



Texas Charter School Board Member Handbook

Texas Charter School Board Member Handbook

BY THE NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS INSTITUTE

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Introduction

Congratulations!

Congratulations! You have accepted an important calling to be a charter school board member. During this journey you will have the opportunity to impact the lives of teachers, students and their families as you help to ensure that your school achieves its mission and goals. The work will not be easy and there is a lot to learn, but the reward of seeing your school positively impact the lives of those in your community will be worth it.

This handbook has been developed to help you get started on your journey and is designed to reinforce your knowledge of important charter school board topics. The information and references in this handbook, current as of August 2020, will help you succeed as you travel down the path of becoming a great board member.



Part 1

Why Charter School Boards Make a Difference

“Life’s most persistent and urgent question is, ‘What are you doing for others?’”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

Serving as a charter school board member is an important and noble calling. Through your leadership and service, you have the opportunity to positively impact the lives of kids, their families and your community. The charter school governing board plays a vital role in ensuring that your school is able to implement its mission and reach its educational goals so that outstanding results can be achieved for kids. An excellent education opens a door of opportunity in the life of a young person and helps them to fulfill their dreams and reach their full potential.

Thank you for being willing to embark on this journey of serving as a charter school board member. We hope this handbook will help you to serve and answer any questions about your role and responsibilities. Your new role will be challenging, but also rewarding.

The History of Charter Schools

It is helpful to begin by understanding the history of the charter schools movement. Access to high quality public education

is the foundation of any successful society. Through much of our nation's recent history, we have strived to ensure our youth have access to a high-quality public education. However, in the 1970's and 1980's it became apparent that there was great disparity and lack of rigor in our nation's public education system.

In 1983, the crisis of America's education system was highlighted by the National Commission on Excellence in Education when they published [A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform](#). This report highlighted the fact that American schools, particularly high schools, were not developing students with solid academic skills who could be competitive in a global marketplace.

In 1988, a school administrator by the name of Ray Budde published a paper in which he introduced the idea of chartering schools and, in the same year, the President of the American Federation of Teachers also introduced the idea of chartering schools in a New York Times article. In 1991, Minnesota passed our nation's first charter school law and the following year, City Academy High School, located in St. Paul, Minnesota, opened and became our country's first charter school. Today, 44 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the charter idea, serving over 3 million students.

What is a Charter School?

So, you may be asking yourself, "what exactly is a charter school and how is it different from a traditional school?" Charter schools are publicly funded, independent schools of choice. They are non-religious and non-sectarian in their practices, are open to all students regardless of where they live, and they do not charge tuition. Charter schools are innovative because their legal basis for existence is a performance contract with an authorizer. They commit to meeting specific educational

goals set by their authorizer, but are free to make their own decisions about how to achieve those goals. If educational goals are not met, the charter may be revoked and the school closed. The granting of freedom and accountability, in exchange for demonstrated student success, allows charter schools to respond to community needs, try new approaches, and put students' learning first. Charter schools give students and families a choice.

Charter Schools in Texas

In 1995, Texas passed its first charter school law, bringing the school choice movement to our state. Texas' charter school law can be located in Chapter 12 of the [Texas Education Code \(TEC\)](#). Under Texas law, charter schools are considered "public schools," receiving funding through the state's Foundation School Program. They provide a tuition-free public school option to students and families. Charter schools are held to the same academic and financial standards as traditional public schools and were created to address the following goals:

- Improve student learning;
- Increase the choice of learning opportunities within the public school system;
- Create professional opportunities that will attract new teachers to the public school system;
- Establish a new form of accountability for public schools; and
- Encourage different and innovative learning methods.

In Texas, there are four types of charter schools: home-rule charter school districts, campus and campus program charter schools, open-enrollment charter schools and university charter schools. There is no cap on the number of campus and campus program charter schools and university charter schools that can be authorized in the state. There is, however, a statewide cap of

305 on open-enrollment charter schools. Currently, there are 179 open-enrollment charter schools operating in Texas.

Home-rule charter school districts occur when an entire school district decides to convert its schools to charter schools. This conversion requires a majority vote in a local election. Currently, there are none of these types of charter districts in Texas.

Campus and campus program charter schools are charter schools which are authorized and overseen by independent school districts. The majority of the school's teachers and parents may sign a petition requesting that the school district board convert an existing school to a charter school. Districts may also open an entirely new charter school within its district boundaries.

The most common type of charter school in Texas is open-enrollment charters. They are often called "open-enrollment" charter schools because they are open to all students. These charter schools are independent schools created by eligible non-profit entities, such as public institutions of higher education, private or independent institutions of higher education, non-profit organizations, or governmental entities.

There are five main types of open-enrollment charter schools: residential treatment centers (RTC), juvenile justice alternative education programs (JJAE), schools with a specialized mission (like fine arts or science and technology), drop out recovery and college preparatory. Open-enrollment charters are authorized by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Commissioner for an initial term of five years.

Public junior colleges, senior colleges or universities may also petition the TEA Commissioner to open a charter school. In most cases, these charter schools are located on the college

or university campus, or in the county in which the college or university is located. These charter schools are overseen by the TEA Commissioner.

Similar to a traditional school district, charter schools are governed by a board of directors. Provisions related to the board and their terms of service are articulated in the charter school's bylaws and enforced through the charter contract. Charter schools must comply with state and federal laws and requirements as well as the requirements contained within their contract.

Questions to Consider

- What is your motivation for serving as a charter school board member? What excites you about the charter schools movement?
- Do all board members have a copy of Texas's charter school law or know how to access it? Have board members read the law and are they familiar with its content?



Part 2

Board Governance Expectations and Bylaws

“Good judgement comes from experience, and a lot of that comes from bad judgement.”

— Will Rogers

Strong governance is the foundation for school and student success. Therefore, your board plays a critical role in making sure your charter school achieves excellent results for kids. In order to effectively govern, it is important that your board members understand governing principles being used in Texas and the board’s critical role and responsibilities.

Charter School Governance Training Requirements

Participating in training is an excellent way for board members to develop and hone their governance skills. Training provides charter school board members with the critical information they need to make wise decisions for schools. With the rules and regulations that govern charter schools constantly changing, it is imperative that board members receive training on a regular basis.

In Texas, charter school board members are legally required to participate in governance training. New board members are

required to complete twelve hours of training within a year of taking office. After the first year, board members must complete an additional six hours of continuing training each year. Charter schools are required to annually submit governance forms verifying that board members have completed their governance training requirements. Section §12.123 of the Texas Education Code (TEC) states that board member training must cover the following topics:

- Basic school law;
- School finance;
- Health and safety issues;
- Accountability requirements related to the use of public funds; and
- Other requirements related to public accountability such as open meetings requirements and public information requirements.

Additional information on charter school board governance training requirements can be found on TEA website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/texas-schools-charter-schools/charter-schools-governance>.

Frameworks for School Board Governance

There are different frameworks available that help to articulate the critical governing responsibilities of a charter school board. It is important for charter school boards to understand their role and responsibilities. The Texas State Board of Education (SBOE) has adopted a framework for helping school boards address, on a regular basis, five critical areas of governance. Additional information on the Texas Framework for School Board Development can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/school-boards/school-board-member-training/framework-for-school-board-development>. These five areas include:

- Vision;
- Structure;
- Accountability;
- Advocacy; and
- Unity.

Charter Board Partners also provides a board governance framework. Information on this framework can be found at: <https://edboards.org/resources> by selecting “Standards for Effective Charter School Governance.” The six standards of this framework include:

- Focus relentlessly on student achievement;
- Ensure exceptional school leadership;
- Commit to exemplary governance;
- Act strategically;
- Raise and use resources wisely; and
- Maintain legal and regulatory compliance.

Governance frameworks are important because they help to focus the work of your board and ensure that important responsibilities are not neglected. Let’s take a moment to explore some of the important responsibilities of a charter school governing board in more detail.

Knowing and Supporting your School’s Bylaws, Mission and Contract

Charter school governance is centered on a board’s alignment to the school’s mission and an understanding of the school’s bylaws and charter contract. The school’s mission defines why it exists and what it seeks to accomplish. Your school’s mission is the heart of its charter contract and, whether the mission is met, will influence your authorizer’s decision about whether to

renew your school's contract.

Board bylaws summarize the board members' duties to act in good faith, in the best interest of the school, to discharge their duties with reasonable care, and to disclose information that is important to the discharge of their duties. Charter school boards must adopt bylaws, and any amendments to the board's bylaws must be approved by the TEA. Bylaws provide a framework for the governance of the school and provide important information on the following:

- Duties of board members;
- The number of board members, quorum and term limits;
- Open meetings, executive sessions, and voting;
- Powers and duties of officers;
- A description of committees;
- Indemnification and directors and officer's insurance; and
- Conflicts of interest.

The charter contract is a legal agreement between the board and its authorizer. It contains the mission, founding documents such as certificate of formation, bylaws, organizational chart, educational program and other important foundational documents. The contract also sets clear expectations regarding the school's academic, operational and financial performance goals.

Governing Effectively Through Careful Planning

Through effective planning, the board helps ensure that the school's mission is reinforced and that appropriate resources are allocated to implement the school's vision. The first step in strategic planning is to clearly define what the school is trying to accomplish. The board needs to ask the question, "what are the

educational outcomes that we want to achieve?" This question is answered by understanding the school's mission statement and educational goals found in the contract.

Once your board clearly understands its mission and goals, it is valuable to research best practices. The board should identify and learn from successful schools that have a similar vision and are serving similar student populations. By dialoguing with the board or leadership of high-performing schools, your board has the opportunity to learn about successful educational strategies that can be replicated at your school.

Once your board understands its vision, has researched best-practices, and is aware of external factors, it is ready to begin the process of developing a plan. A multi-year strategic plan will guide school leadership as they work to fulfill the school's mission and should be what all other annual plans are aligned to. The board articulates the vision and goals of the strategic plan. With the board's vision and goals in mind, the school leader maps out the details of the strategic plan. The board then plays an important role in reviewing the plan, providing recommendations for improvement, and approving the plan.

Once the board has adopted the strategic plan, it's time for the plan to be implemented. The board needs to be careful that the development and adoption phase don't take too long so that the plan's strategies can be put into action swiftly. The power of the plan can only be realized once it is put into motion.

Once the strategic plan is finalized, the school leader is responsible for implementing the details of the plan and reporting progress to the board. Monitoring and measuring the results of the plan is one of the most critical steps in the strategic planning process. Are the student outcomes that were defined in the plan actually being accomplished? By reviewing

the outcomes of the plan on a regular basis, the board has a tool for holding school leadership accountable and for ensuring that good outcomes for kids are being achieved.

Developing and Adopting Policy

One of the key functions of your board of directors is to establish board and school policy. Through policy, the board determines what needs to be accomplished. Policies need to be developed and adopted for important areas such as board governance, staff employment, student discipline, educational programming, financial operations and support services.

Once the expectation of what needs to be accomplished is established through policies, it is the responsibility of the school leadership to ensure that the adopted policies are implemented. It is important that the board of directors communicates with school leadership to determine which policies are working and are being successfully implemented, and which may need to be adjusted. It is also important to know what policies are required by the charter contract and whether or not the school needs to notify its authorizer if policies change. The board of directors and the school's leadership should be working hand-in-hand to ensure great things are happening for kids.

Ensuring High Expectations for Student Learning

Your charter school's ultimate goal is to deliver a high-quality education for the students that it serves. Ensuring high expectations begins with holding your school's leadership accountable for meeting the educational goals found in the charter contract. In order to determine whether the school is meeting its educational goals, you will want to review information on the school's academic performance such as State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR)

scores, the school's performance on the Charter School Performance Framework (CSPF), the school's academic accountability rating, your school's accreditation status and standardized assessment scores. Each of these topics is discussed in further detail in "Part 6: Evaluating Performance" of this handbook.

On a regular basis, the board of directors will want to evaluate and discuss the academic progress of the school. When evaluating educational progress, it is important to review performance data for specific subgroups. You will want to address any performance gaps based on gender, ethnicity or other special characteristics. A plan of improvement should be developed for any areas in which academic targets are not being met.

