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Charter School Boards in the Nation's Capital

By Juliet Squire and Allison Crean Davis

Foreword by Amber M. Northern
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By Amber M. Northern and Michael J. Petrilli

It's often said that adding the word "charter" to a school's name doesn't prove that it is better or even different from district schools in the vicinity. The variation in quality within sectors is much larger than between them. What matters most for student learning and other important education outcomes is what happens inside the classroom—and any given curriculum, instructional strategy, or innovation could as easily be found in many a traditional public school as in a chartered one.

All that is true. Yet there is one important distinction between charter schools and those run by districts: their governance. Districts are almost everywhere overseen by elected school boards and operated as governmental agencies, while charter schools (like other nonprofit entities) are independently operated and overseen by a self-appointed, self-perpetuating board.

Charter opponents regularly make much of this difference, playing up the fact that charter boards are "private" entities rather than democratically controlled ones. Never mind that charter boards are accountable to public entities—the schools' authorizers—or that they must demonstrate key public outcomes (student learning, graduation, and so forth) and that they're open to the public (no picking and choosing of students allowed and no tuition charged).

Charter supporters sometimes find it difficult to counter the "lack of democracy" charge because their schools are, in fact, governed more like nonprofits than like municipal agencies with elected boards (just like many cherished organizations, including our universities and cultural institutions). But what if this turns out to be an asset rather than a liability? What if the boards that run charter schools are better run and more committed to academic excellence?

To determine whether that might be so, we went in search of empirical information on charter boards. Who serves on them? What are their qualifications and backgrounds? How do they spend their time, view their role, and potentially influence school quality?

These are important questions, to be sure, yet we found almost no information. Search for yourself. Aside from a handful of "best-practice" documents based on experience, anecdote, and conventional wisdom, there's a huge void in the research literature when it comes to board governance in schools of choice.¹ Along with special education, it is among the most neglected domains of education research.

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To be fair, there's not a whole lot more on elected school boards. We tried to help rectify that problem with *School Boards Circa 2010: Governance in the Accountability Era*, a report on a survey of district board members that we undertook in partnership with the National School Boards Association and Iowa School Boards Foundation. Our friend Rick Hess, director of education policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, penned that analysis; he rightly noted then that "little empirical research on national board practices has been conducted since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001." Sadly, that's still largely the case.

That 2010 survey did, however, supply a peek at the characteristics and perceptions of school board members, how they approach their work, and the training they receive, among other topics.

A few years later (in 2014), we asked Arnold Schober and Michael Hartney (of Lawrence University and Lake Forest College, respectively) to match the 2010 school-board results with demographic and student-achievement data for those same districts. Their key (and, one might say, entirely appropriate) finding, as set forth in *Does School Board Leadership Matter?*: districts that are more academically successful have board members who assign high priority to improving student learning.

That got us wondering whether charter school boards matter too. Do the types of individuals who serve, the views they hold, and the practices they adopt have any bearing on school quality?

To help answer this critical question, we turned to Bellwether Education Partners, a smart ed-policy research shop led by über-reformer Andy Rotherham. We were fortunate to land two of Bellwether's savviest analysts to lead the study: Juliet Squire and Allison Crean Davis, both of whom serve on charter school boards.

Ultimately, we and our Bellwether colleagues chose Washington, D.C., as a case study. As explained more fully in the report, the nation's capital is a good place to study charter board governance, as it operates under a single set of laws and regulations, a single authorizer, and a uniform set of school-quality metrics. Further, its scale (sixty-two boards overseeing 112 campuses) provides a number sufficient for comparisons. What's more, not only do D.C. charters answer to a single authorizer, but it is an authorizer that values transparency; the accountability framework designed by the D.C. Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) can be readily understood and leveraged for additional analyses.

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That said, the D.C. charter sector is not typical of much else. It is relatively large—enrolling nearly half of the city's public school students—and well regarded for its quality. Stanford University's CREDO has found that students in D.C. charters gained an extra 101 days in math and an extra seventy-two days in reading over the course of a year, as compared to their counterparts in the D.C. Public Schools (DCPS)—this even as DCPS is itself rapidly improving. A mature and high-performing charter sector, such as we find in the District of Columbia, also surely differs in other ways, both observable and not, from those that are less established and perhaps more fragile. We're mindful too that all charter schools in D.C. are urban and that suburban and rural charter schools—of which the country has thousands—are apt to have fundamental differences.

