

BOARD GOVERNANCE WORK GROUP – Meeting Notes of June 12, 2017

Attendees: Becky Meyer, Nancy Dana, Rachel Martinez, Liz Wynne, Heather Ross, Barb Wornson and Eugene Piccolo

A] Preliminaries

Attendees introduced themselves and shared what was the first nonprofit board they were elected or selected to serve on.

Wynne asked if folks would share why they volunteered to serve on the Work Group
(*Comments Summarized*)

- Belief that there is a direct correlation between the quality of school and effective boards
- Boards seem to be directed by the school director – is that appropriate
- Basic requirements for training do not require board to focus on student learning
- Curious to learn about a variety of governance situations
- Question of what oversight role
- Reaffirm great board
- School directors not knowing how to work with board
- Experiences with a number of situations – raise question about role of board/school director
- Get the pulse of governance is charters
- Address isolation of individual board/board chairs
- How to build support for boards
- Understand role of board, school director and authorizer in governance

Piccolo reviewed the Charge of the Work Group and the Meeting Agenda

B] Background & Focus

Piccolo shared that during the Conference Call Orientation a couple of weeks ago, Wynne asked if a search for research about charter school governance could be undertaken. Piccolo reported that he contacted 4 national groups and that all indicated that research was limited. Thus the two documents that were sent out with the agenda.

Wynne asked if there was an awareness of one other piece of research – a study done on governance of Washington D.C. charters by Fordham. She indicated that while it was specific to D. C. it was worth taking a look. (*Note: The D.C. research will be sent to Work Group Members*)

1] Discussion of the Findings & Ideas Based on a Read of the 2 Research Documents

(*Comments Summarized*)

- Boards seem to focus on finances/not planning for the future planning
- Board role about academics not emphasized
- Little accountability beyond internal school community
- Boards need to do assessment of needed skills and skills of current members
- What is role of board in school operations
- Need to define role of authorizer/school director/board
- Boards do not often know how a school works

- Are members of the board “representatives” of constituencies
- How can a board develop expertise/knowledge base with 1 or 2 year terms
- Board member turnover rate – affects governance
- Do we set up boards for success or failure by how they are structured?
- Boards need a range of training
- School election cycles – need for “on-boarding” – process/timeline – attend meetings before taking office
- Training needs to be required before taking office
- Limited pool of board members in smaller communities with expertise & pool of community members
- Job descriptions and expectations for board members
- What value do we place on Boards? - should we pay people like traditional boards, impact on nonprofit status is an issue
- Need to look at parent representation – are they better ways for parent input/different forums
- Who configuration of board structures and composition - is there a best model
- Should we expect a certain level of experience/teaching experience for teachers to qualify for board – charters have a lot of new/inexperienced teachers on boards
- Governance a tough job – that needs to focus on school viability
- Other ways of stakeholder involvement beyond governance – is board appropriate venue for parent/faculty issues? – smart administrators listen to different voices in determining action
- Culture and history of board/school are baked in governance even if everyone currently involved in school leaves.
- Model of governance vs effectiveness of governance – focus too often on model vs effectiveness
- What are the characteristics of highly effective boards? – kids are learning, sound finances, no scandal, inclusive enrollment ... ?
- Other measures of effectiveness - consistency in governance, non-personal, strong policy and procedures that are implemented
- Need to define a highly functioning board
- Questions every board member should be able to answer: What are finances? Where is school academically? What is the morale of the school?
- Boards work hard – question is what are they working at?
- Question - Why boards are not effectively functioning? – pass on taking responsibility, too much information, way information is delivered is beyond level to digest, no opportunity to discuss/boards just listen to reports/no real conversation, lack of preparation for meetings
- Maybe need to do an exit quiz at end of meetings to see if members know information from meeting
- Board culture & expectations – what is level of engagement and preparation for meeting – are people reading minutes during meeting/ Sleeping during meeting/ speeches vs dialogue
- How do we know if people are prepared for meetings? How would one go about finding that out?
- Lack of accountability - board members need to hold each other to standards – certain behaviors not acceptable
- Clear job descriptions/ expectations

2] Starter List of Questions

The Group was asked to identify questions that should be added or eliminated from the Starter List of Questions that the Work Group might address.

Additional Questions suggested:

1. What is the board role in school closures? – there is a need for boards to recognize when it is time to make the tough decision rather than the authorizer
2. What is the board role in holding school directors accountable? – boards need help
3. What is the authorizer role in setting expectations for boards before a school opens?
4. What should be the board's role in strategic planning for the future? In continuous school improvement?
5. Why is it so difficult to get people to volunteer for service on the board? – time, requirements, not understanding governance or even the chartering concept

3] Information Gathering

Question – what information do we need as a Group to gather to answer the questions before the Work Group?

Suggestions

1. By-laws of schools
2. Basic information about existing boards
3. Survey boards using the Starter list of questions
4. Sample surveying
5. Interviews with board members/focus groups – onsite

Piccolo suggested that we probably need to do a combination of methods - he will put together a plan for the Group to look at for gathering information.

C] Charter School Law Review

Ideas suggested for changes to the law:

1. Modify the requirement for designated categories of people on the board
2. Lift the restriction on non-teaching staff being on the board
3. Clarify what school closed means regarding when elections may be held
4. Clarify responsibility of board in terms of charter contract execution and ongoing review
5. Clarify conflict of interest provision – regarding partial ownership of entity doing business with school – i.e. – ownership in a COOP or Credit Union

Two other issues raised – posting requirement of board minutes and definition of family members. The first is addressed in the Data Practices Law and the second in the definition section of the charter law.

The fact that these types of issues are raised by schools indicates the need for education of board about the laws themselves.

D] Evaluation of the Meeting – *Comments Summarized*

- Bigger issues than thought/bigger scope of work
- Great exchange – background/complexity of issues is a challenge – good input/discussion
- Differences in schools and experience of governance – like the idea of focus groups/interviews
- Need to remember not to prescribe solutions that one size fits all
- Looking to end product of work – need to prioritize given the scope of the questions.

NEXT MEETING TUESDAY AUGUST 15th @ MACS OFFICE

Summary Notes by:

Eugene Piccolo, Executive Director