Creating Conditions for Staff Success

The board is responsible for evaluating the school leader's performance. School leadership should know how they're doing, what's working, and what they need to adjust. School leadership evaluations should be based on specific and measurable goals that leadership has already reviewed and understands. Goal setting should be done collaboratively between the board and school leadership and should include annual performance objectives. Formal evaluations, focused on whether specific performance objectives were met, should be conducted annually, but informal evaluations and feedback should be provided on an on-going basis so there are no surprises or misunderstandings about performance expectations. Feedback should be provided in the spirit of helping staff continuously improve so they can achieve better results for kids.

Texas has developed a Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) and a Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS). These evaluation systems include standards and

rubrics by which to measure teacher and principal effectiveness. Information on the teacher framework can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/educator-evaluation-and-support-system/texas-teacher-evaluation-and-support-system> and information on the principal framework is available at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-educators/educator-evaluation-and-support-system/texas-principal-evaluation-and-support-system>. While charter schools are not required to use these specific evaluation systems, they can provide a valuable framework and starting point for ensuring that the critical work of providing meaningful feedback to educators and school leaders is being accomplished.

Ensuring and Carefully Managing Fiscal Resources

Charter school boards are responsible for the financial management of their school. Charter schools in Texas receive funding from the Foundation School Program (FSP). The amount of state funding a Texas charter school receives is based on its average student daily attendance and their program participation. Charter schools that choose to provide transportation are eligible for additional state funds. Charter schools are responsible for accurately reporting their attendance data at the end of each six-week attendance reporting period. The manner in which this data is reported affects a charter school's funding and, if data is not properly reported, it can result in a material breach of the contract and possibly school closure.

Another important financial responsibility of the charter school board is reviewing and approving the school's annual budget. When reviewing the school's budget, the board should ensure that funding priorities address the school's vision and goals. Budgets must be prepared according to generally accepted

accounting principles, rules adopted by the State Board of Education and adopted policies of the board. Charter schools with a July 1st fiscal year are required to adopt their annual budget by June 30th and charter schools with a September 1st fiscal year are required to adopt their annual budget by August 31st.

Upon adoption, the budgets are uploaded to the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS). Once the budget is adopted, the board, on a regular basis, needs to review the budget's status and make adjustments as needed. The following is a list of financial reports that the board should review:

- Statement of financial position (every board meeting);
- Statement of activities (every board meeting);
- Budget to actual comparison (every board meeting);
- Budget to actual comparison with projections and potential budget amendments (quarterly);
- Cash flow projections;
- Charter FIRST calculations and projections (quarterly); and
- Grant program overviews (quarterly).

The board is also responsible for developing and adopting financial policies and procedures that will ensure school funds are handled with integrity and in compliance with all legal requirements. The board may contract with entities to assist in the administration of financial functions such as accounting, purchasing and payroll. On an annual basis, charter school boards are required to contract with an independent third-party financial auditor to conduct a financial audit. The financial audit must be submitted to the TEA within 150 days after the end of the fiscal year.

Effectively Communicating with School Staff and the Community

One of the important responsibilities of the board is to make sure it clearly communicates its progress and success with its stakeholders. The community needs to hear about the good things your school is accomplishing as well as the challenges it is experiencing. Excitement for your school will grow when you take the time to share the achievements with students, parents, your authorizer, financial contributors, legislators, and the media. Being transparent about your school's challenges is a way to invite your school community to help find solutions. Communication may take many forms, from social media postings to glossy annual reports. Whatever the form, ensure it is current and regular. The National School Boards Association has developed a [handbook](https://www.hopkinsschools.org/sites/default/files/public/downloads/II_NSBA_Telling_Your_Story.pdf) (https://www.hopkinsschools.org/sites/default/files/public/downloads/II_NSBA_Telling_Your_Story.pdf) for helping school boards effectively communicate with their constituents.

Through regular, effective and honest communication, board members can build excitement for your charter school and the entire public school choice movement. The more enthusiasm for your school grows, the easier it becomes to ask stakeholders to give of their time, financial resources and talents to improve the school's capacity to positively impact the lives of students and their families.

Evaluating and Improving Student

Texas law (TEC §11.159) requires school board members to complete at least three hours of training on Evaluating and Improving Student Outcomes (EISO) once every two years. While this requirement does not apply directly to charter school board members, it is good practice for charter school board members to participate in EISO training because it provides them with valuable training on how to evaluate a school's academic

performance. EISO training is conducted through regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) or through another authorized provider. Additional information on locating EISO training sites can be found at: <https://txcharterschools.org/tag/eiso-training/>.

EISO training is designed to help board members evaluate academic performance. Goals of the EISO training include:

- Understanding student outcomes and why they matter.
- Developing SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Focused, and Timebound) goals linked to measurable student outcomes with an identified baseline, target, population, and deadline.
- Developing a system of Progress Monitoring to evaluate progress towards goal attainment.
- Understanding the latest changes in the A-F Accountability System and how the EISO process can facilitate improved student performance.

EISO training which is attended by the entire school board and its school leader, includes a review of local school district data on student achievement. As mentioned above, EISO training is not required for charter school boards but is recommended as a great way to further develop your board's governance skills.

Lone Star Governance

To assist board members in understanding their important roles and responsibilities, the TEA has developed the Lone Star Governance (LSG) training initiative. Individual school board members, or entire school boards, have the opportunity to participate in LSG training. This two-day training event is focused on developing a team governance approach to improving student outcomes. The training is based on research regarding the most effective school board behaviors for improving student outcomes and is aligned to the five pillars of

the Texas Framework for School Board Development.

Board members participating in the training receive continuing education credits and, if an entire school board attends the training, the board fulfills certain state training requirements. Once the two-day training is completed, board members receive on-going support from a LSG coach. More information on LSG training is available at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/school-boards/lone-star-governance>.

Questions to Consider

- Does each member of the governing board have a copy of the charter contract? As a governing board, how well do we understand the information included in the school's contract?
- Does our board have effective governance policies in place? Are there any gaps?
- How do we know, based on our board's oversight of the budget, if we are achieving our agreed upon results?
- Is our board committed to developing a strategic plan? Does the strategic plan reflect the goals and needs of the community?
- How often does the board review its progress on meeting the goals of our strategic plan? Are the student outcomes that were defined in the plan actually being accomplished?
- How is our school performing academically? Does the board take the time to review student achievement data?
- What is the board's plan for evaluating the school leader on a regular basis?
- What steps are we taking to communicate to parents and the community the great things our school is doing for kids?

- Does our board have effective financial and operational policies in place? Are there any gaps?



Part 3

Implementing the Goals of the Charter Contract

“The secret of getting ahead is getting started.”

— Mark Twain

As a charter school board member, it is essential that you read and understand your school’s contract. The charter contract is a written, legal agreement between the board and the authorizer. It articulates why your school exists, what it is expected to achieve and provides your school’s organizational structure. Decisions about whether to renew the school’s contract will be based on the school’s performance and ability to meet the goals of your contract. If you haven’t already, you will want to ensure you secure and review a copy of your school’s contract. In this section, we will discuss how the contract is developed and review the important information contained in it.

Contract Development

Charter contracts are based upon a charter school’s application. Texas law, (section 12.111), provides a list of required elements that an open-enrollment charter school applicant must include in the application. These required elements include:

- A description of the school’s educational program, including its curriculum;
- The school’s academic, operational and financial

performance goals;

- Standards for how the school will be evaluated;
- The school's admission and enrollment policies;
- Grade levels offered by the school;
- A description of the school's governance structure and powers and duties of the governing board;
- How information on staff qualifications will be distributed to parents;
- A description of financial operations including the process for adopting an operating budget;
- A description of the facility to be used;
- A description of the geographical area that will be served; and
- A description of any educational management services that will be provided to the school.

Key Contract Components

The contract sets out the school's vision and goals and it also describes how the school will deliver its educational services. It details what the school plans to accomplish educationally and operationally, and how the school will measure its progress. While the layout of the charter contract may differ amongst authorizers, the information included in each contract is very similar. As a board member, it is important to familiarize yourself with all the sections of your school's charter contract.

General Contract Terms

This section of the contract is important because it states when the school became legally operational and when the school's current contract will expire. Knowing the terms of your contract helps you understand your school's position in the charter life-cycle and plan appropriately for renewal. Under the terms of

the charter contract, charter schools are required to enroll and serve students in at least one state-tested grade level by the beginning of their third year of operation and to have at least 50% of their students in a state-tested grade level by the end of their fifth year. Charter schools are also required to maintain a minimum of 100 students so they can remain financially viable. The contract states failure to comply with these provisions will result in termination of this contract.

Students

This section of the contract covers policies related to school enrollment. It includes information on maximum enrollment and non-discrimination requirements.

Educational Program/Academic Accountability

This section references the school's educational program, including educational goals and how progress towards those goals will be measured. Any substantial changes to the school's educational program must be approved by the school's authorizer, and the school's educational program must be aligned to state standards. Also included in this section of the contract are assessment requirements and graduation requirements for high schools. This section of the contract also addresses the school's responsibility to meet the needs of special student populations, such as English language learners and students with disabilities.

Under the student performance and accountability section of the charter contract, schools are required to meet the statutory requirements of the state's assessment system, academic accountability system, and accreditation system.

Financial Management

One of the most important responsibilities the board of directors has is to ensure that the public funds the school

receives are properly stewarded. This section of the contract describes the school's plan for properly managing and allocating funds. In this section you will find:

- Financial management and accountability requirements;
- A requirement that the board contract with an independent certified public accountant to conduct an annual audit of the school's financial records, which will be submitted to the TEA;
- A description of the school's process for returning property and funds in the event the school is no longer operating;
- A description of the school's plan and process for financial planning and budgeting; and
- A description of the school's systems, policies, and processes for accounting, purchasing, and payroll.

Organizational Mission

The mission statement is the heart of the charter contract. It articulates the vision of what the school wants to accomplish for kids. It is important that the board revisit the mission on a regular basis and evaluate whether the school is making progress in accomplishing its vision.

Governance

This part of the contract provides a description of how the school will be governed. Included in this section are the articles of incorporation, which are a legal document establishing the existence of a non-profit board. Texas law requires that an individual or group wishing to form a charter school must first become a non-profit corporation and file an application with the Texas Secretary of State's office. This document provides the legal basis by which your school is eligible to receive state and federal funding.

The governance section of the contract also describes the powers of the board of directors and provides a description of how they will conduct business. It references the board's bylaws and the process for amending them.

Operations

This section of the contract addresses issues related to the daily operation of the school. Here you will find a description of the school's governance, management and staffing structure. Other important topics addressed in this section include:

- Access to school records;
- School facilities;
- Indemnification;
- Severability; and
- Conditions of the contract.

Contract Renewal

At the end of your charter school's contractual term, the board of directors may petition the TEA to renew its contract. TAC §100.1031 states TEA has three decisions to make upon receipt of the renewal application:

- Grant an expedited renewal;
- Allow the charter to expire; or
- Grant a discretionary renewal.

Expedited Renewal

Open-enrollment charter schools receiving an "A" or "B" rating under the state's school performance accountability system, achieving at least a satisfactory financial performance score and not having any operating buildings that have received a "F" rating within the last three years can request an expedited contract renewal. The TEA must approve or deny the request for expedited contract renewal within 30 days.

Expiration

An open-enrollment charter school's contract will be allowed to expire if the school has been assigned the lowest academic performance rating for three of the preceding five years, lower than satisfactory financial performance ratings for three of the preceding five years, any combination of academic or financial performance ratings for three of the preceding five years, or has any campus that has been assigned the lowest academic performance rating for three of the preceding five years.

Discretionary Renewal

Charter schools not meeting the criteria described above, can request a discretionary renewal. Decisions about contract renewal under this process will be based on whether the school met the performance expectations described in the Charter School Performance Framework. Performance frameworks are discussed in greater detail in "Part 6: Evaluating Performance" of this handbook. The TEA must approve or deny the request for a discretionary contract renewal within 90 days.