So we cannot and do not claim that our findings are generalizable beyond the nation's capital. Yet they paint a detailed and revealing portrait of what is occurring there—and that may be, could be, or should be occurring elsewhere. Our survey response rate was strong (over 50 percent), and although this work is descriptive (not causal), it reveals some tantalizing differences between board members of higher- and lower-performing schools, as well as a number of notable similarities—all of which raise questions and hypotheses worth exploring elsewhere.

You'll find much more in the executive summary and full report that follow. But here are five observations that struck us hard. The first two reflect commonalities across both of the board sectors.

1. Board membership provides a route by which the “best and the brightest” of the community have an opportunity to serve.

We see in these data a picture of board members who are highly educated, successful, selfless, and civic-minded and who care enough about the education of children other than their own to devote themselves to trying to make schools better. (Indeed, the social capital on these boards would make James Coleman smile.) Earlier research found that some of these same characteristics are shared by many district board members as well. (Yet keep in mind these studies are vastly different in scope and sample.)

In both sectors, board members tend to be academically accomplished. In large school districts, 85 percent of board members hold a bachelor's degree and more than half have an advanced degree. In the D.C. charter sector, only 4 percent of board members have not graduated from a four-year institution, and a whopping 79 percent have advanced degrees.

Both groups are mostly well off financially. In large school districts in 2011, a majority of board members (54 percent) reported an annual household income of \$100,000 or more. The D.C. charter sector is wealthier still: 51 percent report household income greater than \$200,000 per year, and an additional 37 percent report between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Just 2 percent report income below \$50,000. (For comparison, the median household income in 2014 was \$54,000 annually; in D.C., it was \$91,000.)

Both groups are also reasonably informed about the schools they govern. Traditional board members possess accurate information about their districts, especially when it comes to school finance, teacher pay, class size, and collective bargaining. A similar pattern plays out with D.C. charter board members, who are equally well informed about the characteristics of their schools.

Finally, the same majority of both district and board members responded that they do not have school-aged children (62 percent).²

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By most observable characteristics, we see that citizens who choose to govern public schools, whether district or charter, are affluent, selfless, successful, civic-minded individuals. Board membership provides these “best and brightest” an opportunity to improve education in their local communities.

2. Boards (both district and charter) appear to benefit from training related to school governance.

We’re well aware of the pitiful state of teacher professional development that educators often report (and that research tends to corroborate³) is a waste of time. So we were surprised to find a relationship between board training and school quality for both district and charter sectors. Could it be that boards benefit more from their professional development than teachers?

Our prior research shows that district boards with members who report particular work practices (including participating in professional development) are linked to better student-achievement outcomes than would be expected given the circumstances of their districts (that is, they “beat the odds”). The current study shows that charter board members of higher-quality schools are also more likely to participate in specific kinds of training. Unfortunately, we don’t know anything about the quality of that training—though we have an inkling of its content. We know, for instance, that most district boards overall and charter boards in higher-quality schools (versus lower-quality schools) tend to participate in training about developing and approving a school budget, as well as in how to comply with relevant legal and policy issues.

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Clearly we need to learn more about the quality, ideal amount, and substance of this training, given its association with school quality.

Now on to the differences . . .

3. Charter boards in D.C. differ from district boards around the country when it comes to race, age and ideology.

In general, district school boards tend to have more white members (80 percent), though the largest districts (15,000-plus students) are comprised of boards that are 67 percent white, 22 percent black, and 6 percent Latino. D.C. charter board members are 53 percent white, 33 percent black, and 5 percent Hispanic.

The board-member population of the District’s charter schools is also more balanced in age than traditional boards, with 30 percent between the ages of thirty-one and forty, 33 percent between ages forty-one and fifty, and 35 percent over the age of fifty. Our 2011 data for traditional boards show just 4 percent under the age of forty, 62 percent between forty and fifty-nine, and 34 percent sixty or older.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, district board members across the nation are much more likely to describe themselves as political moderates (47 percent) or conservatives (32 percent). The District’s charter board membership skews much more to the left: 56 percent are liberal, 34 percent moderate, and just 7 percent conservative. (Of course, the District of Columbia is among the bluest political jurisdictions in the country.)⁴

Another big difference is that charter board members do not have to run for election, which brings us to our next point.

