

# Board's Role in Academic Excellence

a **BoardSavvy** webinar

by



**BoardOnTrack**





**We help charter school boards  
deliver exceptional results.**



# A FEW NOTES BEFORE WE DIVE IN

- This session is being recorded. If you registered we'll send you the recording. Feel free to share with your team.
- It's all about the kids.
- We are going to articulate a very high bar. The students in your charter school deserve nothing short of excellence.
- Terminology:
  - ◆ We use the term “CEO” to denote the person at the very top of the org chart, who reports directly to the board
  - ◆ We use the term “organization” to mean the charter school or group of schools that the CEO is responsible for



# What We're Going to Cover

- ▶ Defining the full board's role in academic oversight
- ▶ Defining the role of a board committee
- ▶ Clarifying the governance – management line
- ▶ Clarifying what data the board should be receiving on a consistent basis
- ▶ Concrete tools you can use



# Big Picture Framing

# Framing Thought

## Definition of a Charter School Board

→ Not a collection of well meaning people

Rather...

→ A highly effective team, strategically assembled to bring the skills, expertise, temperament and time to govern a multimillion dollar public enterprise.



# How Important is a Board to a Charter School's Success?

It can be argued that the ultimate success of a charter school hinges on the board's ability to govern effectively:

- Board selects, supports and terminates when necessary the CEO
- Board ensures that the school is operationally and financially viable
- Partners with the CEO to define and ensure the delivery of academic excellence

**Every charter school closure nationwide can be traced back to issues of governance.**



# Framing

Simply put,

**A charter is a contract to increase  
student achievement.**

*The contract is given to the board  
not the CEO*





# Governance Grounding Principle

**The Board Focuses on Results**

*CEO focuses on means*

*to get to results*



**A Results-Focused  
Board  
is a  
Data-Driven Board**

# Data-Driven Governance

The term data-driven instruction is now widely used in the school context. And, is a cornerstone of successful charter schools.

Generally this means:

*The use of quantifiable data obtained from measurable goals set by an educator in order to determine if the student is mastering necessary skills.*



# Data-Driven Governance

- ▶ Your CEO should partner with your board to mirror this practice at a governance level.

*Set measurable goals with the board, collect relevant data, and examine this together frequently to know if the organization is on track, and change strategies if it is not.*



**Key Action Steps**  
**Results-Focused**  
**Data-Driven**  
**Board**

# Key Action Steps

1. Partner with and support the CEO
2. Establish an academic excellence committee of the board
3. Clarify charter promises
4. Define academic excellence / your “high bar”
5. Create annual academic goals
6. Monitor progress
7. Educate the full board



# Step #1

**Strengthen  
Board- CEO  
Partnership**

# Step #1: Establish / Strengthen Your Board-CEO Partnership

| BOARD ROLE   | CEO ROLE   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The board needs to complement the work of the CEO and the academic team, they should not be duplicating the work</li><li>• Invest time in understanding the key drivers of academic success, this is the heart of the business you are running</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The CEO needs to feel that the board <u>can</u> and <u>is</u> adding value in this area</li><li>• Needs to play an active role in educating the full board and sharing information on a consistent basis</li></ul> |





# Step #2

**Establish an  
Academic Excellence  
Committee of the Board**

# Step #2: Academic Excellence Committee

## Key Tasks

- Work with CEO to develop a plan to define and monitor academic results
- Educate the full board to conduct proper oversight of the academic program



## Step #2:

# Academic Excellence Committee

- Most important committee; hardest one to get right
- ▶ Think about it functioning like a finance committee:
  - ▶ CEO brings draft budget to Finance Committee
  - ▶ Finance Committee and CEO go back and forth to refine
  - ▶ Bring bigger strategic questions forward for full board deliberation while preparing the budget
  - ▶ Final draft brought forward for full board discussion, buy-in and final vote to approve for the year
  - ▶ Throughout the year committee monitors budgets to actuals
- ▶ Academic Excellence Committee does the same thing but it is academic “budget to actuals” rather than financial.



## Step #2: Academic Excellence Committee

### Committee Membership

- While it can be useful for a member of the Academic Excellence Committee to have a background in education, it is by no means necessary in order to be an effective committee member.
- Many effective Academic Excellence Committees do not have an educator on the committee. We find that the key functions of the committee—**helping the CEO to set ambitious goals and then monitoring data to assess progress towards those goals**—are often well met by people with strong analytical skills; these people need not be educators.