Decisions made by the TEA Commissioner are not appealable unless the board feels that an arbitrary or capricious decision has been made. In this case, the determination can be reviewed by the State Office of Administrative Hearings.

Contract Revocation

Authorizers are required to develop a process for handling situations in which they intend to revoke or not renew a charter contract. The standards for revocation of a charter contract are located at TAC [§100.1021. Revocation and Modification of Governance of an Open-Enrollment Charter](#). It is prudent for board members to read and understand these rules, a matter as serious as revocation should never be a surprise.

This process must include timely notice to the board stating the reason for the revocation or non-renewal. Charter school authorizers should have a school closure protocol. This protocol ensures that parents receive timely notification of the school's plans to close. It also includes a plan for transferring students and their records to another school and for the proper dissolution of public school funds, property and assets. An authorizer's school closure protocol includes a list of tasks that need to be completed with a specific timeline and a description of the individual responsible for completing each task.

Questions to Consider

- Does each board member have access to a copy of the school's charter contract?
- Does your board make it a regular practice to review key academic and financial performance reports?
- Where is your school in its current charter contract life-cycle? Does your school's current performance make a strong case for future renewal? If not, what areas need to be addressed?
- What parts of the contract does your board need help better understanding? What professional development or training could the board participate in to help expand their knowledge of important contractual components?



Part 4

Effective and Efficient Board Meetings

“Honesty is the first chapter in the book of wisdom.”

— Thomas Jefferson

Board Training

Texas law requires new charter school board members to have at least 12 hours of training during their first year on the board and six hours of training each year after that. Board member training must review school law, school finance, health and safety and public accountability. In addition, new board member training includes a requirement to participate in one to two hours of Open Meetings Act and Public Information Act training within 90 days of being appointed as a board member. The Texas Office of the Attorney General (OAG) provides training resources to meet this requirement at: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/governmental-bodies/pia-and-oma-training-resources>.

Board Meetings

Public board meetings are how boards get their work done. Board meetings that are run effectively and in compliance with state law help to build the trust of your school community. Board meetings provide members and the public with an opportunity to express their opinions, concerns and raise

important questions. Texas's charter school law, §12.1051 and §12.1052, state that charter school boards must comply with the open meetings and public records laws. A board's authority comes from acting as a corporate body. Individual members of a board do not have the authority to act on their own. Therefore, a quorum of members must be present in order for the board to take official action.

It is important that board business is conducted in a transparent and open manner. Texas's Open Meetings Act (OMA) (Chapter 551) requires that charter school boards hold meetings that are open to the public and publicly post meeting notices, agendas and meeting minutes. The Texas OAG has resources for implementing Texas's OMA available at: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government>.

Anytime a quorum of board members is present and is discussing or making decisions on board business, it is considered a board meeting and must be open to the public. Board members do not have to be physically present for it to be considered a board meeting. For example, board meetings could include events like a board dinner, retreat, workshop or e-mail exchange if a majority of board members are present and board business is being discussed. However, the Texas Attorney General has ruled that ceremonial meetings, attendance at conferences, and social gathering do not constitute OMA violations if no school related business is discussed. When board members are gathering for an event, you will want to ensure that board business is not being discussed among members in large or small groups.

Board meetings must be open to the public and the charter school board must have a policy for when and where it will regularly hold its meetings, as well as a plan for announcing that schedule to the public. When determining the time and

location of board meetings, the board should carefully consider the needs of its school constituency. The board should pick a time and location that is convenient for its members, but also consider the needs of the families it is serving. Public meeting notices should include the date, hour, place and topics that will be covered and be publicly posted on a bulletin board in the school's office and on the school's website at least 72 hours before the scheduled time of the meeting.

Prior to conducting the board meeting, a meeting agenda must be developed and it is also good practice to develop a board packet. The agenda and board packets are usually developed by the school leader in consultation with the board president and provide a listing of specific topics that will be addressed during the meeting along with any supporting documentation that is needed to further explain important issues. The OMA requires that meeting agendas are publicly posted, prior to the board meeting, with a description of the items that will be discussed and acted upon. Board members should suggest to the school leader and board president specific topics that should be placed on the agenda prior to the meeting.

Emergency Meetings

Emergency meetings can be held in serious situations where there is an imminent threat to public health or safety, or a serious, unforeseeable situation has arisen and immediate action must be taken. These situations are rare and should only be used when a true emergency is at hand. Under emergency situations, public notice of the meeting is considered sufficient if it is done at least one hour prior to the meeting being held and states the reason for the emergency.

Closed Meetings

There are times when a charter school board needs to discuss topics which are sensitive in nature. In these circumstances, a

board may enter into a closed session. Before members enter into the closed session, the board president must announce to the public the purpose of the session. Any reason for holding a closed session of the board must align with the latest TOMA requirements. Closed sessions are only allowed in the following situations:

- Consultation with an attorney;
- Discussions about a potential real estate purchase;
- Discussions about a prospective gift;
- Discussions about confidential human resource issues;
- Discussions related to investments;
- Discussions about confidential security issues;
- Deliberations involving a disciplinary action against a student, or when a complaint is brought against a school employee;
- A consultation with an employee group; or
- Deliberations regarding a test item.

A certified agenda including information on actions taken or a tape recording of the closed meeting must be kept for at least two years after the meeting was held.

Virtual Meetings

Texas law (§551.125) allows school boards to hold virtual meetings using telephone conferencing in situations where there is an emergency or public threat, convening a quorum at one location is difficult or impossible, or when a meeting is held by an advisory board. The virtual meeting is subject to all other requirements of the Open Meetings Act. The virtual meeting notice must include a physical location where members of the public can listen to the meeting and a tape recording of the meeting must be made available to the public. During

the COVID-19 outbreak, Governor Abbott signed an Executive Order suspending the requirement that a physical location must be made available for the public to participate in the meeting. Instead, the public should be provided with information on how to access the telephone conference call or video conference link.

Under non-emergency situations, school boards may allow some board members to participate virtually as long as a quorum of the board members is present at a single physical location. Different rules regarding remote meetings apply to charter schools who extend into three or more counties as cited under Texas Government Code 551.127(c). In this situation, the presiding officer must be physically present at one location which is open to the public.

Committee Meetings

There are times when it is beneficial for a charter school governing board to establish a committee. They can be a great tool for helping the governing board get its work done in an efficient manner. Committees are helpful for studying specific issues in more detail, and then developing recommendations that can be considered by the full board. A charter school governing board may want to consider creating committees to address areas such as school finance, school performance, facilities, board member training and recruitment or providing input when decisions must be made about controversial issues.

The board's bylaws should provide details on how committees are to be formed and how they are to function. Committees should only be created for a very specific purpose or project. Once the full board has received the committee's recommendations and fully understands the issue being discussed, the committee should be dissolved.

It is important to remember that certain committee meetings may also be subject to the TOMA. This includes committee meetings where action is taken or recommendations are made by the committee that are routinely approved by the Board at a subsequent meeting without substantial discussion by the Board. Please consult with your school's legal counsel on when and where committees must comply with the TOMA.

When establishing committees, it is important that the governing board is very clear about its expectations. Committee members should understand the goal of the committee, how frequently their progress will be reported to the full board and by what date the board would like to receive a final report and recommendation(s). Creating an agenda helps keep the committee meeting focused and taking minutes helps members recall what was discussed during the meeting. The appendix to this handbook includes a sample annual board calendar which highlights important topics that your board may want to consider discussing each month.

It is important that committees do not replace the role of the full board. The committee should conduct detailed research on an identified topic area and then suggest possible solutions, but any decisions about specific actions to take must be considered and voted on by the full board.

In addition to having board members with expertise in the area being discussed serve on a committee, it may also be helpful to have non-committee members from the community with background in the area being studied serve as well. It is important that members of the committee have knowledge and experience related to the issues that are being discussed so that wise solutions can be developed.

Meeting Minutes

Texas's law requires that minutes or a tape recording be kept of each board meeting and that minutes and/or a recording are available to the public for review. It is the responsibility of the governing board to ensure that minutes are recorded and available to the public upon request. Board minutes must include a description of any action item proposed, discussed and/or decided, including a record of any orders, votes, decisions or actions taken.

Public Information Act

Texas policy operates from the fundamental belief that "each person is entitled, unless otherwise expressly provided by law, at all times to complete information about the affairs of government and the official acts of public officials and employees." Texas's Public Information Act (Chapter 552) Charter school board records, which include items like paper, e-mails, text messages, overheads, photographs, CDs, etc. are considered public information. Unless, a record is specifically exempted by the law, it must be provided promptly to members of the public upon request. The individual requesting information should be notified if the request can be met within ten days. Examples of exempted items include personnel records, personal educational records, pending litigation, competitive bids and real estate deals. A request to exempt information must be filed with the OAG.

It is wise practice for board members to have a separate e-mail account for board business. It is important that charter schools and charter school boards promptly comply with Public Information Act requests. Policies for handling Public Information Act requests should be developed and reviewed on a regular basis. Additional information on Texas's Public Information Act can be found at: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open-government/members-public/>

[overview-public-information-act](#). Included on this website is a link to a handbook to help with implementing requirements of the Public Information Act.

Questions to Consider

- Does our board publicly post meeting times and locations in compliance with state law and to invite stakeholder input?
- Do our board members receive board agendas and packets in a timely manner so they have sufficient time to review them prior to our meetings?
- Do our board meetings start on time? If not, why? Is there anything we could do to make our meetings more efficient?
- Do we follow our board agenda?
- Is our board following its bylaws and policies as it conducts business?
- How much time do we spend in our meetings discussing processes versus outcomes?
- How much time does our board spend discussing trivial versus vital issues?
- Do all members of our board have an opportunity to discuss topics and give input? Or are certain members dominating the conversation?
- Do we publicly post our board's meeting minutes? How well do our minutes reflect our board's commitment to excellence? (That is, are minutes accurate, complete, clear, and produced on a timely basis?)
- Are our board minutes devoid of running dialogues and individual comments, suggestions, etc.?
- Are approved minutes annotated as such, along with the date they were approved, and signed by the board's secretary?

- Does your Board have a policy for responding to public information requests? Is the policy effective? Does it need any revisions?



Part 5

Evaluating Academic Performance

“Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.”

— Aristotle

Charter school boards play a critical role in ensuring that students are learning and that tax-payer dollars are being stewarded wisely. Through the Public Educational Information Management System (PEIMS), the Texas Education Agency has developed a robust data system for evaluating school performance and providing information to the public on multiple aspects of school performance. These tools are important for charter board members to use and understand as they provide oversight to their schools. In this chapter we will discuss several of the tools available to evaluate a school’s academic performance. In Part 8, we will discuss specific tools available for evaluating a school’s financial performance.

Texas Academic Accountability

Charter schools in Texas receive an annual academic accountability rating. The rating that a school receives is based on its STAAR scores. Ratings take into consideration student achievement, school progress and whether achievement gaps amongst high-risk student subgroups are being closed. Ratings

for high schools are also based on graduation rates and college, career and military readiness outcomes.

All schools and districts in the state of Texas, with sufficient academic data, receive an overall letter rating of “A-F.” Schools and districts also receive individual letter grades in the following performance areas:

Student Achievement

This domain evaluates student performance on the STAAR across all subjects for all students, on both general and alternate assessments for elementary and middle schools. For high schools, this domain includes College, Career, and Military Readiness (CCMR) indicators and graduation rates.

School Progress

This domain measures district and campus outcomes in two areas: the number of students that grew at least one year academically (or are on track) as measured by STAAR results, and the achievement of all students relative to districts or campuses with similar economically disadvantaged percentages.

Closing the Gaps

This domain uses disaggregated data to demonstrate differentials among racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic backgrounds and other factors. The indicators included in this domain, as well as the domain’s construction, align the state accountability system with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

You can learn more about Texas’s Academic Accountability System at <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/accountability/academic-accountability/a-f-resources>. The state has created an interactive website to report accountability results. It is

located at <https://txschools.gov/>. The TEA uses the academic ratings to help identify schools that need additional supports and interventions. A charter school’s academic rating is also used in making contract renewal and revocation decisions. It is important for your board to understand your charter school’s current academic ratings and what these ratings indicate about current student academic achievement.

