seeing that it is run properly. – Robert Tricker</p>
What are bylaws?	<p>Bylaws are the rules that govern the internal management of an organization. They are written by the organization's founders or directors and cover, at minimum, topics such as how directors are elected, how meetings of directors are conducted, and what officers the organization will have and their duties. Bylaws are developed during the incorporation phase of a nonprofit charter school board. A change to the bylaws should be by board vote only, after full consideration and discussion by all board members. Bylaws should be reviewed annually and updated if necessary. All changes to bylaws must be reported to the IRS and usually also to the local charter school authorizing body.</p>

Does every charter school have a board?	Yes—and no. In most states, there is a board for every charter school, or for a network of schools (e.g. KIPP:DC has one board overseeing all of the KIPP campuses in DC). The law varies state-by-state as to whether a network of schools must have a local board.
How many board members usually sit on a charter school board?	Typically 9-11 members, although some boards in DC (more mature boards) expand to 15, which is the max allowed by law. Not all states have size limits.
Are charter school board members publicly elected?	No—charter schools elect (and re-elect) their members by board vote in accordance with their bylaws.
How long is a typical charter school board member term?	This varies widely by board—2-3 years is the usual “best practice” term length range, but many boards have longer terms, and/or do not actually follow the term limits they outline in their bylaws.
What are the typical committees found on a charter school board?	While committee structures will differ somewhat from board to board, Charter Board Partners recommends that schools create at least four standing committees: Finance (which would be also be responsible for oversight of the audit function), Governance, Academic Excellence, and Development. If the board can only support three committees initially, it should establish a Finance, Governance, and Academic Excellence Committee.
Is the school leader also a board member?	Typically the school leader is an ex-officio member without voting rights. CBP does not advise boards to allow school staff to have voting-authority board seats.
Does every charter school board have to have parent representatives?	DC law requires that every charter school board have two current parents as board members. In many states this is not a requirement. CBP encourages all boards to include parent representation, but the legal mandate on this varies by state.
Why is governance important?	Public charter schools, like other nonprofits and independently governed schools, need strong boards to be successful. The best charter schools are led by effective boards that provide visionary leadership for their schools.
What sort of decisions does a board make for a school?	Boards vote on strategic decisions that affect the academic, fiscal, and organizational health and sustainability of the organizations. The issues they face can range from acquiring a new facility, renewing a lease on a current facility, hiring, firing,

	<p>or retaining their School Leader/Executive Director/CEO, approving the annual budget, or deciding whether to expand the school’s program to serve more students. A board can also choose to make the most difficult decision of all—to relinquish the charter if the school is failing to meet performance standards.</p>
<p>How does the board function when there are several campuses for a school?</p>	<p>There is usually one Executive Director/CEO who oversees all of the School Leaders of each of the various campuses. The ED/CEO should be the only leader who reports directly to the board, and he/she should regularly report on performance metrics for each of the campuses.</p>
<p>What is the relationship between the board and the larger charter school authorizing body for a city or state?</p>	<p>This varies depending on the strength of both the board and the local authorizer. In DC, Scott Pearson, the Executive Director of the Public Charter School Board, and his staff, encourage board members to be proactive and to reach out when they have questions or concerns. CBP encourages this kind of open dialogue.</p>
<p>What is Open Meeting Law and what does it mean for charter governance?</p>	<p>Open meeting laws refer to the legal requirement of a public entity to open its meetings to the public. Open meeting laws vary across the country, and do not exist everywhere although they are very common. This is very important for charter boards to understand as they are usually required to abide by this law, and they are also usually required to receive training on the law.</p>
<p>Does the authorizer frown on board members spending money on food for their board meetings?</p>	<p>Not unless the spending is excessive. The board members are volunteers attending long meetings. A platter from Cosi, pizza, etc. is fine. Most of our boards provide some sort of food and water at their board meetings.</p>
<p>How much money do different schools raise privately, and what do most boards require of their members in this area?</p>	<p>In regards to board fundraising, most schools ask board members to give at a level that is personally meaningful to them, but giving is not the only role a board member plays in fundraising. CBP has a great fundraising tool that gives some guidelines in this area.</p>
<p>When does a CEO need to ask the board about a new budget sign off?</p>	<p>The board also needs to decide (if they haven't already) on their own policy for what constitutes a significant budget change that would require their sign-off. Typically, it's significant if it's more than 10% or is recurring.</p>