# Step #3

**Understand What You  
Promised to Deliver**

# Step #3: Charter Promises

- A charter is a contract to increase student achievement
- This contract is given to the board not the CEO
- Together the Board and CEO need to be crystal clear on the key charter promises they have made to the authorizer (typically defined in the charter broadly and more specifically in an accountability plan)
- You will not get to keep your charter if you don't deliver on these results

## *Recommended Action Step:*

- ✓ *CEO pull out key charter promises in a document for the board. Ideally in a chart form, one page or less.*



# Step #4

**Define Your High Bar**

# Step #4: Define Your High Bar

## 1. Determine if the charter promises are enough or a baseline

### Baseline

- The minimal targets you need to hit to keep your charter
- Many charter contracts / accountability plans are the floor – in many states just hitting the terms in your charter would not be reaching “excellence”

## 2. Define your “high bar”

- Define excellence, especially academic excellence





# Step #5

**Create Annual Academic Goals**

# Step #5:

## Set Annual Academic Goals

- The CEO should bring forward a set of annual academic goals for the committee to discuss and the board to approve
- They should articulate:
  - ◆ What level of success was achieved last year
  - ◆ Where the CEO plans to get the organization by the end of this school year
  - ◆ Whether the organization has met or exceeded charter promises and if not when will you achieve them
  - ◆ Benchmark data for the board to comprehend how you compare to others
  - ◆ High-level overview of the key strategies to achieve the goals



# Step #5:

## Work of Committee vs. CEO role

### GOAL SETTING

| CEO ROLE  | COMMITTEE ROLE   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop goals/timeline for reporting on progress towards academic goals and propose them to the committee for discussion and feedback</li><li>• Present finalized goals/reporting timeline to the full board for approval</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review CEO's proposed goals/reporting timeline</li><li>• Ask questions to ensure that the goals are (1) ambitious and (2) achievable.</li><li>• Recommend finalized goals/reporting timeline to the full board for approval; ensure that all trustees understand goals</li></ul> |



# Step #6

**Monitor Academic Performance**

# Step #6: Develop a Clear And Consistent Way to Monitor Progress

- Board and CEO should look at data consistently at the regular board meeting
- Committee should dive deeper into the data at regularly scheduled meetings and validate data and approaches being shared with the full board



# Step #6: Work of Committee vs. CEO role

## MONITORING PROGRESS

| CEO ROLE   | COMMITTEE ROLE   |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Present the committee with data to assess progress towards goals at the agreed upon timeline</li><li>• Present updates on data to full board at agreed upon timeline</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review data to assess progress towards goals at agreed-upon timeline</li><li>• Ask probing questions to better understand the data and help the CEO look objectively at the data</li><li>• Help CEO to frame data for presentation to the full board</li></ul> |



# Step #7

**Educate the Full Board**

# Step #7: Board Education

- The entire board is on the hook for governing the entire organization
- Members of the committee will dive deeper into the data, but you should develop a key set of metrics that the full board is tracking and an education plan to make sure the full board understands what they are tracking





# **Further Clarifying Roles & Responsibilities**

## **Governance-Management Line?**

# Annually Who Does What In Establishing and Monitoring Academic Results

| Key Steps        | CEO  | Committee   | Board   |
|------------------|--|---|---|
| Charter Promises | Develop chart / high level summary for board                       | Discuss and provide input                           | Discuss and vote to approve as a full board                       |
| Define High Bar  | Recommendations to the board about what is baseline and “high bar” | Discuss and provide input                           | Discuss and vote to approve as a full board                       |
| Set Annual Goals | Develop a set of annual academic goals                             | Discuss and provide input                           | Discuss and vote to approve as a full board                       |
| Monitor Progress | Develop board level dashboard                                      | Discuss and provide input                           | Discuss and vote to approve as a full board                       |
| Board Education  | Develop a timeline and action plan, implement                      | Discuss and provide input, assist in implementation | Discuss and vote to approve as a full board, actively participate |



# Differentiate work of Committee vs. CEO

## INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION-MAKING

| CEO ROLE   | COMMITTEE ROLE  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Select and implement curricula, training, and materials necessary for successful instruction</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sounding board for CEO's ideas on understanding data, seeing trends, what is working in instruction—are there systems in place to replicate success</li></ul> |