The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness

Texas’ assessment of academic readiness includes annual assessments in reading and mathematics for grades 3-8, writing in grades 4 and 7, science in grades 5 and 8 and social studies in grade 8. High schoolers will take end-of-course assessments in English I, English II, Algebra I, Biology and United States History. Optional end-of-course assessments are also available in English III and Algebra II. The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) measures how well students are mastering the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) curriculum standards. Additional information on STAAR can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/staar/staar-resources>. A charter school’s performance on the STAAR is one of the factors used in determining its academic accountability rating.

Texas School Accreditation

The TEA accredits all K-12 public schools in Texas, including charter schools. Under this accreditation system, all public schools annually receive one of the following accreditation designations from the TEA:

- Accredited;
- Accredited-Warned;
- Accredited-Probation; and
- Not Accredited-Revoked.

A listing of schools and their accreditation status can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/accountability/accreditation/accreditation-status>. Charter schools that receive a low academic accountability rating and/or financial performance rating for three consecutive years are in danger of having their charter contract revoked by the TEA.

The Charter School Performance Framework

The Charter School Performance Framework (CSPF) is intended to provide a snapshot of each charter’s academic, financial, and operational performance. It is important that the board review the school’s performance framework in order to reflect on the school’s overall health and viability throughout the charter term. The performance framework will be used by your authorizer to help inform decisions regarding contract renewal, intervention, or revocation.

Texas’s charter school law (§100.1010) requires that the CSPF be used to measure the performance of an open-enrollment charter school. The TEA has developed a framework and the performance standards by which a charter school should be measured on an annual basis. Information on the TEA’s CSPF and standards can be found at: http://castro.tea.state.tx.us/charter_apps/production/performance.html. Included on this website is a copy of the CSPF report for each open-enrollment charter school in the state.

The CSPF is comprised of academic, financial and operational performance standards. Each area has a list of standards that charter schools must meet. Schools receive a numerical score of 0 to 100 for each standard in the specific areas of academic, financial and operational performance. Charter schools achieving a numerical score of 60 or greater, in a specific performance area, are considered to have “met expectations,”

while charter schools that score below 60 in a specific performance area, have “not met expectations.” Each charter school also receives an overall score for the entire framework. When determining a school’s health and viability, it is important that your board carefully review all three of these components. The CSPF also encompasses the student performance and accountability and the financial management and accountability sections of the charter contract. The CSPF outlines the school’s performance expectations and is a tool that is used to make decisions about your school’s contract.

Academic Framework Indicators

Under the framework, a charter school’s academic performance is based on several performance indicators. A charter school’s performance on the academic indicators is important because they constitute 70% of the school’s entire CSPF score. A description of the academic indicators is provided below:

- **The school’s overall accountability rating:** The charter school received an overall accountability score of 60% or higher.
- **Student achievement data:** Is based on the “closing the gaps” indicators used in the Texas school accountability system. Under the CSPF, schools are evaluated on the percentage of indicators they met instead of receiving a single scaled score.
- **Campus status ratings:** Charter schools receive the number of points listed below based on all their campuses receiving the following academic accountability scores:
 - 80 or higher: 10 points
 - 70 or higher: 4 points
 - 60 or higher: 2 points
 - Less than 60: 0 points

**TIER 1:
High Quality
Performance**

Definition

Score 80% or above on the CSPF overall, and on both the academic and financial frameworks.

Oversight

Score 80% or above on the CSPF overall, and on both the academic and financial frameworks.

**TIER 2:
Average
Performance**

Definition

Charter schools that do not qualify for Tier 1, but attain scores at or above 60% on the CSPF overall, and on both the CSPF academic and financial frameworks.

Oversight

TEA will provide increased levels of oversight and may request the school provide additional information. Tier 2 schools also meet minimum expansion and renewal qualifications, but TEA will use CSPF performance to inform decisions.

**TIER 3:
Deficient
Performance**
(performance
watch list status)

Definition

Charter schools that attain scores below 60% on the CSPF overall, or on either the CSPF academic or financial framework, or that receive an overall academic accountability rating of D or F at the district level.

Oversight

TEA will provide substantial oversight and may require improvement plans from Tier 3 schools. Tier 3 schools will not qualify for expansion. Schools remaining in Tier 3 for multiple years may have their charter revoked.

Questions to Consider

- In which areas of the CSPF is your charter school performing well? In which areas does your school need to improve?
- How are the students at your school performing on the STAAR? Are there certain subgroups that are struggling more than others? Are students showing an acceptable amount of student growth each year? What strategies does your school need to implement to help struggling students or subgroups?
- What is your school's current accountability rating? How will this rating affect future reauthorization decisions?
- Is your school currently fully accredited? If not, what steps need to be taken to restore its full accreditation status?



Part 6

Financial Oversight and Risk Management

“Beware of little expenses. A small leak will sink a great ship.”

— Benjamin Franklin

Ensuring and Carefully Stewarding Fiscal Resources

Charter school boards are trusted with the responsibility to ensure the school is well managed and fiscally sound. Fiduciary duties fall into three categories:

- Duty of care;
- Duty of loyalty; and
- Duty of obedience.

The duty of care requires board members to be reasonably aware of what is occurring at the school so they can make informed decisions. As part of the duty of care, board members should be prepared for meetings, actively participate in planning and decision-making, and make informed judgments.

Duty of loyalty requires board members to always put the best interests of the school above any personal or professional interests. Board members should not serve on the board for

financial, or other, gain for themselves or their families. Fulfilling this duty requires board members to be free of real conflicts of interest, be free of perceived conflicts of interest and not engage in related party transactions.

Duty of obedience requires board members to ensure that the school complies with all applicable state and federal laws, rules, and regulations. It also requires board members to ensure that the school is acting in good faith to fulfill the terms of its charter contract and other policies established by the authorizing body. When making decisions, board members should only make decisions that are in the best interest of students. The board should also ensure that the school is obeying the policies that the board has adopted.

Funding Sources

Charter schools in Texas receive funding from the Foundation School Program (FSP). The amount of state funding a Texas charter school receives is based on its average student daily attendance and their program participation. These allocations are based on attendance counts which are collected every six weeks. Charter schools are responsible for accurately reporting their enrollment data. The manner in which this data is reported affects a charter school's funding and, if reported inaccurately, can result in audit findings or a material breach of contract even resulting in school closure.

The funds charter schools receive from the FSP include categorical funds for special education services, career and technology services, compensatory education home instruction services, bilingual/ESL services, early education services and pregnancy related services. Schools are required to spend a percentage of the funds in the allocated programs and then they can allocate for the rest to their general needs.

Other funding sources include federal funds provided through the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA):

- **Title I:** The purpose of these funds “is to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education and reach, at minimum, proficiency on challenging state academic achievement standards and state academic assessments.” Title I funds are provided to schools that have a qualifying number of students living in poverty.
- **Title II:** The purpose of Title II funds is to help individual teachers become “highly-qualified” and to provide professional development to teachers and leaders.
- **Title III:** The purpose of Title III funds is to help English learners attain English language proficiency and meet state academic standards.

Approving the Annual Budget

Another important financial responsibility of the board is reviewing and approving the school's annual budget. Budgets are to be formally adopted by the board, in a public meeting, before the beginning of the school year. Once budgets are adopted, your board, on a monthly basis, needs to review the budget's status and approve public fund expenditures. At each monthly board meeting, your school leader should provide a budget status report which includes an enrollment report, a statement of position (balance sheet), a statement of activities (budget to actual report), cash flow, and any other pertinent financial information.

The board is also responsible for developing and adopting financial policies and procedures that will ensure school funds are handled with integrity and in compliance with all legal requirements. The board may contract with entities to help in the administration of financial functions like accounting,

purchasing and payroll. On an annual basis, charter school boards should contract with an independent third-party financial auditor to conduct a financial audit.

Implementing Financial Controls

Proper stewardship of public monies and assets by the board includes taking steps to reasonably ensure that they are safeguarded against fraud, waste, and abuse. In saying this, we are not dismissing the value of trust in the board-management relationship, but it is vital to understand that the board's fiduciary duty is accomplished by verifying that proper financial controls exist and are being followed—not merely trusting or assuming they are. These safeguards include written policies and procedures referred to as financial controls. These regulate the accounting cycle and transaction processes, as well as other risk management approaches.

It is recommended that all board members familiarize themselves with the school's financial controls, as hundreds of charter schools have been victims of fraud, waste and abuse due to the simple fact that they either lacked key financial controls or the board failed to ensure they were being followed. It is recommended, at a minimum, that every school implement the following six financial controls:

- **Separation of duties policy:** This policy (or procedure) defines which individuals (by position) are responsible for the processes in the accounting cycle (i.e., recording journal entries, posting to the ledger, reconciling the bank statements, etc.). For example, the person who maintains the school's general ledger should be different than the person who reconciles the monthly bank statement against it. While separating duties can be challenging in smaller schools, we strongly recommend doing so as much as possible, within reason.
- **Purchasing policy:** The purchasing process consists of

four functions as follows: (1) authorizing a transaction, (2) executing a transaction, (3) recording a transaction, and (4) safeguarding a transaction. As with the separation of duties policy in smaller schools, we recommend separating the authority for each function in your purchasing procedures as much as possible, while not unnecessarily impeding operations.

- **Debit card policy:** We recommend having a board policy that prohibits the existence of school debit cards, unless they are coded to block cash withdrawals.
- **Credit card policy:** School credit cards are useful but care must be taken to ensure that they are not used for personal purchases, lavish expenses (e.g., first class airfare) or to circumvent normal purchasing procedures.
- **Cash handling procedures:** You might be surprised at the amount of cash that commonly flows through schools for things such as field trips, fundraising activities, concessions, lunchrooms, and gates. While the theft of such funds probably would not be enough to jeopardize a school's existence, it is still important to safeguard every dollar. For example, we recommend using numbered tickets at gates, instead of cash, and having strict cash receipting procedures to include deposit verifications.
- **Vendor approval procedure:** Every school needs a procedure by which it verifies the legitimacy and independence of vendors in order to avoid falling prey to scams involving shell companies, kickback schemes, and undisclosed related party transactions.

In addition to verifying the existence of financial controls and adherence to them, it is also important that the board have an annual external audit conducted by a Certified Public Accountant (auditor or auditing firm) that is independent of management. As important as an audit is in verifying the

integrity of the school's financial reports, it is crucial for the board to understand that detecting fraud is generally not one of the purposes of an ordinary audit. Thus, we recommend that the scope of the audit periodically include an evaluation of financial controls.

When the audit is complete, the auditor should present the audit to the full board. As part of the process, be sure to read any footnotes and discuss with the auditor whether board action is recommended to remedy any particular deficiencies.

Managing Risk v. Risk Management

There are different ways to think about operational risks. Where charter schools are concerned, we propose simplifying the concept by grouping these as risks to people, risks to property, and risks to the program. Charter school risk management involves proactively assessing potential risks. Management takes the lead in doing this by evaluating risks at the intersection of two dimensions: the school's susceptibility to a particular risk, and the magnitude of impact should it occur.

For example, if a school fails to conduct criminal background checks on volunteers, it could be more susceptible to the presence of a child molester whose actions would pose serious risks to children, as well as the risk of lawsuits and damage to the school's reputation. Thus, the intersection of susceptibility and magnitude in this case would indicate an urgent need to put preventive measures into place to protect students and reduce the school's risk exposure.

There are six key risk management strategies:

- **Hire competent people:** If you were operating a warehouse that utilized forklifts, you would need competent forklift operators. Without competent operators, jeopardy to people, property and the company itself

could easily arise. No amount of expensive equipment, operating policies and procedures, or insurance will offset incompetence. The same thing is true for charter schools.