4. Not having elections allows the charter sector to tap a deeper pool of talent for board members.

We can’t help but think that needing to run for election might discourage otherwise willing and capable individuals from serving on a board. Campaigning in today’s fraught political environment is no picnic, especially when your plate is already brimming with a full-time job and family. Besides the cost in dollars and effort, “pro-reform” board candidates often get skewered by local unions.

It’s not hard to see how serving on an appointed board of a nonunion school could be more appealing and perhaps more effectual, especially as members are free of the headaches of collective bargaining. There’s also a higher chance that principals and board members are likeminded and supportive of one another because, unlike superintendents and district school boards, their working relationship is not subject to the vagaries of the latest election returns.

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Finally, there are differences in how the two types of boards approach their work (below), which has implications for the types of individuals who are attracted to board service.

5. One way to recruit and keep talented, busy professionals on charter school boards is to make the job doable.

Part of the reason that D.C. charter boards can attract the best and brightest (other than the fact that there are lots of high-achieving professionals in D.C.) is that their workload on those boards is manageable. Many charter boards meet every six to eight weeks, and members spend an average of six hours per month on board service. Contrast that with district board members—42 percent of whom report spending twenty-five hours or more on board business a month and just 7 percent of whom report spending fewer than seven hours per month. They typically meet at least once, and often twice, per month.

Time is a precious commodity that charter boards tend to maximize, in part by approaching their work more strategically. Fully three-quarters of them say that their first or second top goal as a board member is ensuring that students achieve strong academic outcomes. Contrast that with district board members, who in 2011 showed little consensus on priorities in their districts. When queried about the most important objective of

schooling, most replied, “Preparing students for a satisfying and productive life and helping students fulfill their potential.” There’s nothing wrong with that, but figuring out what it means as well as how board members can hold themselves and the school leadership accountable for attaining it is nearly impossible.

When charter boards set for themselves a focused and measurable goal, it’s easy to see how that increases the odds of attaining it, especially as everyone pursues a shared purpose.

We should also acknowledge the importance of external organizations in recruiting talented professionals and providing training that helps them structure their jobs to maximize efficiency. Outfits like Charter Board Partners, BoardSource, and BoardOnTrack help build strong boards by assembling rosters of talented individuals whose skillsets are matched to particular schools and boards in need of them. They figure out who might best contribute to and mesh with existing school and board leadership and provide them with ongoing professional development. It appears that to a considerable extent they are succeeding in D.C.

Charter supporters and reform “harbormasters” in other cities should take note. Although such folks already have a lot on their hands, they should add “developing great charter boards” to their to-do lists and consider recruiting organizations such as those above to help them do it.



As you can see, our work on board governance paints a somewhat complicated picture of the similarities and differences between district boards around the country and charter board members in the District. Combined with other key findings (below), however, a more concrete narrative emerges.

Our research on both sectors shows that almost all D.C. charter board members give top priority to student achievement, and that’s also generally the case with district board members in high-performing districts.

Within the D.C. charter sector, stronger schools tend to have board members who also are more knowledgeable about their schools, particularly relative to their school’s performance rating, demographics, and financial outlook. Those board members are also more likely to participate in training, engage in strategic planning, and meet monthly (rather than more or less frequently). They’re also more apt to evaluate their school’s leader and use staff satisfaction as a factor in such evaluations.

We’re left with the impression that good board members are good board members in any sector of education—and in other organizations, too. They set the right priorities, they do their homework, they monitor performance, and they evaluate the organization’s leadership.

But the opportunity to be a good board member is so much greater in the charter sector; therefore, it seems likely that the kinds of people who are apt to be good board members will find service on charter boards more appealing and perhaps more rewarding than service on district boards. You don’t have to run for election. You don’t have to bargain with an antagonistic union. You have much greater say about budgets and personnel. You

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don't spend endless hours every week on school business. We can't be sure that charters beyond D.C. also do a great job of attracting top-notch talent; this is important to investigate going forward. But based on what we've been able to learn from this study and comparing it with national analyses of district board members—which, we reiterate, are not fully comparable—we conclude that education-minded, child-centered civic leaders who want to engage directly with public education may find service on charter boards to be a terrific option.



