Introduction

Nationally, New Orleans’ public education system has become known for its unique governance model that is comprised almost exclusively of charter schools, rather than schools run directly by the local Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB — The OPSB has recently rebranded themselves as NOLA Public Schools. For the purpose of reference, however, we refer to them as OPSB in this report). One key feature is that in addition to the OPSB, schools also have charter boards that help with everyday operations and management. Each charter school or Charter Management Organization (an organization which operates multiple charter schools and is abbreviated as CMO hereafter) must have a board. Unlike the seven members of the OPSB, the members of charter boards are not publicly elected. Instead, some are chosen initially by the school leader(s), parents, or other founding members when the school opens, and then, subsequent members are chosen by the existing board members.

In researching and chronicling New Orleans’ public education system, we have learned that this added layer of oversight and governance can lead to public confusion around the duties and responsibilities of the OPSB compared to charter boards.

This report aims to clarify some of those responsibilities and provide information on the role of charter boards to families and other stakeholders in the city’s public education system. It does not intend to serve as a comprehensive review of state law and OPSB policy on charter boards. Rather, it focuses mainly on common questions and the most relevant issues for parents, guardians, and families.

The report includes:

• A breakdown of charter boards’ responsibilities.
• Recommendations on how to help the public better understand charter boards.
• A descriptive overview of charter board members.
• A Q&A addressing frequent questions about charter boards.

We also encourage you to submit any questions you might have about charter boards to us at CowenInfo@tulane.edu and we’ll do our best to answer them.

There are currently... 38 charter boards playing a role in the governance of OPSB schools.

What do charter boards do?

Perhaps the most defining feature of New Orleans’ charter-based model of K-12 public education is the school-level autonomy granted to school leaders, educators, and charter operators. In most traditional, district-run public education models, a central staff of administrators makes decisions for all schools in the district (or specific geographic area), including but not limited to staffing, finances, operations, and curriculum.

In New Orleans, those decisions are made at the school or CMO level. Charter boards are meant to provide oversight and guidance to schools and CMOs as they make these decisions. However, this can also lead to confusion, as it means schools are overseen both by charter boards and the elected members of the OPSB. Charter boards have different responsibilities than the school board, Superintendent, or staff of the OPSB. The chart below aims to clarify some of the responsibilities of charter boards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charter Boards DO...</th>
<th>Charter Boards DON’T...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Hire and evaluate charter school or CMO leaders based on progress towards goals.</td>
<td>• Authorize or approve the opening of new charter schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Provide oversight of school or CMO finances – this includes being able to borrow money and incur debt on behalf of the school or CMO.</td>
<td>• Decide which schools operate in Orleans Parish.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure annual audits of school or CMO finances are conducted and submitted accurately.</td>
<td>• Close low-performing schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Create and edit by-laws to govern the board, which:</td>
<td>• Set overall policies that all charter schools in Orleans Parish must abide by (for example: accountability measures and transportation regulations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set the term lengths of their own board members.</td>
<td>• Typically hire and fire school staff, from teachers to administrators, though there is nothing in state law or local policy to prevent boards from doing so if they so choose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Set the number of members of the charter board.</td>
<td>• Typically provide feedback or guidance on the education curriculum adopted or used by the school or CMO, though there is nothing in state law or local policy to prevent boards from doing so if they so choose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Determine the process for the selection of board members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ensure the board complies with relevant state and local laws regarding public transparency, charter board membership (such as having a parent representative on the board), frequency of meetings, and posting of agendas in advance of meetings and minutes after meetings have occurred.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Have a question or concern?

School Leadership

- ... school work or curriculum?
- ... teachers or school staff?
- ... bus route or transportation?
- ... classmates or other students?
- ... extra-curricular activities?
- ... calendar or school schedule?
- ... discipline policy?
- ... principal or school leadership performance?
- ... how the school spends its money?*
- ... the details of the school’s charter contract?

OPSBN

- ... school openings and closures?
- ... facilities or buildings?
- ... how the school is held accountable?
- ... enrollment or how OneApp works?
- ... how charter boards are held accountable?
- ... how school performance scores are calculated?

