



## Prospective Board Members Frequently Asked Questions

### What is the purpose of Public Charter Schools in South Carolina?

According to the law, the purpose is

- (1) to improve student learning;
- (2) to increase learning opportunities for students;
- (3) to encourage the use of a variety of productive teaching methods;
- (4) to establish new forms of accountability for schools;
- (5) create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site; and
- (6) assist South Carolina in reaching academic excellence.
- (7) create new, innovative, and more flexible ways of educating children within the public school system, with the goal of closing achievement gaps between low-performing student groups and high-performing student groups.

### How does a Board function?

The board governs by policy and the administrator (principal or school leader) manages by implementing procedures. The board acts as one body in a quorum at a publically announced meeting. Individual board members or committees do not have the authority to act for the board. There are four types of policies a charter school governing boards usually consider:

- Policies required by law (e.g. nondiscrimination, sexual harassment)
- Policies required by the charter (e.g. lottery/enrollment)
- Policies that give a broader definition to the vision/mission (e.g. educational program philosophy, administrative structure)
- Policies that communicate board decisions (e.g. facility use, withholding diplomas/transcripts/grades)

### What is the role of a Charter School's Governing Board?

A Charter School's Governing Board is ultimately responsible for advancing the mission of the school, ensuring the charter is implemented, and that school is financially solvent with long term fiscal sustainability. The governing board must assume the following responsibilities according to current SC law:

- (a) employing and contracting with teachers and non-teaching employees;
- (b) ensuring that teachers, whether certified or non-certified, undergo the background checks and other investigations required for certified teachers, as provided by law, before they may teach in the charter school;
- (c) contracting for other services;
- (d) developing pay scales, performance criteria, and discharging policies for its employees;
- (e) deciding all other matters related to the operation of the charter school, including budgeting, curriculum, and operating procedures; and
- (f) ensuring that the charter school will adhere to the same health, safety, civil rights, and disability rights requirements as are applied to all public schools operating in the same school district.

### What are the legal expectations for Charter boards?

- S.C. Charter Act
- SC Nonprofit Law and 501(c)3 IRS regulations.
- Admission of Students (lottery and priority)
- Freedom of Information Act
- Election of Board members
- State Ethics Act <http://ethics.sc.gov/rulesofconduct/>
- In accordance with state law, board members can not have any prior felonies on their record.



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### What are the revenue sources for charter schools?

Charter schools receive state and federal funds. Schools in local districts receive local dollars, but schools under state-wide authorizers do not receive any local dollars. Public charter schools are 501(c)3 organizations and may take tax-deductible donations, and should actively be applying for grants. Board fiscal reports - Monthly Monitoring is a MUST:

- Require Reports with MTD, YTD, and Budget Variance Figures (% or \$)
- Perform Quantitative Analysis
- Always Ask Questions
- Never Assume “Absolute Expertise”
- Annual Audit and 990 filings required – make sure you take time to read it and take action on the independent auditor’s findings.

### What should boards do with all of the student academic growth and achievement data?

Boards should be making data driven decisions based on the needs of the students and the fiscal sustainability of the school. The school administrator will report to the board on:

- Progress on the school’s goals and objectives for the charter
- Student growth in assessments, like MAP
- School’s South Carolina Annual School Report.  
Paying particular attention to:
  - Absolute Rating
  - Improvement Rating
  - Performance Trends over Time

### Who evaluates the school administrator and staff?

Evaluation should reflect the mission and culture of the school.

- It’s the Board’s responsibility to evaluate the Principal each year. This process and the goals and objectives should be determined a year prior to the evaluation or upon hiring.
- It is the Principal’s responsibility to evaluate staff and make recommendations.

### How much time should I plan on committing to serving on a charter school board?

Effective charter school boards are high-functioning diverse teams. They are not positions to merely put on your resume and show up a couple of times a year. Most board members spend 8 to 10 hours a month on board-related work, research, and committee assignments. Board meetings are usually once a month and should be no longer than 2 hours. Board members should come to meetings prepared to discuss all agenda items. Boards should be provided with agenda items to review about a week before the meeting.

### What are some of the common governance problems faced by charter boards in SC?

- Indecision
- Mishandling Conflict
- Nepotism
- Conflict of Interest Policy “worked around”
- Personal Agendas
- Too Much, Too Quick
- Micromanagement
- Overdependence on the Administrator
- Financial Mismanagement
- Overextending Administrators
- Lack of Policy Infrastructure
- Unqualified or Poorly Qualified Board Members
- Founders Syndrome
- Lack of Continuity and Institutional Memory