# Differentiate work of Committee vs. CEO STAFF

| CEO ROLE  | COMMITTEE ROLE   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Hire and train all staff</li><li>• Oversee and evaluate all staff</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that CEO has created and implemented staff evaluation and feedback procedures</li><br/><li>• Monitor results through annual/biannual staff surveys and through staff retention data</li></ul> |



# Make Sure Your Committee Doesn't....

- One of the biggest pitfalls for Academic Excellence Committees is to engage in discussions of ***inputs***—the means by which the organization pursues its mission—rather than ***outcomes***—the objective data used to assess how well the organization is meeting its mission.
- **Inputs** are management level issues, which should be handled by the CEO. **Outcomes** are what the board should be focused on and governing towards.



# Make Sure Your Committee Doesn't....

## ***Continued***

- Evaluate teachers
- Select, design, or review the quality of curricula
- Plan professional development for teachers
- Interact with teachers or other staff members on a regular basis (i.e., daily or weekly)
- Interact with families or students on a regular basis (i.e., daily or weekly)
- Present themselves as an outlet for staff, family, or student complaints or concerns that have not first been formally addressed to the CEO



# What Data Should the Board Be Seeing?

# Right Board-Level Data

## Key Categories

- Academic Achievement
- School Climate and Culture
- Human Capital





# Right Board-Level Data

We recommend framing the data around a set of key questions that the board and CEO continually ask each other:

## **Academic Achievement**

Are our students making progress toward attaining the highest level of academic achievement?

## **School Climate and Culture**

Has our organization established a powerful climate and culture in which students can thrive?

## **Human Capital**

Does our organization recruit, develop, and retain exceptional staff?



# We Highly Recommend You Track: Academic Achievement

Are our students making progress toward attaining the highest level of academic achievement?

- ✓ ELA Gains
- ✓ ELA Interim Proficiency
- ✓ ELA Proficiency
- ✓ Math Gains
- ✓ Math Interim Proficiency
- ✓ Math Proficiency
- ✓ Graduation Rates
- ✓ Postsecondary Engagement



# We Highly Recommend You Track: School Climate and Culture

Has our organization established a powerful climate and culture in which students can thrive?

- ✓ Average Daily Attendance
- ✓ On-time Arrival
- ✓ Parental Satisfaction
- ✓ Suspensions – In School
- ✓ Suspensions – Out of School



# We Highly Recommend You Track: Human Capital

Does our organization recruit, develop, and retain exceptional staff?

- ✓ Teacher Retention
- ✓ Teacher Satisfaction
- ✓ Teacher Turnover



**TOOLS YOU CAN USE**

# Tools You Can Use

- Job Description for Academic Excellence Committee
- In resources section
  - ◆ Smart Questions to Ask About Academics
- Skills Inventory In BoardOnTrack
  - ◆ Do you have the right skills? Bench strength?



# Have you joined the Community?

The **BoardOnTrack** members-only  
online community is here.

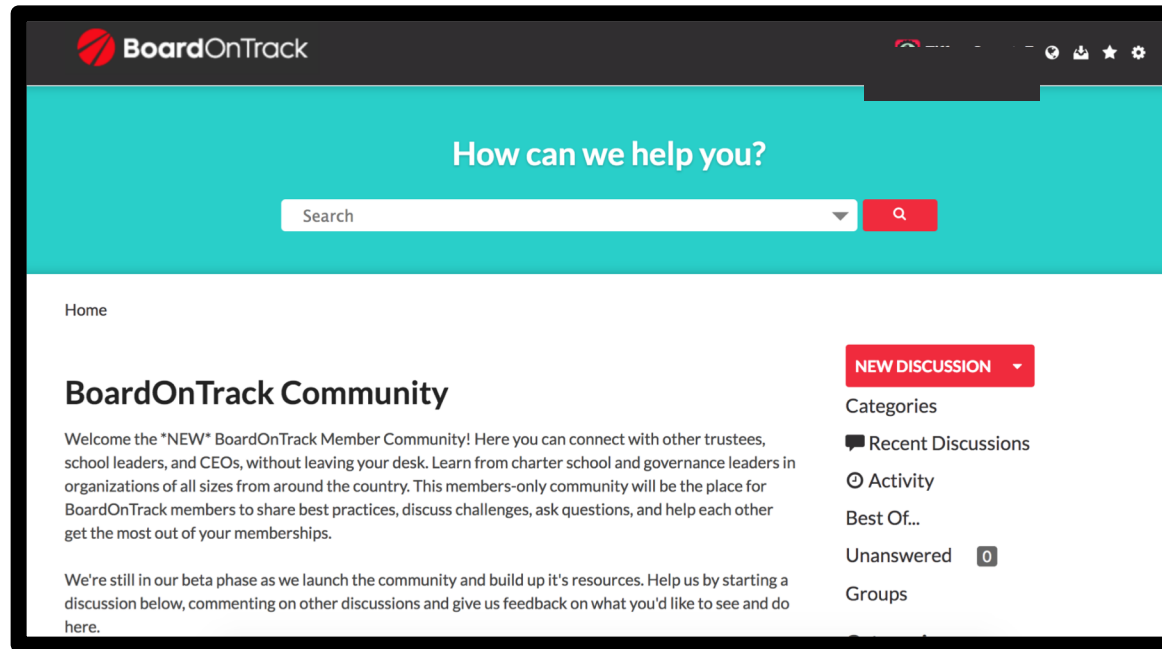
Log in to **BoardOnTrack** and click **Community**.

