



CHARTER  
SOLUTIONS

# A RANGE OF EXPERTISE

Effectively using committees  
at your charter school

# WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- ⦿ How committees can help ease the burden on the board and administration
- ⦿ How committees should be structured and held accountable
- ⦿ Common pitfalls and how to avoid them

# WHY FORM COMMITTEES?

- ◉ To bring expertise and diversity
- ◉ To do preliminary research
- ◉ To take on specific projects
- ◉ Required by law
  - Safety Committee
  - LAND Trust committee

# WHAT COMMITTEES AREN'T

- ⦿ A substitute board or principal or any staff
- ⦿ A barrier between the board and principal
- ⦿ Policy-making or enforcement bodies
- ⦿ A place to further agendas
- ⦿ A body to blame for problems

# THE COMMITTEE'S ROLE

- ⦿ Committees are advisory bodies that support the school governing board or administration in their own role
- ⦿ For a committee to function in its role, there must be understanding and agreement about the role of board and principal
- ⦿ Examples:
  - Governance Policy Committee would report to the board
  - Staff Appreciation Committee would report to the principal

# COMMITTEE ROLE CONT.

- ◉ Typically, committees would do background research on specific topics or issues
- ◉ Committees may explore options or review best practices or models that already exist
- ◉ Sometimes administrative committees (but never Board committees) may take on certain tasks or projects, like the staff Christmas party

# STAYING WITHIN THE ROLE

- ⦿ Committees that take on the job of the principal but report to the board undermine his authority and the relationship
- ⦿ Many schools already have Board Committees that would rightly be administrative committees, and then the board would hold the principal accountable
- ⦿ Committees should research and advise those that have the formal authority, but not pretend to adopt policy nor seek to enforce it
- ⦿ There is no tattle-tale committee

# COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

## ◉ Who serves?

- A committee may be made of:
  - Volunteers with expertise
  - One or two board members (but never a quorum)
  - A member of administration
  - Other interested staff members
- Obviously, the makeup of the committee would depend on its function
  - Curriculum committee would likely consist of the curriculum director and teachers, as well as volunteers and a board member with expertise
  - Library review committee should obviously have the librarian on it, and some parents

# STRUCTURE, CONT.

## ⦿ How long do committees last?

- As long as they are needed and no longer
- Some committees might be perpetual, others very short in duration or for a specific project

## ⦿ Examples:

- Administrative Accountability Committee: this board committee would likely draft job descriptions, evaluations, and reporting requirements, and then dissolve
- Legislative Review Committee: this committee (if you have one) may be perpetual and report to the school about legislation that affects operations and governance

# COMMITTEE ACCOUNTABILITY

- ⦿ There is an inherent difficulty in establishing real accountability for volunteers
  - You can't fire them or give them raises
  - Another reason for committees or other volunteers not to take the role of staff
- ⦿ Accountability for committee members should be about the same as for the board
  - Written expectations and signed commitment
  - Committee chairs should be accountable for the behavior of the committee, so pick a good chair
  - Having staff chair committees can be valuable—you *can* hold them accountable

# ACCOUNTABILITY, CONT.

## ◉ Setting Expectations

- Be specific
- What does the committee need to do?
- By when?
- What are the committees' reporting requirements?
- Who will verify that the committee is completing its job?
- What resources can the committee have to do its job, both in funds and staff time?

# ACCOUNTABILITY, CONT.

## ○ Consequences

- Boards and administration need to be unafraid to hold individuals accountable to agreed standards
- That's much easier with staff, and I encourage you to have staff chair committees whenever possible
- Insulate yourselves from conflicts and difficult situations by avoiding appointment of friends and family to positions where you will need to evaluate them
- If consequences are removal from or of the committee, do it

# CONCLUSION

- ◎ Remember, committees are advisors
  - They are not staff, and shouldn't be tasked with staff responsibilities
  - They can never take responsibility away from the board or administration
- ◎ Success happens when all parties are successful in their role
  - Committees, Executives, Board, and staff
  - Overlapping responsibilities will hurt success, but clear expectations and accountability will enhance it

# SUGGESTED POLICY

The purpose of Academy Committees is to assist the Board, the Director, and the Parent Teacher Organization in accomplishing the Mission and Charter of the Academy.

The Academy Board establishes the following standing committees to report to the Board:

- Academy Accountability
- Financial Accountability
- Capital Fundraising
- School Land Trust

# SUGGESTED POLICY, CONT.

The Academy Board directs the Academy Director to establish the following standing Committees to report to the Director:

- Curriculum
- Public Relations
- Technology
- Safety

The Director will establish additional committees and the Academy PTO Leadership will establish additional PTO committees as they deem necessary for the performance of their specific responsibilities and authority within the Academy's Mission and Charter.

# SUGGESTED POLICY, CONT.

- ◉ (Define the role of established board committees)

Responsibilities, expectations, reporting requirements, timelines, and makeup of committees reporting to the Director will be delegated to the committee in writing by the Director. The Director will ensure that the responsibilities of the standing committees reporting to the Director are consistent with roles and duties outlined in the Academy Charter, State and Federal Law, and the requirements of State and Federal grants the Academy has accepted.