- **Be proactive in identifying potential risks:** The fact is, some risks are not predictable. If, however, your school's management is intentional about being proactive in identifying potential risks, it can position itself to manage and/or mitigate them. For example, no one can predict when a medical emergency will occur, but if your campus has numerous buildings, a potential risk exists in that an ambulance crew might drive to the wrong building. The time lost in redirecting the crew could be the difference between life and death. Clearly numbering buildings and having an emergency response plan that includes aerial photos (which you may be able to download from Google Earth) are two ways of proactively managing this risk. Sharing the plan with first responders in advance is a third.
- **Have a method of monitoring information and data that reflects key risk indicators:** Whether in the form of a report, a spreadsheet, or a computer program, many risks can be monitored through real-time information and data. A good practice is for your school leader to provide a monthly written report to the board which includes data pertaining to changes to enrollment, personnel actions, student suspensions and expulsions, and information about situations involving threatened or actual litigation. Each of these topics represents potential risks to the school, so, real-time board monitoring on how well they are being managed is imperative.
- **Adopt and follow sound policies and procedures:** Every school needs operating policies and procedures that address a wide array of operational matters to include, but not be limited to, human resources, financial management, financial controls, student records, high-stakes testing,

student discipline, campus safety and security and transportation. It is never enough to simply have policies. A board should systematically evaluate how well its key policies are being followed.

- **Consult legal counsel:** Your governing board should consult the school's legal counsel prior to engaging in any potentially high-risk act such as, expelling students, terminating employees, conducting investigations into alleged misconduct, and approving high-dollar contracts. Legal counsel can also be invaluable in reviewing certain policies, such as human resources policies.
- **Maintain thorough insurance coverages:** The value of thorough insurance coverages cannot be overstated. In addition to general liability insurance, the following coverages are recommended:
 - director and officer liability;
 - educator liability;
 - errors and omissions;
 - employee dishonesty (sometimes called crime coverage); and
 - cyber-crime coverage (in the event that damage occurs to the school through hacking, an attack on your information system, or phishing, etc.)

A copy of the school's certificate of insurance (usually one page) will list its coverages by category. It will also show the renewal anniversary date, the name and contact information of the agent, and the name of the underwriter (whose AM Best ratings can usually be checked online). Also, some insurance companies that underwrite charter schools offer free or inexpensive risk management resources.

Monitoring Financial Health

As public schools, charters receive most or all of their operating revenues from state and federal funds which are, of course, derived from tax dollars. The board's resulting fiduciary duty makes it ultimately responsible for ensuring that these monies are not only safeguarded from waste, fraud, and abuse, but also for ensuring that all funds are prudently spent and properly accounted for.

One of the key ways a charter school board monitors spending and accounting is by reviewing financial reports on a regular basis—usually monthly. In addition to a budget versus actual report, these should include a balance sheet and a revenue and expense statement (sometimes called an income statement or a profit and loss statement).

In charter school financial oversight, it is common for members of a board to rely on the judgement of just one or two members that have experience reading and interpreting financial reports. While this is understandable, we recommend that all board members possess a familiarity with the three basic financial performance indicators. It is likely that your authorizer utilizes additional financial performance indicators. However, when charter schools are struggling financially, they are usually doing so with respect to one or more of these three fundamental financial performance indicators:

- **Unrestricted cash on hand:** Of the three key financial performance metrics, this is one of the most important because a school obviously cannot operate without adequate cash. In this context, unrestricted refers to monies that can be used for general operating expenses. (In contrast, some monies in education are restricted, meaning that they may only be used for specific purposes, not for general operations.)

In charter schools, the unit of measure to assess the adequacy of a school's cash position is its average expense per day. Using this metric, the standard for performance recommended by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is 60 days cash, or between 30- and 60-days cash, and a one-year trend that is positive. The formula for determining whether a school meets this standard is as follows:

**total expenses - depreciation
(i.e., a non-cash expense) / 365**

Example: ABC Charter School's total expenses (less depreciation) for the year were \$2.78 million. Divided by 365 days, the school's average daily expense is \$7,616. To meet the 30 days of unrestricted cash goal, the school must have a minimum unrestricted cash balance of at least \$228,493.

The financial reports in which the numbers are found:

A school's total expenses are found in the revenue and expense statement and its cash balance is stated on the balance sheet.

- **Liquidity:** This metric is also commonly known as the current ratio. It refers to the ratio between current assets and current liabilities. It is computed by how many times the school's current assets (usually just its cash) could cover the school's current liabilities (i.e., obligations that will be settled within 12 months). NACSA's financial performance framework recommends a current ratio that is equal to, or greater than, 1.1 or between 1.0 and 1.1 and a one-year trend that is positive. A current ratio of 1.1 would mean that the school has 10% more current assets than current liabilities. The formula for determining whether a school

meets this standard is as follows:

current assets / current liabilities

Example: ABC Charter School's total current assets equal \$487,513. Its current liabilities equal \$243,765. Dividing the assets by the liabilities produces a current ratio of 2.0, which means that the school has twice as many assets as liabilities.

The financial reports in which the numbers are found:

A school's current assets and current liabilities are stated on the balance sheet.

Total margin: This ratio is derived by dividing net income (the amount of money the school earned at the end of the year after all operating expenses are accounted for) by the school's total revenue for the year. While this is easily understood, it is important to keep in mind that net income often includes non- cash expenses, such as depreciation.

We recommend a total margin of at least 3% per year. (Many successful veteran school executives take this a step further by aiming for a margin of at least 3% per year before depreciation expenses. Achieving this year-over-year will produce substantial cash reserves over time.)

The formula for calculating total margin is as follows:

net income / total revenue

Example: ABC Charter School's current year net income is \$63,000. It's total revenues for the year are \$2,100,000. This is a total margin of 3%. (Again, if the school aims for a margin of at least 3% per year before depreciation, so much the better for the school.)

The financial reports in which the numbers are found: A school's total margin is derived from the numbers found in the revenue and expenses statement.

In addition to the aforementioned reports which are needed to compute the three ratios discussed, we also recommend that boards review a monthly enrollment update report because, apart from an occasional grant the school might receive, enrollment is the school's financial lifeblood. If it is decreasing, the board needs to be aware, sooner rather than later.

The Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas

Texas has developed a system to hold public schools accountable for the proper management of their fiscal resources. This system is called the Financial Integrity Rating System of Texas, commonly referred to as FIRST. One of the goals of this system is to help schools maximize the amount of funds that are allocated for direct instructional purposes. Under this system, all public school districts and charter schools receive an annual performance rating. The FIRST rating is one of the indicators used in the CSPF. A charter school's FIRST rating score makes up 20% of its overall CSPF score. FIRST ratings are important for charter schools because they indicate their financial health and viability. Strong FIRST ratings can result in an expedited contract renewal, while failing ratings can result in the revocation of a charter contract.

A charter school's FIRST rating is based on 21 key financial indicators. These 21 indicators include:

1. Annual financial report (AFR) and financial data submitted to the TEA on time;
2. Unmodified opinion included in the AFR;
3. Charter school is in compliance with the payment terms

- of all debt agreements for the fiscal year;
4. Timely payments made to the Teacher Retirement System (TRS), Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and other government agencies;
5. Total net asset balance was greater than zero;
6. Average change in total net assets over 3 years was less than 25% or the current year total net asset balance exceeds 75 days of operational expenditures;
7. The number of days of cash on hand and current investments for the charter school are sufficient to cover operating expenses;
8. The measure of current assets to current liabilities ratio for the charter school is sufficient to cover short-term debt;
9. The charter school's revenues equal or exceed expenses, excluding depreciation;
10. The charter school averaged less than a 10 percent variance when comparing budgeted revenues to actual revenues for the last 3 fiscal years;
11. The ratio of long-term liabilities to total assets for the charter school is sufficient to support long-term solvency;
12. The debt service coverage ratio is sufficient to meet the required debt service;
13. The charter school had a debt-to-capitalization percentage that was reasonable for the charter school to continue operating;
14. The charter school's administrative cost ratio is equal to or less than the threshold ratio;
15. The charter school did not experience a 15 percent decline in the student to staff ratio over the last 3 years;

16. The charter school's average daily attendance (ADA) was within 10 percent of the charter school's annual estimated ADA;
17. The comparison of the PEIMS data to like information in the school's AFR results in a total variance of less than 3 percent of all expenses by function;
18. The external independent auditor did not report any material weaknesses in internal controls over financial reporting and compliance for local, state, or federal funds;
19. The external independent auditor indicated the AFR was free of any instances of material noncompliance for grants, contracts and laws related to local, state or federal funds;
20. The charter school posted financial information on its website, and;
21. The charter school served students that reside within its approved geographic boundaries.

A detailed description of the financial documents and indicators used to determine a charter school's FIRST rating can be found in section [§109.1001](#) of the Texas Administrative Code. The TEA also provides a worksheet showing how FIRST rating calculations will be determined for the 2020-2021 school year. FIRST ratings for the 2020-2021 school year are based on calculations from financial data from the 2019-2020 school year. This worksheet can be found at: https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/20_04_figure-19_0109_1001-10.pdf. For the critical indicators, schools receive a score of "pass" or "fail," and for the solvency and financial competence indicators, schools receive a score of 0 to 10. There are six solvency indicators that are considered "ceiling" indicators. These ceiling indicators require charter schools to meet certain minimum thresholds in order to receive

a maximum total charter FIRST score. For example, if a charter scored 94 points but failed to pass ceiling indicator #5 (Total Net Assets), then the highest score (ceiling) the charter school could receive would be 79. Different indicators have different ceilings. Indicators 4, 5, 6, 17, 18 and 20 are ceiling indicators. The maximum number of points a school can receive for its FIRST rating is 100. Schools are awarded a letter grade based on the number of points they receive in the following manner:

- A: Superior Achievement (90-100 points)
- B: Above Standard Achievement (80-89 points)
- C: Standard Achievement (70-79 points)
- F: Substandard Achievement (0-69 points)

Your board can find your charter school's FIRST rating at: <https://pryor.tea.state.tx.us/Tea.CharterFirst.Web/Public/District.aspx>

Financial Framework Indicators

A charter school's financial performance is based on the performance indicators described below and constitutes 20% of a charter school's overall CSPF score. The majority of the financial indicators used in the CSPF are also indicators in Texas's Financial Integrity Rating System (FIRST).

- **The school's overall score on Charter FIRST:** The charter school received an overall score of 60% or higher on the financial framework.
- **Short-term solvency (cash on hand):** Charter FIRST indicator #6.
- **Short-term solvency (ratio of current assets to current liabilities):** Charter FIRST indicator #7.
- **Long-term solvency (revenues equal or exceed expenses):** Charter FIRST indicator #9.
- **Long-term solvency (debt service coverage ratio):** Charter FIRST indicator #10.

Operational Framework Indicators

Under the framework, a charter school's operational performance is based on several performance indicators and constitutes the remaining 10% of a charter school's overall CSPF score. A list of these indicators and a brief description of how they are measured is provided below.

- **Teacher qualifications:** All charter school teachers must hold, at a minimum, a baccalaureate degree.
- **Program requirements (special populations):** Charter schools must provide special education services that meet state legal requirements.
- **Program requirements (bilingual education and ESL populations):** Charter schools must provide bilingual education and English as a Second Language (ESL) services that meet state legal requirements.
- **Timely filing of governance reporting forms:** Governance reporting forms are submitted on time.
- **Training requirements for board members and charter school officials:** All newly appointed board members and school officers completed their annual training or met the training exception criteria.
- **Criminal record employment requirements:** The charter school submitted its criminal history compliance certification on time.
- **Timely filing of PEIMS data:** The charter school is in compliance with all PEIMS data reporting requirements.
- **Certificate of Occupancy Requirements:** All charter school buildings used for educational purposes must have a valid certificate of occupancy.
- **Administrative Cost Ratio:** Charter FIRST indicator #11.
- **50% of students in tested grades:** Within five years, 50% of the charter school's student population must

be in grades that are covered by the state's assessment system or the school must have received a waiver from the Commissioner of Education.