- Connect with like-minded leaders
- Get help addressing current challenges
- Learn from trustees and CEOs around the country

# Members-Only Online Community

**Connect** with trustees, CEOs & school leaders nationwide.

Without traveling to the next conference.



This where **Board**OnTrack members, from single-site school to CMO, share best practices, get new ideas, and help each other get the most out of membership.



# Members-Only Online Community

1

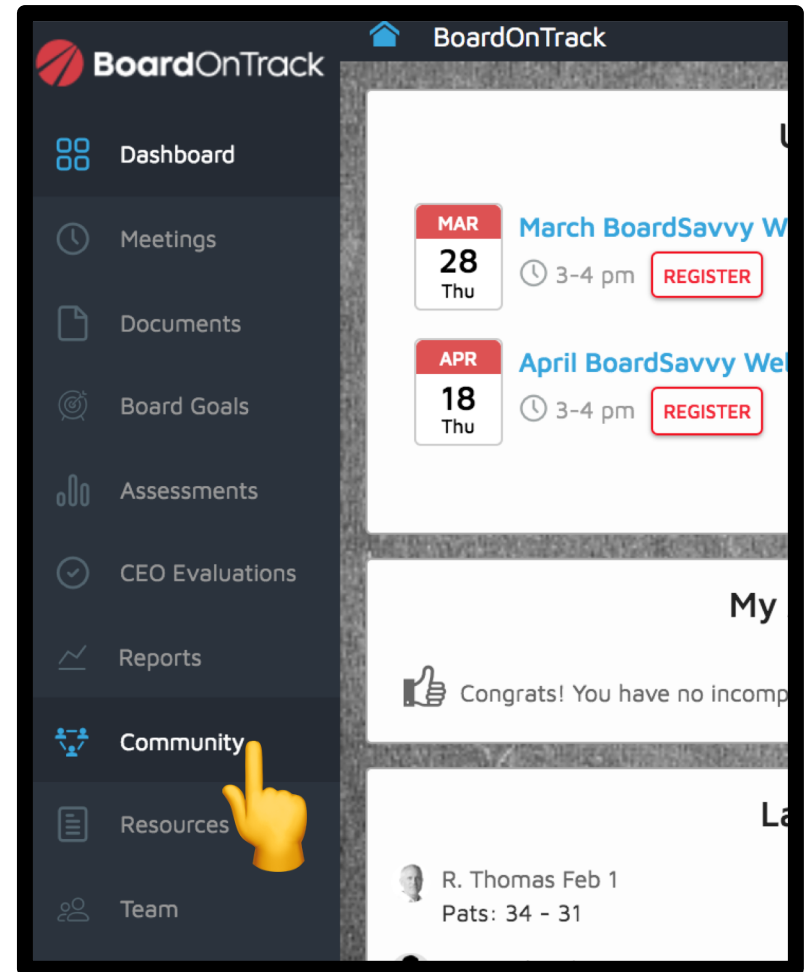
**Click**

2

**Register**

3

**Start a discussion**



**QUESTIONS?**