One final thought: we're compelled to put in a plug for the oft-derided "Washington elite." According to today's populist politics, those of us who inhabit the nation's capital are mostly self-serving and possibly corrupt careerists. Maybe that's true in some corners, but the fine men and women who have volunteered to serve on the city's charter boards don't fit that stereotype. They are selfless, committed, and competent—and are likely one part, perhaps a vital part, of the reason why D.C.'s charter sector is so high-performing.

In fact, Washington's charter boards appear to mirror the vision that progressive reformers had for elected school boards over a century ago—that they be filled by the best and brightest of the community, who stand for the common good and place the interests of children ahead of their own interests or those of adult groups.

Such civic-minded citizens can be found on elected boards as well. So to opponents of charter schools and their "unelected" boards, we ask this: Do you want our schools to rise above crass politics, as the progressives of a century ago sought for public education? If so, we respectfully suggest that you embrace charter schools and applaud those who serve on their boards.

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Last, though certainly not least, we extend gratitude to the District of Columbia's charter school board members for participating in our survey and to our colleagues at Charter Board Partners, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, D.C. Public Charter School Board, and Friends of Choice in Urban Schools for their support throughout the project.

Tens of thousands of individuals across the United States volunteer their time, energy, and expertise to the governance of charter schools. These board members make key financial and operational decisions about their schools and have legal and moral responsibilities for the education of children in their communities—who are often poor and of ethnic minority groups. As the charter sector grows, board members are likely to play an increasingly prominent role in discussions of public education, particularly in cities where charters serve a significant proportion of the student population.

Yet we know remarkably little about this group. Who serves on charter school boards? What is the relationship, if any, between the characteristics and practices of those boards and the quality of the schools for which they are responsible? With few exceptions, most of what we know (or think we know) about charter school boards is based on anecdotes and lived experience. The present analysis, although limited in scope, is one of the first to use quantitative survey data to explore the connections between charter school boards and school quality.

We surveyed charter school board members in Washington, D.C., a city with one of the highest percentages of public charter school students in the nation. We sought answers to two primary questions:

1. Who serves on charter school boards in the District of Columbia?
2. Which board characteristics and practices are associated with school quality?

Our survey explored numerous topics, including board members' backgrounds and characteristics, motivations to serve, understanding of the board's role, and challenges as board members. We had an impressive response rate of 51 percent. Though we can provide only correlational findings, not cause and effect, our research aptly represents the D.C. charter school board population; widens the heretofore narrow domain of research on charter school boards; and functions as an empirical flashlight for charter sectors beyond the nation's capital.

Who serves on D.C.'s charter school boards?

Charter school board members in D.C. tend to be affluent, highly educated individuals with moderate or liberal political leanings. Three-quarters of them have served fewer than four years on their board, and half of them have served for two years or less. A slight majority is white, and one-third are African American. They are fairly evenly distributed by age and have a wide range of occupational and professional backgrounds, although almost one-third work or have worked in education.

Which board characteristics and practices are linked to school quality?

In order to identify relationships between board practices and characteristics on the one hand and school quality on the other, we analyzed survey data alongside school-quality data from the D.C. Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB). We found several significant differences between high- and low-quality schools.

FINDING 1:

Board members of high-quality schools are more knowledgeable about their schools.

These board members are more likely to know their school's quality rating from the DC PCSB and more accurately report their school's poverty population and whether the school recently had a budget deficit.

In light of this, we suggest that charter advocates and other sector leaders intentionally recruit board members who demonstrate the interest and ability to be informed and engaged. They might also encourage school leaders to effectively and consistently communicate key information about the school to their boards.

FINDING 2:

Board members of high-quality schools are more likely to participate in training, engage in strategic planning, and meet monthly.

In particular, board members at high-performing schools are more likely to have received training in developing the school budget, strategic planning, and legal and policy issues.

