



THE GOVERNOR JOHN ENGLER
**CENTER FOR
CHARTER
SCHOOLS**
CENTRAL MICHIGAN
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BOARD GEAR: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Boards have a critical role and special responsibilities in making sure their school succeeds for students. These responsibilities fall into six broad categories.



KNOW AND SUPPORT THE SCHOOL'S MISSION AND FOUNDING DOCUMENTS

Embracing the mission and understanding your founding documents are the bedrock of sound governance. Every charter school operates under a charter contract, this legal agreement between the board and its authorizer contains your mission and founding documents such as articles of incorporation, bylaws, operational structure, educational program and other documents important to your school's operations. Your contract also sets clear expectations regarding your school's academic achievement goals. In short, your contract contains a plan for how you will fulfill your mission and academic expectations. Therefore it's critical that you have a firm understanding of what you are setting out to achieve and your plan to achieve your goals.



ENSURE EFFECTIVE PLANNING

Ensuring effective planning is the cornerstone of any effective organization. The planning process enables the board and staff to translate the broad mission of the organization into objectives and goals that can be measured and accomplished. An important part of planning is ensuring alignment of all plans including the budget, school improvement plan, staff professional development plan and strategic plan to name a few. Alignment of all plans is critical, the board should monitor plans to ensure that planning is effective and working toward achieving the school's mission.



CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY

Building a culture of accountability is critical to ensuring that your effective planning is having the intended outcomes for your organization and students. This begins with board members committing to accountability and making it a core value in everything that is done to fulfill the school's mission. The board should begin by agreeing to board member expectations on commitment and engagement so that it can structure accountability within the organization. Once completed the board can start to collaborate with management on expectations for reporting mechanisms and timing of reports at board meetings. Reporting should be based on outcomes of plans as a way of measuring progress towards goals identified during planning. This cyclical nature of planning, evaluating and reporting on outcomes creates an environment of accountability that's healthy to any organization.



ENSURE FISCAL RESOURCES AND PROVIDE OVERSIGHT TO RESOURCES

The entire board has an essential role in ensuring that fiscal resources are available for the school's operations, while also providing oversight to ensure that those resources are spent wisely. Step one is making sure that the school's budget is sound followed by ensuring regular reporting takes place in a way that all board members can follow. This means understanding what resources are available, and ensuring that your plan maximizes them. Another important step is identifying priorities and funding them first. Finally, you should be continuously evaluating your school's spending against two, primary criteria: academic performance and fiscal soundness. If the budget is not producing agreed upon results in the agreed upon timeframe, adjustments may be needed to align resources to the school's mission.



BOARD BUILDING

Board building encompasses two components: increasing board capacity and increasing personal capacity to govern. Increasing board capacity means identifying what skills are needed on the board, and recruiting people with those skills to serve and build out committees. Committees develop a pipeline of qualified individuals to keep your board balanced and strong overtime while allowing you to vet potential board members. Increasing your personal capacity to govern is also critical. From reading a book or case study to attending an event hosted by CMU, there are many great ways to continue your personal growth and support board building in your school.



EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND AMBASSADORSHIP

Effective communication and ambassadorship is crucial to messaging and staying connected as an organization. Since board members communicate with all stakeholders, it's important to make sure that the board communicates with one voice. Board members individually have no authority, their authority rests with the full board when it takes action at a public meeting. This is how the board most effectively communicates its expectations for the organization. Board members are also ambassadors for their school. Be prepared to share why you're involved with your organization and the benefits of the constituency it serves as part of your elevator speech. Also attend events in support of your organization and the students that it serves as a way of fulfilling your role as an ambassador.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- » How well do we as a board understand our founding documents and what is included in the charter contract?
- » How do we know, based on our board oversight of the budget, if we are achieving our agreed upon results?
- » How have we increased our capacity to govern as a board, and how can we continue to increase capacity moving forward?

Board Gear is a comprehensive governance curriculum focused on charter public school board members and the role governance plays in driving school performance. To view the complete library of videos and resources, visit www.TheCenterforCharters.org/BoardGear.

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