

10 Successful Habits of Highly Success Charter School Founding Boards

SUNY Charter Schools Institute (March 2020)

1. **Understand the charter.** Every board member should read and understand the charter, the school's Accountability Plan, and understand how the school's success will be measured.
2. **Communicate clear expectations for a board member's role.** Board members should know ahead of time how much time they are expected to commit each week or month during the school's start up years. The board should develop guidelines for recruiting new members. Board members should maintain objectivity by having a clear performance evaluation framework for the school leader (and management organization, if applicable).
3. **Have a sufficient number of members.** A high functioning charter school board should have enough people to have functioning committees capable of accomplishing significant work in between meetings. Before school opening, the board may consider having a greater number of members to handle the increased workload.
4. **Have members with a variety of skills.** Several board members should have previous governing experience. Additionally, the school leader needs to have the time and the desire to assist in creating effective governance. Some board members should have education and education management experience, and most board members should have expertise that school staff likely do not possess, such as finance, real estate, law, etc.
5. **Create committees.** While in the founding phase many successful boards work as a whole team, by the beginning of the school's first year most boards have a need to develop committees that focus on specific issues in greater depth than what can be covered during regular board meetings. Committees meet outside of regularly scheduled board meeting times. Board members are typically assigned to committees based on area of expertise.
6. **Create structures to provide oversight of the academic program.** Every board member should read the school's Accountability Plan and collaborate with the school leader to develop benchmarks to measure the school's progress toward meeting its Accountability Plan goals. The board should have a system to monitor the school's academic progress every month, such as regular questions to ask the school leader, and a dashboard of academic and other data.

7. **Create structures to provide financial oversight.** Charter school failure can sometimes be due to financial mismanagement. The board members with strong financial expertise should ensure all other board members fully understand the school's annual budget, monthly financial reports, and how this information impacts the overall academic program and organizational viability.
8. **Increase the board's capacity to govern.** Often the school leader or board chair initiated the vision for the school. However, the board is the entity that has engaged in the contract of the charter with the authorizer, and as such, the board has the ultimate responsibility for the school's success. The board should establish structure for regular board member training so that all board members have the necessary skills to question the school leader and hold them accountable.
9. **Fundraise.** Charter schools typically need additional funds for facility acquisition and renovation, and any additional programming outside of the typical school day such as enrichment programs and after school programs.
10. **Work with urgency.** If a charter school is not excelling early on, it is more difficult to do so later in the term. Therefore it is important to be clear about your expectations with the school leader and hold the school leader accountable for meeting them.