In charting their own course for continuous improvement, board members in other cities may find it useful to imitate these practices.

FINDING 3:

Board members of high-quality schools are significantly more likely to evaluate their school leaders and use staff satisfaction as a factor in such evaluations.

Our analysis lends some support to the view that evaluating the school leader is one of the board's key functions. Board members, support organizations, and others should consider investing in boards' capacity to fulfill this responsibility with relevant data, measures, and goals.

FINDING 4:

Regardless of school quality, charter school board members in D.C. have much in common, including board makeup and shared beliefs about education, school-finance practices, and their role and responsibilities.

Our analysis shows that members of charter school boards in D.C. have similar demographic and professional backgrounds, regardless of school quality. Members share the belief that academic achievement is the primary goal of a quality education, have similar practices in stewarding public funds, and understand that their role is to govern the school, not get involved in its operations.

Interestingly, charter school board members in D.C. also share some misunderstandings about the board's role in relation to the authorizer. For instance, one in four members indicate that the DC PCSB is responsible for assisting the school leader in school operations, which would overstep the DC PCSB's oversight role, and one in three indicate that it is *not* their responsibility to close underperforming schools, although that is indeed one of the DC PCSB's primary obligations as an authorizer—and an action that it sometimes undertakes.



Charter school boards play an important role in school choice, and their responsibility for educating the next generation of American children merits greater attention from public officials, charter-sector leaders, and analysts. What's more, we should not forget that charter school boards represent a phenomenon unique to American democracy in which voluntarism plays a significant role in cultivating civil society and shaping the common good.

Governing boards, whether district or charter, play key roles in public education. They are responsible to taxpayers, communities, and parents for such fundamental decisions as who leads their schools, how funds are allocated, what curricula and assessments the schools use, and how teachers are evaluated, retained, and promoted. A board's tolerance for tough decisions, its aversion to rocking the boat, or its impatience for rapid improvement can have a profound effect on efforts to improve opportunities, experiences, and outcomes for the children in its care.

It is therefore no surprise that analysts have sought to understand the relationship between school boards and student outcomes. Unfortunately, the rather-limited research on school boards to date has focused almost entirely on districts (see "What we know about district school boards").

However, charter school boards differ from district school boards in key ways and merit their own line of inquiry. For example, district school board members are almost always elected or appointed by an elected official, while charter school board members are almost never.⁵ Rather, charter school boards are generally self-appointed and self-perpetuating, more akin to nonprofit organizations than government units. A group of individuals typically decides to found a nonprofit entity and apply for a school charter, then comprise the organization's—and the school's—first board. Once established, the board expands or replaces its members through a board vote.

When it comes to accountability for results, district school boards answer to the general public, either directly through the voting booth or via the election of the mayor or other official who appointed them. Charter school boards, however, are accountable to their schools' authorizers—entities empowered by states to enter into contracts with nonprofit organizations to operate public but nondistrict schools. These contracts (that is, charters) vest charter school boards with responsibility for the academic, operational, and financial health of their schools. If the authorizer finds that a school is not meeting expectations, it can revoke or decline to renew the board's charter.

District and charter school boards have many other differences, depending on the varying laws and regulations of specific jurisdictions. Some charter boards are subject to state "open meeting" laws, for example, while others aren't. Some states allow charter school boards to oversee multiple schools or campuses, somewhat like a district, while other places require each charter school to have its own board.

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My hope is to sustain what I believe is a place I [wish] my mother would have had when she came to this country . . . a place where the American dream can continue to be realized.

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TIER 1 BOARD MEMBER

When all is said and done, however, charter school boards—like district school boards—have significant obligations, both legal and moral, to the public as well as to their students. The purpose of this study is to understand how these obligations intersect with board characteristics, practices, and school quality.

In the pages that follow, we address two questions:

1. Who serves on charter school boards in the District of Columbia?
2. Which board characteristics and practices are associated with school quality?

This analysis focuses solely on the charter sector in Washington, D.C. (see “Why Washington, D.C.?” on page 17). Because the charter sector’s policies and practices in the District are not representative of America’s entire charter sector, our findings are not necessarily applicable to places outside the nation’s capital. We also note that although we point to various relationships between the characteristics and practices of a board and its school quality, this analysis does not support causal arguments; indeed, our measures of school quality were collected and reported prior to the administration of the survey. This project is therefore best understood as an exploratory study. Although not definitive, its findings do offer new insights and should serve as a catalyst for additional research in a sorely understudied area.