LDOE

* Note: School leaders also have significant say over allocation of school funds, but charter boards are responsible for ensuring annual audits are conducted.
### Charter Boards of OPSB Schools for 2019-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bricolage Academy</td>
<td>Choice Foundation, Inc.</td>
<td>The Citizens’ Committee for Education</td>
<td>Collegiate Academies</td>
<td>Community Leaders Advocating Student Success, Inc</td>
<td>The Council for Quality Education</td>
<td>Crescent City Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dryades YMCA</td>
<td>Educators for Quality Alternatives</td>
<td>The Einstein Group, Inc.</td>
<td>ENCORE Learning</td>
<td>Elan Academy, Inc.</td>
<td>Foundation Preparatory, Inc.</td>
<td>FirstLine Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>French and Montessori Education, Inc.</td>
<td>Friends of King Schools</td>
<td>Hynes Charter School Corp.</td>
<td>IDEA Public Schools New Orleans</td>
<td>InspireNOLA Charter Schools</td>
<td>InspireNOLA Charter Schools</td>
<td>InspireNOLA Charter Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legacy of Excellence, Inc.</td>
<td>Morris Jeff Community School</td>
<td>New Beginnings Schools Foundation</td>
<td>New Orleans College Prep</td>
<td>ReNEW-Reinventing Education Schools</td>
<td>ReNEW-Reinventing Education Schools</td>
<td>ReNEW-Reinventing Education Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benjamin Franklin Elementary School</td>
<td>Morris Jeff Community School</td>
<td>JFK High School at Lake Area Pierre A. Capkau Charter School</td>
<td>Lawrence D. Crocker College Prep, Walter L. Cohen College Prep</td>
<td>ReNEW Accelerated H.S., ReNEW D. T. Aaron Academy, ReNEW Schaumburg Elem, ReNEW SciTech Academy</td>
<td>ReNEW Accelerated H.S., ReNEW D. T. Aaron Academy, ReNEW Schaumburg Elem, ReNEW SciTech Academy</td>
<td>Rooted School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living School Charter</td>
<td>Living School Charter</td>
<td>Morris Jeff Community School</td>
<td>New Beginnings Schools Foundation</td>
<td>New Orleans College Prep</td>
<td>ReNEW-Reinventing Education Schools</td>
<td>Rooted School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: This chart only shows schools authorized and overseen by the OPSB. It does not include schools that operate in Orleans Parish that are overseen by BESE or the state legislature, or those that are directly run by the OPSB.
**Q&A on charter boards**

**What is the difference between the Orleans Parish School Board (OPSB) and the board of an individual charter school or Charter Management Organization (CMO)?**

In New Orleans and Louisiana, charter schools have two levels of oversight – a charter board that directly oversees the leadership, administration, operations, and financing of the school, and an authorizer that approves the school’s initial application to open and then ensures the school remains in compliance with local and state requirements. For most charter schools in Orleans Parish, the OPSB is the authorizer, meaning that the OPSB has the power to give a non-profit organization its charter to open and operate a school. This means a charter board can exist even if it does not have a school that has been approved to open. State and local law require all charters to have boards that oversee the school and its leadership directly.

**Are charter school board members elected by the public?**

No. While the OPSB has seven publicly elected members, individual charter school boards are not publicly elected. The OPSB members are elected by the public based on geographic districts in the city. The State Board of Education (BESE) is also composed of democratically elected members. However, charter board members are not elected by the public – they are selected or elected based on the criteria for membership set down in their charter board by-laws. Each school can set its own terms for board membership and decide whether an election by the other board members is necessary when adding new members.

**How many members do charter boards have?**

It depends on the school. OPSB policy requires charter boards to have at least seven members, but there is no limit on the number of members boards can have, unless dictated by the school or charter management organization. Generally, schools have between seven and 15 members on their boards.

**Are board members selected based on certain criteria?**

Yes, but policies about the criteria of board demographics are quite broad. OPSB policy states that a charter school’s “board members shall represent a diverse set of professional skills and practical work experience in areas such as education, public/nonprofit and/or for-profit administration or operations, community development, finance, and law.” Yet, there is no further requirement for how many people possessing these skills must sit on each board or what determines these qualifications. Additionally, beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, according to LA R.S. 17:3991(A)(iv), most charters in New Orleans will also be required to have a board that is “representative of the community in which the charter school is located by race and gender to ensure diversity.”

**Are there parents or guardians on charter boards?**

Yes. Both OPSB policy and state law require that at least one member of a board is a parent or guardian representative. However, in the cases of charter boards for CMOs with multiple schools, this representative only must be a parent or legal guardian of any student in the same CMO, not necessarily a particular school. Additionally, the parent representative role can be filled by a parent or guardian of a former student or graduate.

**Do all charter board members have to live in New Orleans?**

No. OPSB policy and state law require that at least 60% of a board’s members must reside in Orleans Parish.

**What other requirements must board members follow?**

To join a board, candidates must undergo a criminal background check. They must also file a financial statement in compliance with state law within 90 days of becoming a member of a board. Only one member of a family can serve on the same board, and board members must avoid and disclose any potential conflicts of interest.

