

Observing Board Meetings

An excellent way to improve your board meetings is to go watch another board in action. Identify another charter school in your community (or another non profit board if you prefer) and observe one of their meetings.

Although charter school board meetings are open to the public, it is generally good practice to call the CEO or Board Chair ahead of time and let them know that you plan to attend the board meeting as an observer.

You will probably get a lot more out of the meeting if you request the agendas and minutes from the last few meetings, and read them ahead of time. These are public documents, so it is fine to request them. By looking at them ahead of time, you will get a context for the meeting you are about to observe.

We recommend going early (20 minutes or so) you can learn a lot by introducing yourself to people ahead of time and also by watching the set-up / group dynamics etc.

The following are questions that you should answer / things to look for when you observe a board meeting.

Logistics

1. Where was the meeting held? What was the room like?
2. What was the seating set-up like? Was it a comfortable atmosphere? Why or why not?
3. Where did the CEO sit?
4. Where did the board sit?
5. Where did other staff members sit?
6. Where did you and other members of the public sit?
7. What would you have done differently as far as logistics?

Participation

1. Who attended the meeting? List their names and roles?
2. Who was absent? How many people? Why?
3. Did the meeting start on time? Was everyone there on time?
4. Who facilitated the meeting?
5. How would you characterize the facilitation?
6. Who spoke at the meeting? Did everyone? A few people? Did one person dominate?
7. What was the CEO's role?
8. Did anyone from the public speak or make comments?
9. Was there anyone in the "audience"?
10. What would you have done differently as far as the participation?

Meeting Content

1. Was there a meeting agenda?
2. Did the meeting keep to the agenda? Why or why not?
3. Did it run for the scheduled amount of time? Longer or shorter? Why?
4. Think about what you know about management and governance. Did the board meeting focus more on management or governance?
5. What substantive discussions did the board have? Do you think these were appropriate discussions for the board level?
6. What major decisions were made? How were the decisions made?
7. Was it possible to tell if the board had working committees? Was it evident whether or not the committees had done work in between meetings?
8. What would you have done differently about the meeting content?

CEO's Role

1. What role did the CEO play in the board meeting?
2. How much did they speak?
3. What role did they play in decision-making?
4. What did you surmise about their relationship with their board?
5. If you were in their shoes, what would you have done differently?

Final Thoughts

1. What was the most important thing that you learned by attending this board meeting?
2. What additional questions do you have about boards and board meetings?
3. Ask the CEO to send you a copy of the minutes when they are complete. Do the minutes accurately reflect the meeting you attended?