

# Sounding Board

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## Ongoing Training for Charter School Board Members

An earlier issue of ACNW's Sounding Board series discussed the topic of onboarding new charter school board members. That discussion included the fact that even after the successful onboarding of new board members, there is a legal obligation for all board members, experienced as well as new board members, to participate in annual ongoing board training during the time they serve as members of the board.

### The Importance of Ongoing Charter School Board Member Training:

**Onboarding is basically a process through which new board members acquire very basic information about charter school law, finance, and employment as they start their board service.** These initial board training topics, required under MN §124E, are included as part of the previously mentioned onboarding process, but these alone cannot prepare board members for the specific work of their own school board's governance. The reason for this is that while this initial training is important, helpful, and meets the statutory requirements of initial board training, the training is often not school or site specific and attendees at these training sessions generally

represent a number of charter schools, rather than just the board members of a single school. While the mandated training provides new board members with up to date information of a general nature, it does not address the uniqueness of each charter school community, its culture, past practices, norms and values.... important characteristics. Effective board members need to understand the complexities of the school, the opportunities before the school, the academic, enrollment, legal, and other challenges the school may be facing—the school's history and "track record," for example.

# Planning for Ongoing Board Member Training

Here are some questions that often arise in planning for ongoing board member training:

- 1. What topics are recommended for ongoing board training?**
- 2. Who decides what topics are presented or studied during ongoing board training?**
- 3. When does board training take place?**
- 4. Where does board training take place?**
- 5. Who presents the training materials?**
- 6. Does the training have to take place with the board as a group or can individual board members participate individually without the entire board participating?**
- 7. Who pays for the training?**



Below are some suggestions that might provide useful information in response to the above questions:

## **1. What topics are recommended for ongoing board training?**

Topics for ongoing charter school board members are not specified in MN §124E which means the determination of them is left up to each individual charter school board. Ideally, the ongoing training will supplement prior training (e.g. charter school finance, law, and employment) since the initial training is often just an introduction to the topics and there is much more for board members to know and understand about them than can be presented in the initial training.

In addition to additional training on the original topics noted above, boards often train on the following, although this list should not be considered all-inclusive since it is important that boards receive training on topics they feel will enhance and improve their governance and leadership activities.

- Robert's Rules of Order or other parliamentary procedures
- Special Education and other special student populations (e.g. ELL, 504, etc.)
- Facility and Affiliated Building Company processes, procedures, and limitations
- The specific and unique roles of the school leader and the school board
- Education testing and accountability in Minnesota
- School leader job description, hiring, and evaluation
- Obligations and limitations contained in MN Charter School §124E
- Minnesota's Open Meeting Law, MN §13D
- Others as determined by the charter school board itself

## **2. Who decides what topics are presented or studied during ongoing board training?**

Generally, the board as a group has an annual discussion during which it determines the topics for its ongoing training for the upcoming school year. However, some delegate this task to a board committee that makes recommendations for the entire board to consider and approve.

## **3. When does board training take place?**

Board training can occur at any time. The most usual times are during school board meetings themselves, at separately scheduled training meetings or retreats, or individual board members can participate in approved training at a time convenient to their schedules. However, if board members participate in training individually, the board should consider including time on the agenda for members to share their learning with the full board in order to reflect on how individual learning can impact the work of the board as a whole.

## **4. Where does board training take place?**

Board training can occur at any location the board wishes; however, it is important that if the board schedules a separate training time and place other than at its regularly scheduled school board meetings, care must be taken to follow the requirements in MN §13D (Open Meeting Law) to post the date, time, and location of the training since, if a quorum will be present for the training, those are required.

## **5. Who presents the training materials?**

There are no required qualifications for charter school board trainers; however, they generally are either charter school professional organizations, such as the Minnesota Charter School Association (MACS), or people with significant expertise, knowledge, and experience with the topic of the charter school board training. For example, finance training is most often provided by the external consultant the board uses for its financial work. For other topics, there are individuals, including authorizers, attorneys, experienced senior educational leaders, and others who can provide effective training. At times, too, board members or the school's leader has a particular expertise and they provide the training for the board on specific topics with which they are experienced. In the case of ACNW authorized schools, the annual leaders retreat can be an excellent source for training.

In addition, the board can also consider independent studies and discussions as sources of ongoing training, such as book study, viewing webinars, reading relevant articles, and then discussing them as a group during a board meeting.

## **6. Does the training have to take place with the board as a group or can individual board members participate individually without the entire board participating?**

Charter school board training can be conducted either with the full board, with smaller groups of the board (e.g. board committees), or with individual board members. The topics, scheduling, means of delivery, presenters, and participants are all under the purview of the board with consideration given to individual board member's training needs as well as the training needs of the board as a group.

## **7. Who pays for the training?**

The cost of board training is most often borne by the school board and an estimate of the funds that may be required in any given year is often set aside as an expenditure item in the school's annual budget that is approved prior to the beginning of the new fiscal year. However, some training may have no cost to it and some board members may prefer to pay for their own training as a donation to the school.

## **8. Finally, how much annual ongoing training is required of each school board and each school board member?**

MN §124E is silent on these questions so it is up to each board to identify its training needs annually, keeping "good faith" with the intent of MN §124E which is to have well-trained charter school boards. Some suggest, at a minimum, that to keep "good faith" with the intent of the statute that school boards and their members should participate in at least six hours of training annually and this is based on the six-hour initial training requirement for new school board members. Remember though that the amount of training can and should be based on the board and its individual members' needs to become as effective as they can as a board and as a board member; and not on any subjective predetermined amount of time.



# A Suggestion: Develop and Use a Board Meeting Training Calendar

A board meeting training calendar can be very helpful, as used by some ACNW authorized schools to map out and specify, by month, the full board's ongoing training topics and activities for the year. Boards do this in the summer prior to the school year beginning. It is then incumbent on everyone, the board chair and all board members, to ensure that the board training plan is implemented with fidelity.

While board training does not need to occur at school board meetings, those times are available to ensure that all or most board members meet their required

annual ongoing training requirement, and to do so by interacting with their fellow board members about the training topic and how it affects their school. Finally, take responsibility to ensure that board training planning and the training activities themselves are a high priority for your board, rather than simply a chore to be completed for someone else's benefit. The training for you and your fellow board members is intended to provide you with information that will allow everyone on the board, and the board as a whole, to become the best possible stewards of the school's legacy of success.