● What we know about district school boards

In 2010, Nancy Walser released *The Essential Board Book*, which synthesized research linking district school board practices to student achievement and identified the practices shared among high-functioning boards. She found that high-functioning boards typically follow a set agenda, establish a regular process to review achievement data, monitor progress toward long-term goals, and avoid involvement in the district’s day-to-day operations.⁶

Around the same time, the American Enterprise Institute’s Frederick M. Hess and Olivia Meeks released the results of a survey of district school board members and found that the era of accountability and No Child Left Behind corresponded to boards’ increased focus on pupil achievement. Compared to an earlier (2002) survey, board members in 2009 were much more likely to view achievement as a “key consideration” in evaluating their superintendents. Three out of four members indicated that improving student learning was *extremely* or *very urgent*.⁷

A subsequent analysis of the Hess and Meeks survey data, conducted by Arnold F. Shober and Michael T. Hartney in 2014 for the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, explored the relationship between board characteristics and students’ academic performance. They found, perhaps unsurprisingly, that “districts that are more successful academically have board members who assign high priority to improving student learning.” Hartney and Shober also found that training, compensation, and time dedicated to board business were related to district performance.⁸

In 2015, Ford and Ihrke found that the governance best practices identified by the National School Boards Association showed a positive association with student achievement but only among board members who had served for more than five years.⁹ Additional work by Ford, Ihrke, and Jason A. Grissom demonstrate that traditional school boards that exhibit less conflict are also associated with better district performance.¹⁰

Finally, several other studies have established links between board practices and student achievement, including those conducted by Thomas Alsbury,¹¹ Mary Delagardelle and colleagues,¹² Ivan Lorentzen,¹³ Steven Peterson,¹⁴ and Paul Johnson.¹⁵

Conventional wisdom on charter school board practices

Since its inception, the charter sector's knowledge of board effectiveness has been gleaned largely from interviews, anecdotes, and other qualitative analyses.¹⁶ Until very recently, researchers had not used quantitative data to explore whether and how charter school board practices relate to school quality and performance.¹⁷ To our knowledge, the only study that does so is a forthcoming correlational analysis by Michael R. Ford at the University of Wisconsin–Oshkosh that links survey data on board practices to school-performance data.¹⁸ Ford finds that board members who report lower levels of internal conflict are more likely to be actively engaged in setting key policies for the school. In turn, active engagement in setting policy is associated with better student outcomes.¹⁹

In the absence of additional empirical studies, state policymakers, authorizers, funders, and others have made sundry weighty decisions—including the enactment of highly consequential legislation—that rely more on lessons gleaned from lived experience than from robust data.

● Why Washington, D.C.?

We conducted our survey in Washington, D.C., for several reasons. We knew that if we were to try to sample across states, variation in survey responses would likely be attributable as much to what different charter statutes do and don't allow as to more substantive differences in board characteristics, practices, or perceptions. Most states also have multiple authorizers, often with different rules for the schools in their portfolios. Disparate gauges of school quality would further muddle potential links between survey data and school quality. It makes for a more reliable study when all charters operate under a single set of laws and regulations, a single authorizer, and some common measures of school quality—such as occurs in the District.²⁰

In addition, the size of the D.C. charter sector—sixty-two boards overseeing more than a hundred schools—provides

a number sufficient for meaningful comparisons. What's more, not only do D.C. charters answer to a single authorizer, but it's one that values transparency and accountability; the DC PCSB's accountability framework can be readily understood and leveraged for additional analyses. In fact, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) in 2013 found DC PCSB to be “among the highest-quality authorizers it has ever reviewed.”²¹

All that said, we recognize that a single-city approach has serious limitations. The District's population is not representative of the country outside its borders. For instance, adults living in the District are better educated and have higher incomes than the national average (see “Question 1: Who serves on charter school boards?” on page 21). The District's charter sector is

“Our goal is to provide our students with an education that is as rich in range and depth as any school private or public . . . in the District.”