**What conflicts of interest must board members be sure to avoid?**

Board members must comply with the Louisiana Code of Governmental Ethics. This is an extensive code of conduct that attempts to ensure that no public official, or a member of his/her immediate family, benefits financially or in another material way from the official’s public service.

**Are board members paid by the school?**

No. OPSB policy forbids board members from receiving any compensation except for reimbursements incurred while completing their “duties” for the board. The policy does not define what expenses qualify for reimbursement.

**Is anyone prohibited from being a board member?**

Yes. OPSB policy prohibits OPSB employees, employees of the school or CMO, and current elected officials, as well as elected officials who have left office within the past year, from serving as charter school board members.

**Do board members have set terms?**

That is up to the school’s individual charter. OPSB policy and state law do not specify the length of individual board terms or how many terms a member can serve.

**How frequently must boards meet?**

There are no requirements for the frequency of meetings. It is up to the individual boards to decide how often they meet. However, charter boards must comply with all state sunshine laws for public meetings. That includes the posting of agendas 24 hours in advance of a meeting and the posting of meeting minutes in a reasonable amount of time (the OPSB recommends within 10 days) after the meeting. The OPSB tracks when every board meets and attends at least one meeting each year to ensure compliance with these sunshine law provisions.

Charter Board Members

According to new OPSB policy, charter boards in New Orleans must publicly list their members on their website. Some, but not all, schools and CMOs list the professions of their members. Using this as a starting point, at the end of 2018, we put together a descriptive summary of charter board members in the city, including gender and industry when available. This is a point in time summary of board membership and does not reflect board membership for schools in 2019-2020. We are not currently able to provide any information on the race, age, or other demographic characteristics of board members as this data is not publicly available in an aggregated or centralized way. Please see the methodology for a detailed explanation of our approach.

Who sits on charter boards?

We have very little information on charter board members, apart from what is voluntarily disclosed on schools’ websites. Here’s what we do know.

1. They are often overseen by men.

There are more men than women on charter boards but the overall difference isn’t great. However, women are starkly underrepresented among board presidents and chairs.

- Total board population (N = 429): 54.5% men, 45.5% women
- Board leaders (N = 45): 80.0% men, 20.0% women

2. Board members have a range of professional backgrounds, with law and finance being the most common.

- Legal: 13.9%
- Finance: 21.2%
- K-12: 5.5%
- Higher Ed: 11.8%
- Business: 5.7%
- Non-profit: 1.3%
- Sciences / Health: 11.8%
- Arts: 0.6%
- Government: 0.6%
- Real Estate: 1.1%
- Insurance: 0.6%
- Engineering: 0.6%
- PR / Marketing: 1.1%
- Social Work: 0.6%
- Architecture: 0.6%
- IT: 0.6%

3. Existing data on the racial composition of board members is anecdotal and incomplete.

There is no centralized data on the racial composition of charter school boards in New Orleans, nor is that information made publicly available on schools’ websites. While this information is important, it is not included in this report because we were unable to compile or obtain valid data.

Recommendations

The availability of public information about charter board members in the city has improved over the past two years. Working with the OPSB, school websites are now listing the names of board members and, in some cases, greater details about the backgrounds of their members.

However, there is no single centralized website or location for a parent or member of the public to find board information on any school he/she is interested in. Therefore, in an effort to make it easier for the public to find information on charter board members, we recommend a central website or a dedicated section of the site for all schools overseen by the OPSB, featuring:

- an up-to-date calendar of all board meetings for every charter board in the city;
- a downloadable list of the by-laws for every charter board in the city;
- a listing of the members of every charter board in the city that includes board members’ occupation, employer, length of time on the board, place of residency, whether they are a parental representative, and other relevant information;
- the contact information the chair of every board.

State law and local policy do not currently require schools to make contact information or more detailed information about the identities of charter board members publicly available, but we believe doing so would help to improve public understanding of who sits on charter boards in the city, as well as the ability of the parents, family members, and the public to interact with charter board members.
Methodology

There is no comprehensive, centralized dataset on New Orleans charter board members. All data in this report was gathered manually from school and CMO websites in November and December of 2018 and reviewed by OPSB staff. It is likely that board membership since that time has changed.

During our review, we found that of the 38 charter boards in the city overseen by the OSPB, as well as the additional school boards overseen by BESE and the state legislature, all but two had published the names of board members on their sites. The gender of board members was gathered from biographies using self-reported gender pronouns. When provided, employment information was gathered. Among boards with published information about their members, 28 provided employment information and/or biographies on their board members. As a result, of the 429 charter board members in New Orleans, we were able to gather employment information for 250. Again, charter boards are not legally required to make employment information about their members publicly available.