

AN INTRODUCTION TO EFFECTIVE CHARTER SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

CHARTER SCHOOL
BOARD
UNIVERSITY



SECOND EDITION
BRIAN L. CARPENTER, PH.D.



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Introduction

If you were standing at 2715 Jorie Boulevard in Oak Brook, Illinois (a Chicago suburb), you would see a university founded in 1961. The institution is situated on 80 acres and is complete with interactive classrooms, labs, and an auditorium--a campus that would be the envy of most charter schools. More than 5,000 students attend this university each year although the first graduating class had only 14.

If that was all you knew about this university, you might be tempted to dismiss it as commonplace when really, it is quite unusual. Why? In part, because of the reason it exists. Hamburger University exists to preserve the credibility of the McDonald's brand by training employees, managers, and franchise owners how to run restaurants the McDonald's way.

Think about that for a moment. McDonald's Corporation recognizes that standards, which they refer to as "Quality, Service, Cleanliness and Value (QSC&V)," are so essential to establishing and sustaining quality restaurants, they've created a university to teach them.

Though I've never attended Hamburger University, I'd bet that its QSC&V curriculum covers everything from making milkshakes to making payroll, as well it should. Running a restaurant is a serious responsibility. Undercook the food and people get sick. Fail to reorder the necessary inventory and the restaurant loses money. Manage employees poorly and the whole operation begins to smell like last week's french fry grease. In time, customers go elsewhere.

A McDonald's manager has typically had more formal training than a charter school board member has typically had.

I chose Hamburger University as an analogy for the introduction to this second edition of *Charter School Board University* because it is rich with implications for charter school boards (and because McDonald's strawberry shakes have been my favorite from the time I was just old enough, according to my mom, to ask for a "shook-make"). The most obvious implication is the centrality of training people as a necessary component to helping them achieve success. McDonald's probably invests tens of thousands of dollars per manager and franchise owner for one simple reason: people that know how to do their jobs well are essential to keeping restaurants profitable.

If you agree that your board has an even greater responsibility than that of a restaurant manager (no diminishment of the latter intended), shouldn't board members have as much or more training on how to do their jobs well? With so much at stake, namely, the well-being of the students in your school, both now and in the future, shouldn't mastering sound governance be one of your board's priorities? The questions are obviously rhetorical but I pose them to make this point: *a McDonald's manager has typically had more formal training than a charter school board member has typically had.*

Hmm.

And when I say *formal training*, I don't mean training on how to follow parliamentary procedures, how to elect officers, how to introduce a motion, and so on. Robert doesn't need me to rewrite his Rules-- and you can read his book if you want to understand them. *Besides, you can follow parliamentary procedure perfectly and still not be governing.* That which is fatuous is not made virtuous just because you follow parliamentary procedure, as exemplified by a board I know of that introduced, seconded, discussed, and voted on a motion to approve the style of student socks. You can substitute cement mix for cake batter but it doesn't make dessert.

By training, I also don't mean information on the usual assortment of stuff that passes for governance training such as Open Meetings,

That which is fatuous is not made virtuous just because you follow parliamentary procedure, as exemplified by a board I know of that introduced, seconded, discussed, and voted on a motion to approve the style of student socks. You can substitute cement mix for cake batter but it doesn't make dessert.

Freedom of Information Act, etc. There is an abundance of information readily available to help boards understand these aspects of governing *but in and of themselves they are not governance.*

It is true, your charter school board has to follow certain laws such as Open Meetings because it is a public school. But understanding those laws is of little help in understanding *how* to govern well, just as following the speed limit is of little help in understanding how to drive a stick shift.

This book offers something more: board practices *based on sound governance principles.* You can think of it as sort of like a Hamburger University for charter school boards--ergo, *Charter School Board University.* In place of “Quality, Service, Cleanliness & Value,” however, I would label a good governance curriculum as SO, SJ, AT & MCP. Certainly not as elegant as QSC&V, but ensuring Student Outcomes, Social Justice, Accountability to Taxpayers, & Meaningful Choices for Parents are the very reasons why charter school boards exist.

If ensuring those outcomes sounds like a big job, well, it is. Governing a public school is every bit as complicated, arguably more so, than managing a restaurant. Learning and practicing the principles of good governance while refraining from interfering with the executive leadership of the school are the keys to meeting that responsibility. This book provides an introduction on how to do that. It’s definitely not the final word on everything you need to know as a board member but it will point you in the right direction.