VETERAN BOARD MEMBER

relatively large—enrolling nearly half of the city's public school students—and generally well regarded for its quality.²² It is likely that a mature and high-performing charter sector differs in ways both observable and hidden from less well-established counterparts. We're mindful, too, that all charter schools in D.C. are urban and that suburban and rural charter schools are apt to have fundamental differences from those we examine here.

Although our findings are not generalizable outside the nation's capital, this case study offers valuable insights into the relationship between charter school boards and school quality and raises questions and hypotheses worth applying to charter school boards elsewhere. We hope others will build on our work and seek to find commonalities and differences across cities, states, and authorizers.

For example, legislators have written provisions into charter laws that limit the size of boards and include requirements for residency and parent representation.²³ Authorizers routinely evaluate charter applicants based on how prospective boards plan to monitor school progress and evaluate school leaders.²⁴ National philanthropies such as the Walton Family Foundation and city-based organizations such as New Schools for New Orleans want to know before investing whether schools have effective and engaged boards.²⁵

Organizations have also emerged to provide training for charter school boards. BoardSource provides support to boards across the nonprofit sector, including charter schools.²⁶ Charter Board Partners (CBP) was founded with the specific goal of “strengthening the governance and quality of public charter schools” and has synthesized much of the sector’s best thinking into a robust set of forty recommended practices.²⁷

All of this activity around charter governance has amounted to a set of presumptive best practices based on conventional wisdom about board success: the inclusion of diverse perspectives; belief in the importance and potential of students’ academic achievement; understanding the board’s own role and responsibilities; being informed about school activities and performance; hiring, supporting, evaluating, and, if necessary, terminating the school leader; and investing in the board’s own development.

This practical knowledge seems amply sensible and reflects hard-learned lessons. In no way do we discount the value of conventional wisdom. Still, we also need more empirical evidence regarding the relationship between such practices and school quality. With more than 6,600 charter schools already operating around the United States, the sector’s continuing growth, and its demonstrated potential to serve even the most disadvantaged students, it is time to bridge the knowledge gap.

To begin doing so, we surveyed board members in Washington, D.C., to learn more about who serves on charter school boards and how they function. More specifically, we tested whether some of the central tenets of conventional wisdom about the governance of charter school boards link to school quality.

A detailed discussion of the survey instrument, survey administration, data analyses, and sampling methods is included in appendix A. Here, we provide a brief sketch.

We designed an online survey of charter school board members that focused on their demographics, beliefs, and practices. We received responses from 325 of the 639 board members in D.C., making for a strong response rate of 51 percent.²⁸

This sample represents 94 percent (fifty-eight out of sixty-two) of charter school boards in D.C. and includes feedback from fifty board chairs and forty-eight parent representatives.²⁹ The average response rate by board—akin to that of the sample as a whole—was 50 percent.³⁰

To explore relationships between board-member characteristics and practices and school quality, we analyzed our survey data against two measures of school quality: schools' ratings on the DC PCSB's performance management framework (PMF) and schools' reenrollment rates.

The PMF uses tier ratings to assess and monitor school performance. Schools are rated in three tiers: Tier 1 (high-performing), Tier 2 (mid-performing), and Tier 3 (low-performing). Those in Tier 3 are often subject to increased oversight from the DC PCSB and can be subject to closure. The tier ratings incorporate data on student achievement, student growth, student attendance, reenrollment rates, and other leading indicators of long-term academic success (such as third-grade reading proficiency).³¹

We also used reenrollment rates alone as a separate indicator of school quality. In a choice-based system, a family's decision to return their children to a charter school likely reflects their overall view of the school's quality (otherwise they could choose to withdraw and go elsewhere). As such, reenrollment rates are a valuable composite measure of the many observable and unobservable factors that inform how parents assess school quality. We categorized schools into thirds for our analysis: low-reenrollment schools, medium-reenrollment schools, and high-reenrollment schools.

Because tier and reenrollment data were not available for all schools,³² the two school-quality measures yield slightly different samples for analysis. Tier data were available for thirty-eight out of sixty-two schools (eleven schools in Tier 1, twenty-two schools in Tier 2, and five schools in Tier 3); reenrollment data were available for fifty out of sixty-two schools. Overall, we received 208 responses from schools with tier data and 288 from schools with reenrollment data (see Table 1 for more).

