

# The Role of an Effective Charter School Board Chair

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## ***Basics and Beyond***

September 27, 2007

# Objectives for Today.....

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- ❑ Review Some Basics about the key roles and responsibilities of a board member
- ❑ Share “Lessons Learned”
- ❑ Examine Specific Examples  
but most importantly.....

***Interact & Exchange Ideas***

# Roles & Responsibilities of a Charter School Board

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- ❑ Academic program is successful, as measured by both internal and external assessment.
- ❑ Program & operation are faithful to the terms of its charter including all statutory and regulatory requirements
- ❑ School is viable, financially solvent and had competent staff

# Legal Duties of a NYS Nonprofit Board Member

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- **Duty of Attention: Participate actively in oversight of organizational activities**
  - Attend meetings
  - Obtain adequate information (or request a delay in any decision if information is not available)
  - Review and digest information provided
  - Monitor delegated activities
- **Duty of Loyalty**
  - Avoidance of a conflict of interest, if possible.
  - Fairness toward the organization if avoidance of conflict of interest is not possible (“interested director”)
  - Give priority to the organization over all other parties when organizational opportunities arise
  - Maintenance of confidentiality and avoidance of the use of “inside information” for personal gain
  - Disclosure to the organization of pertinent information necessary for the making of informed decisions by the board members
- **Duty of Care**
  - *“In good faith and with that degree of diligence, care and skill which ordinary prudent men and women would exercise under similar circumstances in like positions.”*

N-PCL #717 (A)

# What is a Board Meeting?

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- Volunteer board members spending time together making governance decisions for the future success of the organization

# Role of the Charter School Board Chair.....

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- One part orchestra conductor
  - So that the brass sections does not drown out the reed instruments!
- One part lion tamer
  - Ensuring that the end result is good and no one gets hurt!
- One part nurturer
  - Making sure each board members receives what she or he needs to continue to be of value to the organization

## Characteristics of an Effective Chair...

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- Passion
- Good People Skills
- Keen Negotiation Instincts
- Creativity
- Healthy Self-Esteem
- Ability to see the Big Picture without letting the details slide
- Knowledge of where they need help

# The basic job descriptions....

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- ❑ **Chair meetings** after having worked with School Leader to set agenda
- ❑ **Ensure Effective Functioning of Board** in fulfilling responsibilities of Governance
- ❑ **Appoint Committee Chairs & Membership** in consultation with Board members & School Leader
- ❑ **Chair the Executive Committee**
- ❑ Serve as an **Ambassador & Spokesperson**
- ❑ Provide Leadership in Identification & Outreach for **Resources**



# Chair Meetings.....

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- Establish and Agree Upon Clear Objectives
- Manage Time, Focus, and Egos
- Check Balance using The Four Legged Stool Approach
  - STUDENTS ; SCHOOL PERFORMANCE**
  - Funders and State authorizers
  - Teachers and Staff
  - Community
- Use a Parking Lot for thorny issues
- Share Leadership

## Ensure Effective Governance.....

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- ❑ Set expectations for reports from committees and school leader
- ❑ Review prior to meeting - set tone of openness and “no surprises”
- ❑ Insist materials are circulated at least one week before meeting
- ❑ Observe trustee involvement and understanding; coach as necessary
- ❑ Ensure that issues are addressed as necessary

# Appoint Committee Chairs.....

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- Match trustee skills and committee needs
- Set collaborative tone
- Coach as necessary

# Chair Executive Committee.....

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- ❑ Guide work of other committees, e.g. set format and substance expectations for reporting
- ❑ Call special meetings as necessary to deal with critical issues between regular board meetings
- ❑ Head efforts to appoint and evaluate school Leader
  - Ensure Availability of Job Description and clear Statement of Measurable Expectations

# Relating to the School Leader.....

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## □ Chair

- Supervise school leader
- Define Processes
- Drive the Mission
- Make Strategic Decisions
- Approve Operational Plan
- Review Operational Milestones and Budget

## □ School Leader

- Devise ways to involve other staff members
- Solicit input and communicate to board
- Recommend options
- Develop operation plan and budget
- Implement and present results

# Relating to School Leader (cont)....

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## □ Some Key Skills

- The art of asking the right questions
- Being part of the solution- not the problem
- Maintaining a focus on facts – not anecdotes
- Keeping the school's mission, goals and objectives at the forefront when making decisions
- Willingness to engage as necessary

## Serve as Ambassador.....

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- Lead by example in “friend” raising and community outreach
- Represent school at community events
- Attend school functions and encourage other board participation
- Visit the school regularly

## Lead in Search for Resources.....

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- ❑ Lead by example
- ❑ Set clear statement of support expected from board members
- ❑ Work with development subcommittee on creation, tracking, and implementation of fundraising plan
- ❑ Hold board members accountable to their commitments , e.g. funds, recruitment, attendance, etc.



# Action Axioms for Board Meetings...

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- ❑ #1 Planning: have a plan - no plan, no meeting
- ❑ #2 Working: sitting on a board means work by board members--not just staff members
- ❑ #3 Learning: give board members a chance to learn something at each meeting
- ❑ #4 Deciding: make a decision about something at each meeting
- ❑ #5 Connecting: allow board members time to get to know each other
- ❑ #6 Speaking: a happy board is one where each member speaks – but not too little or too much
- ❑ #7 Acting: the brain can only absorb what the backside can endure—do something
- ❑ #8 Enjoying: board service can be fun, interesting and enjoyable

# And Now Time for Sharing....

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- Thorniest Problems
- Proudest Accomplishments

# Remember.....

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- L**isten
- E**ncourage and engage
- A**ssess
- D**ecide using discipline, facts, respect, and collaborative compromise