Governance and Leadership

Governance

Before a principal accepts a position at a charter school, he/she should make sure his/her values align with the school's vision, mission, and goals.

The Center for School Change (Cheung, 1999), at the University of Minnesota has conducted a national review of charter school governance. They collected data from 30 charter schools in nine states to uncover key elements of successful structures that were common with thriving schools as evidenced by standardized tests and other forms of assessment. The following common traits were found:

- ❑ Governance structure reflected that of the school's mission, goals, and objectives.
- ❑ Used some form of shared decision-making.
- ❑ Produced documents explaining which decisions are made by whom (i.e., governing board, administrator, committee).
- ❑ Involved a variety of people in the governing board and in the committees.
- ❑ Employed board training seminars, and/or retreats.
- ❑ Had a relatively simple organization, without multiple levels of bureaucracy.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (July, 1999), states most governing boards reflect one or more of the following models:

Model of Governance	Type of Decisionmaking	Committee Role	Membership Traits	Advantages/ Disadvantages
Traditional	Well-defined with published rules, formal votes, and recorded minutes	Committees make recommendations to the board for approval	Parent represented, however that is not the dominant representation. There is a balance in representation, which is written in the bylaws. Expertise is the justification for membership.	Advantage: Clear leadership, understanding of accountability and responsibility.

Disadvantage: Teachers don't feel ownership and parents may fell alienated. |
| **School Committee** | Management is delegated to one or more members. Decisions are usually reached through consensus. | Always discusses issues as a whole group, rather than as a subcommittee. | Parents and teachers are usually dominant. Members are elected or appointed. The criteria for membership are a desire to see the school's mission met. | Advantage: More collaboration, peer-based decision making.

Disadvantage: Unclear leadership, may be time-consuming. |
| **Entrepreneur** | CEO makes final decisions | Committee on an advisory only basis to the CEO. | This is the standard corporate model. | Advantage: Clear leadership.

Disadvantage: Not always appropriate for schools, as shared decision-making typically brings better results. |

Whatever type of structure your school will use, certain issues need to be addressed:

- ❑ Policies need to be clearly stated (see examples in this section of the *Guidebook*).
    - ➢ Formalized written statements and documents that are adopted by the governing board should describe or characterize the way a certain issue is handled by the school. This helps maintain a healthy organization.
- ❑ Alertness for the tendency to micromanage.
- ❑ Bylaws should include
    - ➢ A description of the powers of the board
    - ➢ Process for formation of the board and board elections
    - ➢ Clarification of committee designations and nominating process
        - • Standing committees (permanent committees, established in the by-laws)
        - • Ad hoc committees (created for a specific purpose, then disbanded after the need no longer exists)
    - ➢ Relationship to staff
        - • Day-to day operations
        - • Hiring
        - • Administrator's role vs. that of the Board
    - ➢ Meeting specifics
        - • Public meetings laws
        - • Types of meetings
        - • Notice of and actions taken at meetings

A good source for how to develop policy is a new website being developed through the Colorado Department of Education's School to Career Partnership office [www.cde.state.co.us/schooltocareer/index.htm]. Click on "Navigating the Seas of Policy," written by Steve Kennedy of the School to Career office at CDE. Another excellent resource is Jossey-Bass, Reinventing Your Board: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Policy Governance (1990).

Developing a board manual is helpful, and it can be used as a resource for reference, as well as an orientation for new board members (see example in this section of the *Guidebook*, additionally, Hirzy's book , Nonprofit Board Committees: How to Make Them Work [1993], is a good reference to understand nonprofit board committees).

Successful boards are ones in which the members not only share the mission and vision of the school, but the membership consists of people who team well. These successful boards make board member development a priority. Some ideas for this would include:

- ❑ Hold retreats or in-house sessions that focus on team building. This should be done every year or two, and especially when there are several new board members.
- ❑ Revisit the mission and vision often. It is so easy to lose sight of this as the years pass.

- ❑ Clarify roles and responsibilities of the board early; create job descriptions of the various positions of the board.
- ❑ Conduct new board member training.
- ❑ Evaluate the board and its members on a continuous basis. The design of the evaluation will vary depending upon the governance structure; a third party may be needed to provide an unbiased evaluation. (See examples in this section of the *Guidebook*.)

An excellent reference would be John Carver's Boards that Make a Difference: A New Design for Leadership in Nonprofit and Public Organizations (1990).

Leadership

"To lead people, walk beside them...When the best leader's work is done, the people will say, 'We did it ourselves!'"---Lao-tsu

True leadership will be needed in working with the core founding group of a charter school; however, it will be critical to the successful operations of the governing board and school, past the initial start-up phase.

Below are a few common leadership styles:
- ❑ The *authoritarian leader* tells the group what to do without getting any input from other sources. Although this style will be used occassionally by all leaders when time is limited, the needed information has been collected, or the group is already internally motivated, it is a less desirable mode of leadership to use the majority of the time.
  - • An appropriate use of this style would be with a new teacher just learning the job. The leader acts like a coach, motivating the new individual to learn his new skills.
- ❑ The *delegative* style of leadership allows the team (or individuals) to respond to most tasks. The leader is responsible, however, for the tasks and decisions that are made. This type of leadership maximizes the organization's talents, as no leader can be the best all the time, nor do everything himself. It does, however, require a great deal of time, something which tends to be in short supply in most charter schools.
  - • For this style to be successful, team members need to have their jobs clearly defined.
- ❑ The *participative leadership* is very democratic. It is similar to the delegative style, but is not quite as extreme. Once again, the leader relies on the talents and motivation of the members. Teamwork tends to bring out talents and inspiration in others. The collaborative nature of this style creates ownership with the members, as they feel more vested in the organization's outcome. This style creates a more balanced power base, as well as a more realistic approach to tackling all the necessary tasks in a charter school.

❑ There will be times when a staff member may know more about an issue than the leader; it is in the organization's best interest, then, to delegate the task to this member. There will also be times when the leader is unavailable. With delegation being a common practice in the school, someone else can be at the helm.

In education, according to William Glasser (1990), the boss-management style of leadership is used almost exclusively. This style limits both the quality and production of all members of the school community (teachers, students, and parents). However, a good leader will use all three of these styles depending on the situation. From Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1999), an example of the appropriate use of all three leadership styles is as follows:

> Telling your staff that a procedure is not working correctly and a new
> one must be established (authoritarian). Asking for their ideas and input
> on creating a new procedure (participative). Delegating tasks in order to
> implement the new procedure (delegative).

Studies overwhelmingly show organizations that consistently use a strong-arm approach to management leadership do not have the same high quality production from its members as do other leadership styles. Teamwork means working to maximize the strengths, which minimizes the individual weaknesses. Methods to use in creating teamwork can include:

❑ Identifying strengths and talents within your school.
❑ Creating a more personal and positive focus to unleash the potential in the organization.
❑ Never assuming one knows all the strengths of your members. Ask them to identify their strengths to you.
❑ Teamwork creates cohesion, which means the individuals put the group as a whole above their own interests. This creates pride in the organization, which is an internal, more genuine motivator. The focus becomes one of contribution, rather than personal gain. High morale occurs when there is ownership.

No matter what blend of leadership style is chosen, expectations of the principal as the instructional leader should be high. This person needs to be capable of accessing needed resources (materials, funds, manpower), be a strong instructional supervisor, an explicit communicator, and the most important resource being visible to the school community.

This section of the <u>Guidebook</u> contains a reference list of helpful materials for a new or existing charter schools, as well as examples of documents dealing with governing boards and the relationship with the school's principal.

References

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Websites

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