

## BACKGROUND

Effective governance is one of the great challenges for any organization. It is especially challenging for charter schools because the legal and governance structure of charter schools in Minnesota is unlike that of any other organization. Charter school board governance is, by legislative design, a unique model and one of the more innovative elements of the charter school law.

Charter schools are non-profit corporations operating a public institution, which is governed by a nonprofit board of directors that operates under the rules of a legislative body. The board is composed of teachers, parents, and community members, who are elected by parents/legal guardians and staff of the school.

It is a governance model that requires a high-functioning and hardworking board for there to be effective and successful governance.

While the ultimate effectiveness of a board depends on the commitment of those who take on the role of governance to act with integrity and seriousness of purpose, those who take on governance responsibilities also need tools and skill set to do the job, as well as education to enhance their knowledge and understanding.

The history of the charter school movement in Minnesota provides sufficient evidence that ineffective and dysfunctional governance leads to the failure of charter schools and the disruption of education for young people.

In response to that history, the 2009 legislature instituted a requirement that charter school board members take training in three basic topics within their first year of service on the board. Those topics are: board governance, employment policies and practices, and financial management.

While these three topics are considered essential, they are not sufficient for effective governance. In 2011 the legislature added the requirement that board members complete annual ongoing training and education throughout their term of office.

The charter school movement cannot operate with ineffective and low-functioning boards. Ineffective and dysfunctional board governance robs students and families of opportunities, costs teachers in terms of professional growth and employment opportunities, and imperils charter school autonomy with new regulations and laws enacted to address the ineffectiveness, dysfunction, and even abdication of duty by boards.

The MN Association of Charter Schools believes that individual charter school boards as well as the movement itself must take leadership to improve board governance.

With that in mind, the MN Association of Charter Schools recommends the following actions for individual charter school boards, authorizers, and the Association itself.

## Recommendations:

### Individual Charter School Board of Directors

1. Adopt and implement a plan and process to provide information about the role and responsibilities of board members to candidates before the election of the board.
2. Adopt and implement a plan and process for the orientation of all new board members. The plan should require that the orientation of every new member must be conducted before the individual is formally seated as a board member.
3. Adopt a policy and implement the practice of an annual board of directors retreat to address the education of the board, review the achievements of the school and/or undertake long-range planning.
4. Adopt a policy and implement the practice that requires individual board members do an annual assessment of his/her performance of board member responsibilities and develop a personal development plan for enhancing his/her skills, knowledge and understanding to be an effective board member. \*
5. Adopt a policy and implement the practice of an annual board performance review and the development of an action plan for the continuous improvement of board performance. \*
6. Annually budget and appropriate funds for the education and training of board members.

### Authorizers:

1. Require that charter school contracts include **school board established** goals for the orientation, and ongoing education, and training of school board members, and how the school will document the implementation of these goals.
2. Require all authorizer staff and consultants who monitor charter school boards take the initial training that board members are required to take and do continuing education in the governance of a non-profit board operating a chartered public school.

### MN Association of Charter Schools:

1. Offer training for board members on a variety of topics that will enhance the skills, knowledge and understanding of the role and responsibilities of board members.
2. Develop and offer tools and other resources to assist charter school board members to be more effective in fulfilling their responsibilities.
3. Provide technical assistance to boards to enhance their operations and performance.