- **Eligibility to participate in child nutrition program:** The charter school maintains its eligibility to participate in child nutrition programs.
- **Appropriate handling of secure assessment materials:** Charter schools must comply with statute rules concerning the delivery, storage, administration, and return of state assessments.

CSPF Tiered Support

The TEA has recently introduced tiered level of supports to charter schools based on their performance on the CSPF. Tiering the TEA charter school portfolio increases transparency, allows for clear communication of performance ratings, and identifies low-performing schools that should be subject to increased oversight. Under this new tiering system, charter schools will be classified in the following manner:

The Annual Financial and Compliance Report

Each year, charter schools are required to prepare their annual financial statements and have them audited by a licensed independent CPA firm. Audited financial statements must be approved by the charter school's board. A copy of the school's board approved audited Annual Financial and Compliance Report (AFR) must be submitted to the TEA for review. The AFR is due to the TEA no later than 150 days after the close of the charter school's fiscal year. If the school's fiscal year ends on August 31st, then the AFR is due by January 28th, and if the school's fiscal year ends on June 30th, then the AFR is due by November 27th. AFRs are submitted through the Texas Education Agency Login (TEAL).

Financial Accountability System Resource Guide

The Financial Accountability System Resource Guide (FASRG) describes the financial accounting rules for charter schools. This guide is made up of the six modules listed below. Modules 2 and 3 apply to charter schools and are considered state law through commissioner rule adoption.

- **Module 1:**
[Financial Accounting and Reporting \(FAR\) and FAR Appendices](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20I%20FAR%20Appendices%20New%20Attachment%20II%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
(https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20I%20FAR%20Appendices%20New%20Attachment%20II%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
- **Module 2:**
[Special Supplement - Charter School](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20II%20new%20Attachment%20III%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
([/files/Module%20II%20new%20Attachment%20III%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20II%20new%20Attachment%20III%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf))
- **Module 3:**
[Special Supplement - Non-profit Charter Schools Chart of Accounts](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20III%20new%20Attachment%20IV%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
(https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20III%20new%20Attachment%20IV%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
- **Module 4:**
[Auditing](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20IV%20new%20Attachment%20V%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
(https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20IV%20new%20Attachment%20V%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
- **Module 5:**
[Purchasing](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20V%20new%20Attachments%20VI%20AMP_editfinal_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
(https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20V%20new%20Attachments%20VI%20AMP_editfinal_AccessiblePDF.pdf)
- **Module 6:**
[Compensatory Education, Guidelines, Financial Treatment, and an Auditing and Reporting System](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20VI%20new%20Attachment%20VII%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF_accessible.pdf)
(https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Module%20VI%20new%20Attachment%20VII%20-%20Copy_AccessiblePDF_accessible.pdf)

Questions to Consider

- How many of our board members know how to interpret financial statements?
- Does our school have written financial internal control policies and procedures? Are these policies and procedures easy to locate?
- Is our school's management currently producing a monthly financial report that consists of a revenue and expense statement and a balance sheet?
- How many days of unrestricted cash on hand does our school currently have?
- What is our school's current debt ratio?
- What is our school's current total operating margin?
- Does our facility lease reflect fair market value?
- To whom does our board turn for expert advice completely independent of the interests of the management company?
- Is our school being proactive in managing risk? Is our school highly susceptible to certain kinds of risks? Does our board require management to conduct an annual risk management assessment and to report its findings?
- On what date does our school's liability insurance coverage expire? Does our school's actual insurance coverages meet all minimum thresholds that are stated in our charter?



Part 7

Ensuring Services to Special Populations

“Everybody is a genius. But if you judge a fish by its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it is stupid.”

— Albert Einstein

Open-enrollment charter schools in Texas are open to all students. Charter schools cannot set minimum academic standards or deny students because they are eligible to receive special services such as English language services or special education services. It is important that charter schools help every student they serve succeed. They must understand their responsibility under state and federal law to provide services to students who need extra support and services. Charter school boards play an important role in ensuring there are policies and procedures in place to meet the unique needs of all students.

English Language Learners

Students who are not native English speakers need additional learning supports in order to be academically successful in the classroom. The TEC ([section §29.051](#)) requires public schools to provide an opportunity for students to become competent in speaking, reading, writing and comprehending the English language. It is important that charter schools have practices in place for identifying English Language Learner (ELL) students

and then providing them with the supports they need to become proficient in English.

Bilingual Education

The TEA is responsible for identifying school districts and charter schools that are required to offer bilingual education and special language programs. Generally, districts or charter schools with 20 or more students in the same grade level who are limited English proficient must provide a bilingual or special language program. Districts and charter schools that cannot find a sufficient number of certified bilingual teachers may request a temporary exemption from offering a bilingual educational program from the TEA. Waiver applications must be submitted to the TEA by November 1st. Additional information on the bilingual exemption waiver can be found on the TEA's website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/english-learner-support/bilingual-education-exception-and-esl-waiver-resources>.

English Language Proficiency Assessment

Once Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are identified, it is important to assess their English proficiency. Texas has developed the Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment (TELPAS) and Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment (TELPAS) Alternate in order to assess the English proficiency of LEP students. These assessments assess English language proficiency in the areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing and are based on English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). Students are given an English proficiency score of beginning, intermediate, advanced or advanced high. A student's TELPAS proficiency score helps inform what types of linguistic accommodations should be given to ensure the student is able to learn the academic content. Additional information on the TELPAS can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/telpas/telpas-resources>.

Special Education Services

It is important that charter schools understand their legal responsibilities under state and federal law to provide the appropriate accommodations and services to students with disabilities. The federal laws that govern special education services include the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The TEC and the TAC also stipulate a charter school's responsibilities for providing special education services. On the TEA's website, they provide an alphabetical listing of special education resources at: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/programs-and-services/special-education-funding/special-education-in-texas-a-z-index>.

Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Charter schools must comply with the federal Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). This act ensures that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). This means that a school must provide services to students with disabilities regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities. Special education services must be provided to students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and to develop an individualized education program (IEP) that lays out a plan for how the student will best be served. Resources for implementing the IDEA can be found at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/?src=pr>.

Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee

Title 19, Chapter 89 of the TAC lays out the guidelines for schools offering special education services in Texas. These rules can be found at: <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter089/ch089aa.html>. Access to special education services begins when a student is identified by a parent, teacher or administrator as benefiting from services. The IDEA requires schools to use Response to Intervention (RtI) as a method for

identifying students who are struggling and might benefit from special education services. Rtl uses targeted, research-based interventions to meet a student's needs, to monitor student progress, and to ensure effective instruction in the general education setting. In determining whether a student received appropriate instruction, schools should consider primary language, limited English proficiency, and environmental and cultural factors, as well as whether a student has had frequent moves or absences that may have limited the student's access to the curriculum. The school should exclude these factors as the primary cause of a student's failure to achieve or make sufficient academic progress in determining whether a student might be eligible to receive special education services.

All students who are referred for special education services, must be evaluated by an Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) Committee and parents must be notified of the evaluation. Referred students undergo a rigorous evaluation that will gauge their mental, emotional, and social capacity. Only those students who qualify will be allowed to participate in the program. Once the evaluation is complete, a team must review the results and determine whether the student is indeed eligible for services. Information on the ARD process can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/parent-and-family-resources/guidance-on-admission-review-and-dismissal-guide-production-and-required-dissemination>.

Individualized Educational Plan

Within 30 days of being identified as eligible to receive special education services, an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) must be created for the student. The IEP is developed by the ARD committee and the student's parent(s). The purpose of this plan is to lay out a course of action for how the student will access services in a way that best meets their individual needs and

prepares them for their future as an adult. The IEP is a mutual agreement between the ARD committee and the student's parent(s). Charter schools must ensure they are following procedural safeguards and properly notify parents before any student placement decisions are made. Parents must be included in the process of developing the IEP. The goal is to develop a plan that is agreeable to the student, their parent(s) and the school staff. The IEP lays out the student's educational goals and how those goals will be met, educational settings, how the student will be assessed and services and supports they will receive. When determining a student's educational setting, the IDEA requires that a student be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. This means they should spend as much time as possible with peers who do not receive special education. A model IEP form can be accessed on the TEA's website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/programs-and-services/iep-model-form>.

IDEA and Student Discipline

It is important for schools to carefully approach discipline issues that involve students with disabilities. Under IDEA, students with disabilities have additional rights and safeguards when it comes to school discipline. When a student with disabilities misbehaves, it is first of all important to determine whether the misbehavior was a manifestation of the student's disability. If the behavior was a manifestation of the disability, then the ARD committee needs to meet and determine if modifications need to be made to the IEP so that the student can successfully cope in the learning environment. If it is determined that the misbehavior was not a result of the student's disability, then regular school discipline methods can be followed. If student discipline involves a change of placement, the school must ensure special education services are still provided. Charter schools must also ensure they are following state and federal

laws related to the use of physical restraints and seclusion when disciplining students. Texas has outlined specific requirements and procedures (TEC §37.0021 and TAC §89.1053) when the use of physical restraint or time-out is necessary.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Charter schools must also ensure they are following section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act. Section 504 is similar to IDEA as it prohibits student discrimination based on a disability. It also requires FAPE, due process protections including convening a committee to develop a 504 plan to provide the student with the necessary services. This law protects students who have a physical or mental impairment that limits one or more major life activities, has a long-term illness or a disorder that substantially reduces or lessens a student's ability to access learning in an educational setting. Major life activities include things like caring for one's self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks and learning.

Students served under section 504 may have health conditions or disorders that are not readily noticeable to others or conditions that only need accommodations for a short period of time. This would include students who have learning disabilities, diabetes, epilepsy, allergies or a physical injury such as a broken leg. Doctors or parents can recommend a student be evaluated for section 504 services but school staff must also believe there is a need for services. It is important that charter schools have policies and procedures in place for referring and reviewing whether students are eligible to receive section 504 services. It is also important for charter schools to adopt procedural safeguards including a process for receiving complaints, investigating, and conducting 504 Due Process Hearings.

Assessments for Students with Disabilities

The ARD committee decides which state assessment a student with disabilities will take. Students may take the traditional STARR assessment with or without accommodations. A list of possible test accommodations and the process for requesting them can be found on the TEA's website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/student-assessment-overview/accommodation-resources>. A student that has a significant cognitive disability will take the STARR Alternative 2 assessment. An alternative English proficiency assessment is also available for ELL students who have a cognitive disability.

Homeless Students

All public schools, including charter schools, must follow federal rules regarding the education of homeless students found in the McKinney-Vento Act. This law requires charter schools to have a homeless education liaison. The name of a school's homeless education liaison must be submitted to the TEA through Texas's Education Directory (TED). Charter schools are responsible for identifying students that might be eligible for services under the McKinney-Vento Act. The homeless education liaison is responsible for identifying homeless students, assisting with their enrollment, monitoring their attendance and providing opportunities for academic success.

Schools cannot require students who are experiencing homelessness to provide proof of residency, immunizations, birth certificates or guardianship documents before they are allowed to enroll. In Texas, students experiencing homelessness are allowed to enroll in any school of their choice regardless of the location of their temporary residence or school of origin. Once enrolled, homeless students are eligible to receive Title I services. The [Texas Education for Homeless Children and Youth \(TEHCY\)](#) provides information and resources to assist with serving students who are homeless.

Questions to Consider

- What policies and programs does your charter school have in place to serve ELL students? Based on a review of TELPAS data, are the programs effective?
- Is your charter school in compliance with all state and federal special education laws and regulations?
- Has the charter school identified a homeless education liaison? Is the school in compliance with provisions under the McKinney-Vento Act?
- Does the school have any additional “special populations” that need additional support? How can this group be supported?
- Are the board’s policies up-to-date in regards to serving students with special needs (i.e. ELL, students with disabilities and homeless students)?



Part 8

School Safety

“All of life is the management of risk, not its elimination.”

— Walter Wriston

The Texas Legislature, in 2019, signed into law a package of bills addressing school safety. These bills increased many existing school safety requirements and made them applicable to charter schools. Under this new legislation, the TEA is charged with developing standards to ensure that schools provide a secure and safe environment. The TEA is working on guidance to implement these new school safety laws and has provided information on its school safety website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/school-safety>. Major components of the new school safety law include developing comprehensive school safety plans and conducting regular school safety audits and behavioral threat assessments.

