

An Inside Look: Understanding Governing Boards of Texas Public Charter Schools

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SUMMARY

The Role of Public Charter School Boards of Directors

About **1,300 experienced professionals** serve on the governing boards of Texas public charter schools, volunteering their time and talent so that students are well-positioned to succeed. Their experience enriches the way that public charter schools – designed to be creative and flexible – operate each day.

Public charter school boards of directors in Texas oversee school operations for over **365,000 students** and manage over **\$3 billion** in taxpayer revenue across the state every year. This role requires an understanding of not only school operations, but school finance and governance laws and regulations in order to meet the high standards for academic and financial accountability set by the Texas State Legislature, the Texas Commissioner of Education, and the federal government.

“As a charter school board member, I get to see the bigger picture and help guide the organization towards our shared vision. As volunteers, we are invested in the school and its focus on developing relationships with students, families, teachers and staff. Seeing decisions we made at the board level come to life as they are implemented at the school and classroom levels, things that might be considered innovative in another school, but at Legacy are just ‘the way we do things’ is what makes this work so rewarding.”

KATRINA MARTINEZ, Board Member,
Legacy Preparatory Charter Academy

Public Charter School Boards are Accountable to Taxpayers

Charter schools are public schools designed to put the needs of students first and they face tough accountability standards to ensure they deliver on that promise. The nonprofit volunteer board governance system in Texas is one reason why Texas public charter schools educate 6% of the state’s public schools students, but represent 67% of the state’s top-rated school districts. In fact in Texas, the accountability standards are among the strictest in the nation.

- Texas has strict standards for those who may serve on a public charter school board. These standards are far stricter than those governing who may serve on an ISD board.
- Texas public charter school board members receive no compensation for their service and cannot have a financial stake in a management company.
- Texas public charter school boards are held just as accountable, and must be just as transparent, as those in traditional public school districts. As 501(c)3 nonprofit organizations, public charter schools and their boards must also comply with additional IRS accountability guidelines.
- Texas public charter school board members receive training to ensure they understand state law.
- Texas public charter school boards are separate from the boards of management organizations.
- Texas public charter school board members who breach their duty or commit a crime can be removed with relative ease, whereas ISDs and the State have virtually no authority or ability to remove ISD trustees who have breached their duty.
- Texas public charter school board members are directly accountable to the TEA and Attorney General and can be held individually and personally liable for breach of duty. There is no similar mechanism for ISD trustees.

Public Charter Schools vs. Traditional Districts

On this chart, the inner circle shows what accountability standards apply to both public charter schools and ISDs. The next two circles show areas where similar measures apply, but the rules for charters are stricter. Finally, the outer circle shows what accountability measures are totally unique to charter schools.

