



EXCELLENCE AT THE TOP

Charter School boards get business and community leaders to lend a hand

Imagine public schools that are hotbeds of creativity. Places where the best and brightest pool their collective knowledge and energy—where technology professionals, business entrepreneurs, and academics inspire students to develop their minds and impact their communities.

This is no alternate universe; it's how charter schools work. One key reason is that charter schools have recruited, for their governing boards, talented visionaries who want to infuse their energy and expertise into public education.

Fiore Landino is a typical example. As head of recruiting for Fore Systems (later Marconi), Landino had spent years bemoaning the quality of education he saw in job seekers. So Rick Wertheimer, a cofounder of Pittsburgh's City Charter High School, invited him to make a difference by joining City Charter's board.

"Rick called me and said, 'Do you want to complain about it or be part of the solution?'" Landino recalls. Since its founding in 2002 City Charter has garnered several national awards, in part thanks to the diverse, professionally informed, and productive contributions of its board members.

Landino says the nature of charter schools allows them to attract talented, energetic board members who might not be inclined to run for election to a local school board. Charter schools are autonomous public schools, run by their own independent boards rather than by an elected board. Charter board members don't have to worry about elections, so they can devote their expertise—in areas like law, business, and human resources—to shaping the school's policies and plans. "We're all there because we have a certain skill set, and

we're there in an altruistic way," Landino says.

Peggy Fayfich, a business consultant with 35 years of experience in retail, human resources, and financial services, would never have campaigned for a school board seat, but she jumped at the chance to join the board of Northside Urban Pathways Charter School five years ago.

Fayfich has helped the board craft a school "scorecard" of performance goals against which administrators, teachers and students are measured. She pushed for establishment of the scorecard because, she says, "for any organization, what gets measured gets accomplished."

Jocelyn Horner, a North Side native, is (at age 25) the youngest Manchester Academic Charter School board member and another fascinating example of the talent that charter schools are tapping. With a master's degree from the London School of Economics and experience as a grant administrator at the Children's Museum, Horner has helped the school craft its strategic plan. She says she has found community service in a public school setting particularly compelling and rewarding: "There's a level of responsibility that goes beyond governance for an organization. You're talking about children's lives. I feel the impact of it. I feel I'm helping children."

Indeed, everyone who helps to make it possible for charter schools to unleash innovation and energy in Pennsylvania public education is helping children!

This series is brought to you by a consortium of Allegheny County charter schools.



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