The Texas School Safety Center is also helping to coordinate the implementation and compliance with these new laws. Information and resources related to these new school safety laws can be found on its website at: <https://txssc.txstate.edu>.

School Safety Plans

The TEC (§37.108) requires all charter schools to develop a Multi-hazard Emergency Operations Plan (MEOP). Charter schools receive an annual school safety allotment, based on the school’s average daily attendance, to assist with developing and implementing a safety plan. The main purpose of these funds is to provide improvements to facilities that will enhance student and staff safety and to implement safety technology.

In addition, charter schools may apply for a safety and security grant through the TEA. The purpose of this grant is to provide funding for safety and security equipment. A charter school's MEOP must include the following:

- Safety prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery strategies and protocols;
- Training for all school personnel including:
 - Emergency Response (including substitute teachers)
 - Psychological safety and suicide prevention (including substitute teachers)
 - Protocol on responding to traumatic injuries (bleeding control kits);
- Regular emergency drills for each campus;
- Chain of command protocols for emergencies;
- Plans and devices for communicating with local emergency personnel;
- Specific safety measures for portable buildings and students with disabilities; and
- Policies for notifying parents (including for a bomb threat).

The United States Department of Education (USDOE) also has a website dedicated to providing educators with school safety resources. This website can be accessed at: <https://www.schoolsafety.gov>.

School Safety Audits

At least once every three years, charter schools are required to conduct a safety and security audit of their school facilities, which also includes a review of their school safety policies and procedures. The Texas School Safety Center (TxSSC) is a university-level research center located at Texas State University. The TxSSC serves as a resource to K-12 schools and

junior colleges throughout the state by providing safety and security information through research, training, and technical assistance. The TxSSC has developed school safety and security audit procedures. A copy of TxSSC's audit tool can be found at: <https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/ss-audit-toolkit/>. The board is required to review a copy of your school's safety audit and to address and correct any deficiencies identified in the audit.

Behavioral Threat Assessment

One of the requirements of the new safety legislation is that each charter school campus form a Behavioral Threat Assessment Team. The purpose of this team is to proactively identify and address any possible safety and security threats. Training and support for Behavioral Threat Assessment Teams are available through the TxSSC.

One of the responsibilities of this team is to conduct a behavioral threat assessment which includes identifying and reporting individuals who make threats of violence or exhibit harmful, threatening or violent behavior. Part of the assessment includes gathering and analyzing data to determine the level of risk the threat poses and the most appropriate intervention. It is important that charter school boards develop and or implement policies for addressing threatening and violent behavior. The TxSSC has developed a Threat Assessment Toolkit which includes model policies and procedures. This toolkit is available at: <https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/tam-toolkit/>.

School Safety and Security Committee

The law requires all Texas public schools to form a School Safety and Security Committee. The committee is tasked with approving the school's MEOPs and reviewing campus Safety and Security Audits. They must meet at least three times per year: once per academic semester and once in the summer. All meetings of this committee are subject to the Open Meetings

Act provisions. Members of the committee must include the board president and at least one other board member, in addition to local emergency management representatives, teachers, the superintendent, and parents.

School Safety Resource Officer

Texas's new safety law allows a charter school board to employ a School Resource Officer (SRO) in the same manner that a traditional public school would. It allows a charter school board to enter into a memorandum of understanding with a local law enforcement agency to assign a SRO to the school on a full or part-time basis. The charter school is required to pay a proportional cost of the SRO's salary, benefits and equipment. This officer provides a presence at the school and safety and drug education to students.

Traumatic Injury Response

Charter schools are responsible for developing procedures and protocols for employees and volunteers to follow in the case of a traumatic injury. These procedures and protocols were required to be implemented by January 1, 2020. As part of these procedures and protocols, charter schools must provide bleeding control stations, with bleeding control kits in easily accessible areas, and provide training on how to use these stations to secondary students. Charter schools must also provide training on how to use the bleeding stations to SROs, security personnel, and law enforcement working in the school. A list of training programs that have been approved by the TEA can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/coordinated-school-health/healthy-and-safe-school-environment-of-the-coordinated-school-health-model>.

Sexual Abuse Protocol

Charter school boards are required to adopt and implement policies addressing sexual abuse, sex trafficking and other

maltreatment of children. These policies should be included in the school's improvement plan and made available to students and parents in the school's handbook. Model sexual abuse policies can be found at: <https://www.tasb.org/services/legal-services/tasb-school-law-esource/students/freedom-from-bullying-and-harassment.aspx>.

Charter school board members are required to participate in at least 30 minutes of training on health and safety issues. We recommend that part of this training include sexual abuse training to raise their awareness of issues related to the sexual abuse, sex trafficking and other maltreatment of children. Charter school staff are also required to participate in training that helps identify factors that make students at risk for sexual abuse, early warning indicators, and procedures for helping students who are experiencing abuse. The TEA provides a list of organizations that offer sexual abuse training on its website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/child-abuse-prevention/child-abuse-prevention-an-overview>.

School Safety Facility Standards

Charter schools must ensure that their facilities meet state safety and security standards. It is important that charter schools have a communication infrastructure in place that will allow them to communicate with local emergency personnel in the case of an emergency. The TxSSC has helped develop the Texas Unified School Safety and Security Standards. These standards provide a set of criteria by which schools can develop and implement a comprehensive emergency management program. These standards are divided into four phases: mitigation/prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. You can download a set of these standards at: <https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/standards-toolkit/>.

There are also new safety standards that schools must adhere

to if they are building a new facility or upgrading a current one. Some of these facility standards include:

- Ensuring that all exterior and interior doors are numerically numbered and that the numbering sequence is clockwise;
- Making sure all primary entrances must have the ability to observe individuals before they enter the building, prohibit immediate access to students and a visitor check-in and check-out process;
- Installing security cameras at all primary and secondary entrances; and
- Making sure all exterior doors are locked during school hours.

School Emergency and Safety Drills

Texas law mandates that charter schools practice emergency evacuation and safety drills. These drills should be conducted each semester of the school year. The TEA cannot require more than eight drills for the entire school year but schools can make the decision to conduct additional drills if needed. Charter schools should incorporate the following emergency and safety drills:

- Secure lockout drill (one per school year);
- Secure lockdown drill (one per semester);
- Evacuation drill (one per school year);
- Shelter-in-place for hazmat drill (one per school year);
- Shelter-in-place for severe weather drill (one per school year);
- Hold drill (one per school year); and
- Fire evacuation drill (one per school year).

Additional information on school evacuation and safety drills can be found on TxSSC's website at: <https://txssc.txstate.edu/tools/tde-toolkit/drilling>.

Responding to a Global Pandemic

When dealing with a global pandemic, such as COVID-19, there are numerous safety concerns to consider. The TxSSC provides Texas educators with updates, training, data collection requirements and resources related to COVID-19. Access to COVID-19 resources are available through the TxSSC, at: <https://txssc.txstate.edu/featured/covid-19>.

As your board helps your school plan to reopen, there are several important areas to address including preparing the school facility, creating a social distancing plan, promoting staff and student sanitation and hygiene, monitoring staff and student health, providing enhanced learning supports and creating an emergency plan for outbreaks. The National Charter Schools Institute (NCSI) has developed a tool for helping you identify actions and resources for each of the six areas listed above. This tool is available at: <https://nationalcharterschools.org/resources/books-publications/> under "free resources."

Questions to Consider

- What policies and procedures does our board currently have in place to address school safety concerns? Are our policies and procedures in alignment with Texas's new school safety laws?
- Is our school's leadership currently accessing the information and resources available to them through the TxSSC?
- Did our board review our school's last safety audit? Were there any deficiencies found in the audit? If so, have those deficiencies been appropriately addressed?
- What are the biggest safety threats to our school? Which proactive steps should our board take to address these threats?



Part 9

Ensuring High Quality Distance Learning

“A prudent question is one-half of wisdom.”

— Francis Bacon

More than ever, students need flexibility in the manner and mode by which they learn. Technology plays an important role in providing students with options for where and how they learn. Access to on-line tools can help to ensure learning is not disrupted when schools are faced with health emergencies, natural disasters, threats of violence or other circumstances in which the school’s physical building must remain closed. Access to on-line learning environments also provides individual students with the ability to learn from home and at a time that is most convenient for them. This ability can be helpful to students who are trying to achieve competitive academic or athletic endeavors that require training time during the traditional school day. Access to educational resources through the use of technology is also beneficial to students who may be dealing with a health crisis or for students who want to take additional courses not provided by the school.

It is important that charter schools develop a plan that ensures technology resources are available to all students in an equitable manner and that your board adopt

policies that will help ensure a strong online learning environment. The State Board of Education has developed a [technology plan](https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/FinalCombinedLRPT2020%282%29.pdf) (<https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/FinalCombinedLRPT2020%282%29.pdf>) which provides recommendations for how schools can successfully implement the use of technology for student learning. The TEA's Educational Technology Unit has resources available for schools on its website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/technology-resources/educational-technology>.

Distance Learning Plans

There are multiple ways of delivering and facilitating learning when not in person. It is important that charter schools carefully think through all of the issues related to implementing a successful remote learning environment and develop a comprehensive plan that includes strategies for addressing each of the important areas of online learning. These are the critical components that charter schools should consider as they develop their remote learning plans.

Curriculum, Instruction and Evaluation

It is important for schools to consider how the school's mission will be supported and accomplished when learning is remote. The vision of what the school is trying to accomplish should not be compromised because learning has gone online. Schools will want to provide students with a daily schedule and have a plan for disseminating, maintaining and replenishing technology and learning materials. Developing a plan for identifying and providing interventions for students who are struggling with the content or technology is an important part of making sure all students are successful in a remote learning environment. It is also important for schools to develop an assessment plan that will ensure academic integrity.

Student Engagement/Behavior and Social-Emotional Support

Schools will want to consider how they will record and monitor student attendance. During the initial COVID-19 pandemic shutdown of schools in the spring of 2020, the state waived many of the student attendance requirements. When school buildings reopen, it is likely that the former attendance rules will apply. However, schools are advised to regularly check the Texas Education Agency website for updates. In unusual circumstances, when most, if not all, students are engaged in remote learning, such as the pandemic shutdown, it is important for schools to develop strategies for reaching out to students who are not actively engaging in the online learning environment or are having a hard time completing assignments. It will be important for the board to adopt safety policies for remote learning. These policies need to address student safety, including areas such as physical health and wellness, mental health and wellness, student safety and community building. The TEA has developed a list of internet safety resources at: <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/learning-support-and-programs/technology-resources/internet-safety>.

Staff Professional Development

One of the keys to ensuring a strong remote learning environment is making sure teachers have the supports, training, and resources they need to be successful. Schools should develop a plan for how teachers will participate in professional development, troubleshoot, provide feedback, receive support and ask for help. Boards will also want to consider how the school administrator and teachers will be evaluated in an online environment and make sure policies are in place for recognizing and dealing with indications of abuse and student safety.

Resiliency for Managing through Crisis

Just as in a traditional learning environment, there will be unforeseen challenges that will arise and need to be addressed. Schools will need to consider how they will handle situations when a teacher is unable to provide instruction because of a personal or health emergency. A plan for dealing with prolonged or wide-spread internet or system outages and protection against potential hackers should be considered. The school will want to make sure it has policies and procedures in place for ensuring cyber security, protecting student data and ensuring student privacy.

Special Populations

Remote learning environments can be especially challenging for students with unique needs, such as students receiving special education services, English learners and gifted and talented students. Charter schools must ensure that, in a remote learning environment, they are meeting all state and federal legal requirements including ADA, 504 and IDEA. English language learners will need supports to ensure they are able to understand content and are growing in their acquisition of the English language. Successfully communicating with parents who do not speak English as their primary language is a challenge that needs to be addressed. It is also important that gifted and talented students are not forgotten in a learning environment. Strategies for providing additional challenging content to students that are mastering the traditional content at a rapid speed must be developed.