In closing, I’m grateful to everyone who bought the first edition. It sold around 3,000 copies in about two years, thereby exceeding my expectations. I’m even more grateful to everyone who gave me constructive comments. I kept notes and am incorporating many of your ideas into this edition. I’ve also added five new chapters. Among them, I am particularly pleased to include some findings from my dissertation (successfully defended in September 2008) on dissolved charter schools (in a new chapter aptly titled,

Charter School Accountability: 588 Examples and Counting). I doubt that you'll be surprised to learn that sloppy governance was prevalent in schools on the road to school closure. It's too late for the boards of those schools to learn good governance, but your board can learn some valuable lessons at their expense.

I hope you enjoy this new edition and that it inspires you to lead well through good governance. If you want to connect with me to offer suggestions for improving the next edition or to ask questions, there are numerous ways to do so. Besides contacting the Institute, you can also network with me at www.Linkedin.com or send me an email at board_doctor@mac.com. And of course, if you're looking for a conference speaker or someone to facilitate board training or strategic planning, visit us at www.CharterInstitute.org or call us at (989) 774-2999.

Best regards,
Dr. Brian L. Carpenter
CEO
National Charter Schools Institute
March 2009

How We Got Here

When something has existed during most or all of our lifetime, we tend to give little thought as to that which came before. For example, as far as my daughters are concerned, people have always listened to music either on CDs or iPods. When I was a kid, we listened to records, which were then replaced with eight-tracks, then later, cassettes. When my dad was a kid, I think records were available, but he probably listened to most music on the radio. When my granddad was a kid, they listened to music on those Victrola gramophone things. Before that, I guess all music listening was either done at concert halls or on front porches. The only time I think about the way people used to listen to music is when I play my banjo on my back porch or visit a museum. The point being, we tend to accept what we know as the way it has always been. I find that people think about public schools in much the same way.

People are dimly aware of course, that earlier generations used to walk to school to attend a multi-age class taught in a one-room schoolhouse, much as they are dimly aware that people used to listen to music on Victrola gramophones. But because modern districts with their union-dominated politics and monopoly-like existence have been around for the past fifty years or so, people don't really think about what schools were like before the present system evolved. A real downside to this is that many people haven't ever considered whether the system we have now is really in the best interest of the children it was created to serve.

WANT TO IMPROVE YOUR CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD GOVERNANCE?

One of the most important keys to building a world-class charter school is a superb working relationship between the board and CEO. This book describes how the board can leverage good governance to maximize its oversight, while simultaneously getting and staying out of management. Because the principles explained in this book are timeless, your board can refer to it again and again.

Among other things, your board will discover:

- A simple way to tell the difference between management and governance responsibilities
- Twelve things new board members should receive as part of their orientation before they join the board
- How to apply Pareto's Law to shorten and improve your board meetings
- The twelve characteristics to look for when hiring a charter school CEO
- The three most important do's and don'ts in the board/CEO relationship

"CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD UNIVERSITY IS A MUST-READ FOR CHARTER BOARD MEMBERS AND ADMINISTRATORS SERIOUS ABOUT SUPERIOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT. BRIAN'S PRACTICAL GUIDANCE ENCOURAGES BOARDS TO FOCUS ON GOOD GOVERNANCE SO THEY CAN ENSURE SCHOOL EXCELLENCE, RATHER THAN BEING MIRED IN THE DAY-TO-DAY MINUTIA OF OPERATIONS. WE ARE SO INSPIRED BY BRIAN'S MESSAGE THAT WE ARE BLANKETING UTAH'S SIXTY-SEVEN CHARTER SCHOOLS WITH HIS PUBLICATIONS AND SEMINARS."

—Utah Association of Public Charter Schools

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—Dr. Bryan Hassel, Founder/President, Public Impact

"THIS BOOK IS THE 'MUST-HAVE' TOOL FOR CHARTER SCHOOL PRINCIPALS AND BOARD MEMBERS TO BUILD EFFECTIVE AND PRODUCTIVE GOVERNANCE. USE IT TO ORIENT NEW BOARD MEMBERS, OR AS PART OF THE ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS. IT IS SIMPLE, PRACTICAL, AND ENGAGING--THE BEST BOOK ON GOVERNANCE IN THE CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT."

—Ted Fujimoto, Chairman of the Board, Founder of the Right to Succeed Foundation

Drawing on more than twenty years of experience with charter schools, the Institute distills practical lessons that charter school board members and CEOs can apply to the schools they lead. Written in an easy-to-read style, this book is considered by many in the charter movement to be the best publication of its kind.

Read by thousands of board members, charter school CEOs, authorizers and association leaders across the country, this bestselling charter school governance book is a sound investment in your school's future. Why not use it to build a stronger board in your school?