Family Engagement

Strong family engagement is an important part of ensuring student success in a remote learning environment. Schools will want to think about strategies for how they will collect parent feedback and respond to their frustrations and concerns.

Schools will also want to make sure they have a plan for disseminating important information and changes that will impact student learning and a plan for keeping family contact information up-to-date.

Equitable Access to Technology

Accessing online learning can be challenging for some students. Certain factors in their home life and family dynamics can make learning through technology a challenge. For example, they may live in a home where high-speed internet access is not available, they may live in an unstable family situation where it is difficult to find the space and time where they can concentrate on learning or they may not have a supportive parent available to help them when they have questions. It is important that charter school boards adopt a technology plan that includes strategies for meeting the technology needs of every student, including those who have limited resources and supports at home. This plan should include strategies for providing families who have limited or no access to the personal devices and broadband internet resources that they need. Under Texas law, charter schools can use part of their instructional materials allotment to purchase technology equipment and technology-related services.

Schools will also want to think about how they handle scheduling and virtual class time. What accommodations can be made when a student is unable to engage in learning during normally scheduled hours because of situations outside of their control? Strategies for providing remote learning at flexible times might include recorded lessons or small groups with an aide for structured support and tutoring.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Texas has done a good job of reacting to the crisis and providing schools flexibility to offer at home learning to their students. There are myriad

resources the state provides to schools and parents at <https://texashomelearning.org/>. It is nothing less than incredible that Texans have developed, collected and disseminated all these resources in a few short weeks. Nonetheless, the state has not had the opportunity to develop a sound regulatory plan for supporting virtual learning at this time. With few exceptions, school funding in Texas is still based primarily on “seat time” and so Texas, along with all other states, recognizes that the remote learning environment for all students brings with it equity issues related to accessing technology. It is highly likely that the COVID-19 experience will result in regulatory changes that will make virtual education easier to implement.

Questions to Consider

- Has your board approved a distance learning plan for your charter school? Does the plan address the following critical areas?
 - Curriculum, Instruction and Evaluation
 - Student Engagement/Behavior and Social-Emotional Support
 - Staff Professional Development
 - Resiliency for Managing through Crisis
 - Special Populations
 - Family Engagement
- Does your charter school have the ability to provide technology devices and high-speed internet services to students who cannot access them on their own? Does money need to be set aside in the school’s budget to provide these services?
- How will your charter school ensure that all students have equitable access to online learning? How will the needs of special populations be addressed?

- Has your board adopted policies to ensure the safety of students and teachers in an online learning environment?



Part 10

Tips for Effective Governance and Continuous Improvement

“The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails.”

— William Arthur Ward

Habits of Highly Effective Boards

The ability of your board to govern well is vital to the success of your charter school. There are many factors that go into ensuring that your board is able to make good decisions and effectively lead. Boards that govern successfully have developed some important habits.

Effective boards have developed the habit of self-reflection and growth. They take the time to evaluate how effectively they are governing and continually look for ways to improve. Effective boards are on a constant quest to learn and grow. They take advantage of opportunities to read and participate in trainings that will increase their knowledge of important topics related to charter school governance.

They recognize that each individual member must act with integrity and put the needs of the school and its students before their own personal or political gain. They also recognize that although the board is comprised of multiple members,

it must act with one, unified voice. Board members may have different opinions and debate important issues prior to the board taking action. However, once a decision is made, the board must act in unison. The power of the board comes from collective voices moving in the same direction.

Effective boards clearly communicate their vision, goals, and direction to students, staff, parents, and the community. They understand that it is important to carefully listen to the concerns of their constituents and then clearly articulate how they plan to address problems. They are also committed to communicating the great things their school is doing within their community.

Finally, highly effective boards have the ability to govern and not manage. Charter school boards have been given the responsibility to govern by understanding and promoting the school's mission, developing and adopting policy, providing the school with sufficient resources, and hiring the school leader to manage the day-to-day operations of the school. All of these combine to help make that mission a reality. Effective boards understand they define what needs to be accomplished, but leave the details of how the work will be accomplished to school leadership. They do not get involved in the details of managing the school. Instead, they hold school leadership accountable for implementing the vision and policies that they have defined.

Important Board Member Values

Serving as a charter school board member is both a privilege and a responsibility. The decisions and actions your board take will have a lasting educational impact on the children that attend your charter school. Therefore, it is important that you fulfill your board member obligations with integrity and excellence. Below is a description of five personal standards that school board members should adopt.

Values and Ethical Behavior

Contained in this standard is the idea that board members put the needs of students first, and that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect. Board members should place a high value on public education and high academic standards for all the students attending the charter school. The decisions and actions taken by the board should be based on high ethical standards.

Texas law requires board members to file a disclosure statement when a board member has a potential financial interest in business the board is conducting. Financial disclosure statements provide the public with information on a board member's income, gifts, real estate holdings, investments, creditors, businesses owned and the major customers of those businesses. There are three key laws in Texas that require financial disclosure. Please note that Chapter 553, subchapter A of the Texas Government Code does not apply to charter school board members.

- **Chapter 171 of the Texas Local Government Code:** Requires disclosure when a board member has substantial financial interest in a business or real property;
- **Chapter 553, subchapter A of the Texas Government Code:** Requires disclosure when a board member has substantial financial interest in property to be purchased by the charter school; and
- **Chapter 176 of the Texas Local Government Code:** Requires disclosure when a board member has financial interest in a vendor contract that the board is considering.

Board members must govern with integrity and make decisions that are in the best interest of their school. They should disclose any real or perceived conflicts of interest and abstain from voting on matters in which they may have a vested political or financial interest.

Leadership

As a member of the board, it's important that you attend and actively engage in all board meetings. Board authority rests with the entire board and not individual members. It is important to do your homework and understand the important issues facing your school. Leadership is demonstrated by participating in discussion and dialogue and working to implement the best solutions possible for your school.

Communication

One of your most important jobs as a board member is to build strong relationships with your fellow board members, school staff and the community. Your board is able to more effectively govern when relationships of trust and respect are fostered. Good communication includes carefully listening to issues and concerns and then responding with honesty and civility. It also includes maintaining confidentiality when appropriate.

Professional Development

It is important that you continue to grow and learn in your school member role. You will want to read articles, attend conferences or participate in training that will expand your knowledge base and help you in your role. In Texas, new charter school board members are required to participate in 12 hours of training covering topics such as school law, school finance, health and safety, public accountability, the Open Meetings Act and the Public Records Act. After the first year, board members are required to participate in an additional six hours of training each year. Details on required board member training can be found on the TEA's website at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/texas-schools-charter-schools/charter-schools-governance>.

Your authorizer can be a great resource in recommending literature, trainings and conferences that could be beneficial

to your professional growth as a board member. You will want to work with your school leader to provide trainings regarding specific elements of the school's design or educational program terms. Information about how to interpret assessment results and accountability ratings is also critical to understanding student academic performance.

Accountability

As a board member, you have the responsibility to wisely steward your school's resources. You should never use your position for personal or partisan gain. You should hold yourself to the same level of accountability that you expect from your school leadership and staff. This means governing with transparency and complying with board policies, procedures and the law. It also means abstaining from making decisions in which you have a vested personal or financial interest. It is important that you govern with integrity and avoid conflicts of interest. Under Texas law, school board members who have a personal or professional relationship with a vendor or other business that will be providing services to the school are required to file a [Conflict of Interest Statement \(CIS\)](#) with the charter school's records administrator, and the CIS statement is to be posted on the school's website.

Building Board Capacity

The ability of your board to govern passionately and effectively is essential to the success of your charter school. The first step in building your board's capacity is recruiting high quality board members. High quality board members will possess both the passion that aligns with the mission and vision of your school and important skills related to school governance. Serving as a board member is hard work, but if you are excited and passionate about the school's vision and what it wants to accomplish, serving will be a joy and not a burden.

A best practice for boards is to recruit members who have a specific skill or expertise that the board needs. Highly effective boards are made up of individuals that have a variety of expertise in areas such as education, fundraising, finance, law, human resources, non-profit management and facilities acquisition. The greater the knowledge and varied experience of your board members, the easier it will be to make sound decisions for your school. When looking for members to serve on your board, it is important that you are mindful of your school's community and the students it serves. Boards should be diverse and reflective of the community they represent.

Once you have identified both passionate and skilled individuals that are willing to serve, you can build out committees.

Committees develop a pipeline of qualified individuals to keep your board balanced and strong over time, while allowing you to vet potential board members.

Boards are also strengthened when new board members are properly trained in their role. It is beneficial to ensure that new members participate in some sort of orientation or training program. A new member orientation program should introduce board members to important documents and information. A list of the types of documents and information you will want to make sure your new board member can find include:

- A list of important contacts;
- Essential information on how the board conducts its business;
- Articles of incorporation and bylaws;
- A copy of Texas's charter school law;
- A copy of your school's charter contract;
- Documents explaining your school's financial status;
- A copy of any educational service management agreements;

- Previous board meeting minutes; and
- A copy of the board's policy manual.

In addition, Texas's law requires that new school board members participate in at least 12 hours of training during their first year and six hours every year after. Part of this training must include training on the Open Public Meetings Act and Public Records Act. Information on these training requirements and training resources can be found at: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/school-boards/school-board-member-training>.

Board Self-Evaluation

Wise boards take the time to regularly evaluate their own performance. They want to understand the areas they are effectively governing and the areas in which they still need to improve. The most effective way to create accountability is to model the way. Therefore, it's important that the board evaluate its own performance on a regular basis. When you set aside time to evaluate your performance, some of the areas you will want to review include your success in implementing the mission and goals found in your charter contract, your process for strategic planning and communication and your ability to govern effectively. The New York City Charter School Center has developed a [board assessment tool \(https://www.nyccharterschools.org/resources/board-assessment-tool\)](https://www.nyccharterschools.org/resources/board-assessment-tool) to assist school boards with the practice of self-evaluation.

Questions to Consider

- Do the bylaws or board policies require a board orientation process? How many of your board members received an orientation?
- Is there any additional information or topics that need to be included in the board orientation process? Do all new board members receive necessary information and documents such as:
 - Board member contact list and job descriptions;
 - Articles of incorporation and bylaws;
 - Charter contract;
 - Educational services management agreements;
 - School academic performance data;
 - Previous board meeting minutes;
 - Most recent financial statements and audit; and
 - Board policy manual
- Does our board have a development plan in place to improve its governance of the school?
- Does our board regularly allocate specific time on the agenda to developing its skills?
- Does our board read and discuss books on governance?
- Has our board ever held a retreat to work on strengthening its capacity to govern?
- Has our board ever conducted a formative evaluation of its performance? If so, what did the board do differently as a result of what it learned?

Appendix List of Resources

National Association of Charter School Authorizers: <https://www.qualitycharters.org/>

National Charter Schools Institute: <https://nationalcharterschools.org/>

Office of the Texas Attorney General: <https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov>

SchoolSafety.Gov: <https://www.schoolsafety.gov>

Texas Association of School Boards: <https://www.tasb.org/home.aspx>

Texas Constitution and Statutes: <https://statutes.capitol.texas.gov/Index.aspx>

Texas Education Agency: <https://tea.texas.gov>

Texas Education Agency Academic Accountability System: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/accountability/academic-accountability/a-f-resources>

Texas Education Agency Accountability Ratings: <https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/account/>

Texas Education Agency Charter School Performance Framework: http://castro.tea.state.tx.us/charter_apps/production/performance.html

Texas Education Agency School Safety: <https://tea.texas.gov/texas-schools/health-safety-discipline/school-safety>

Texas Education Agency STAAR Resources: <https://tea.texas.gov/student-assessment/testing/taar/taar-resources>

Texas School Safety Center: <https://txssc.txstate.edu>

Texas State Board of Education: <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/leadership/state-board-of-education>

Texas Public Charter Schools Association: <https://txcharterschools.org>

United States Department of Education: <https://www.ed.gov/>