Table 1. Board member responses by school-quality indicators

	Tier ratings			Reenrollment rates		
	Percent of responses	Response number	Response rate	Percent of responses	Response number	Response rate
High-quality schools (Tier 1/high reenrollment)	32%	67	56%	36%	103	63%
Medium-quality schools (Tier 2/medium reenrollment)	57%	118	49%	31%	90	53%
Low-quality schools (Tier 3/low reenrollment)	11%	23	51%	33%	95	51%
	Total: 100%	Total: 208	Avg: 51%	Total: 100%	Total: 288	Avg: 55%

The remainder of this report is structured around our two research questions:

1. Who serves on charter school boards in the District of Columbia?
2. Which board characteristics and practices are associated with school quality?

The first section describes the individuals who serve on charter school boards. In the second section, we first describe three characteristics and practices that show a relationship to school quality, each followed by a brief discussion. Here, we present only those findings that were statistically significant and note whether we used tier ratings or reenrollment rates as our indicator of school quality. In several cases, we found the absence of significant findings equally interesting, so the fourth finding in the section frames a few of these commonalities. Finally, we highlight some implications from our research for charter school boards and offer final considerations for the field. Verbatim comments from respondents provided in the open-ended section of the survey are highlighted as pull quotes throughout the report.

Question 1: Who serves on charter school boards?

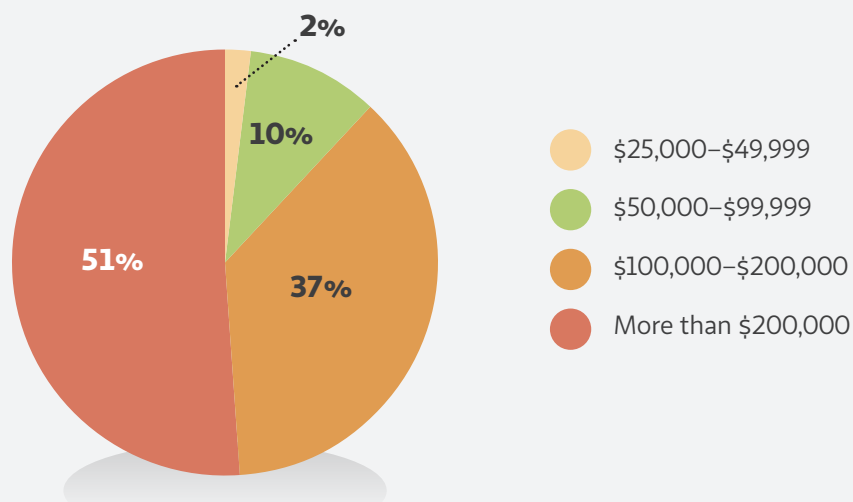
In exploring the role that charter school boards may play relative to school quality, it is important first to understand the characteristics of the individuals who serve on them. The only requirements in the District’s charter law are that boards have no more than fifteen members, that a majority of members reside within the city, and that at least two members are parents or guardians of children enrolled in the school.³³

Analysis of the full data set shows that charter school board members in D.C. are exceptionally well educated, even more so than the city’s population as a whole.³⁴ Of the District’s charter school board members, 79 percent have advanced degrees and an additional 17 percent have bachelor’s degrees. Only 4 percent of the District’s charter school board members have not graduated from a four-year institution.

Because educational attainment and income are highly correlated, it is not surprising that board members in D.C. also report sizable annual incomes. Of those who responded to the question, 51 percent indicated household incomes greater than \$200,000 per year and an additional 37 percent indicated incomes between \$100,000 and \$200,000. Just 2 percent reported incomes below \$50,000 (see Figure 1).³⁵ For comparison, the median household income in 2014 was about \$54,000 nationally; in the D.C. metropolitan area, it was \$91,000.³⁶ It is worth underscoring that, at least in the nation’s capital, the charter sector affords a means for highly educated, prosperous citizens to take an active role in the city’s alternative public schooling system.

Fig. 1

Board member household income



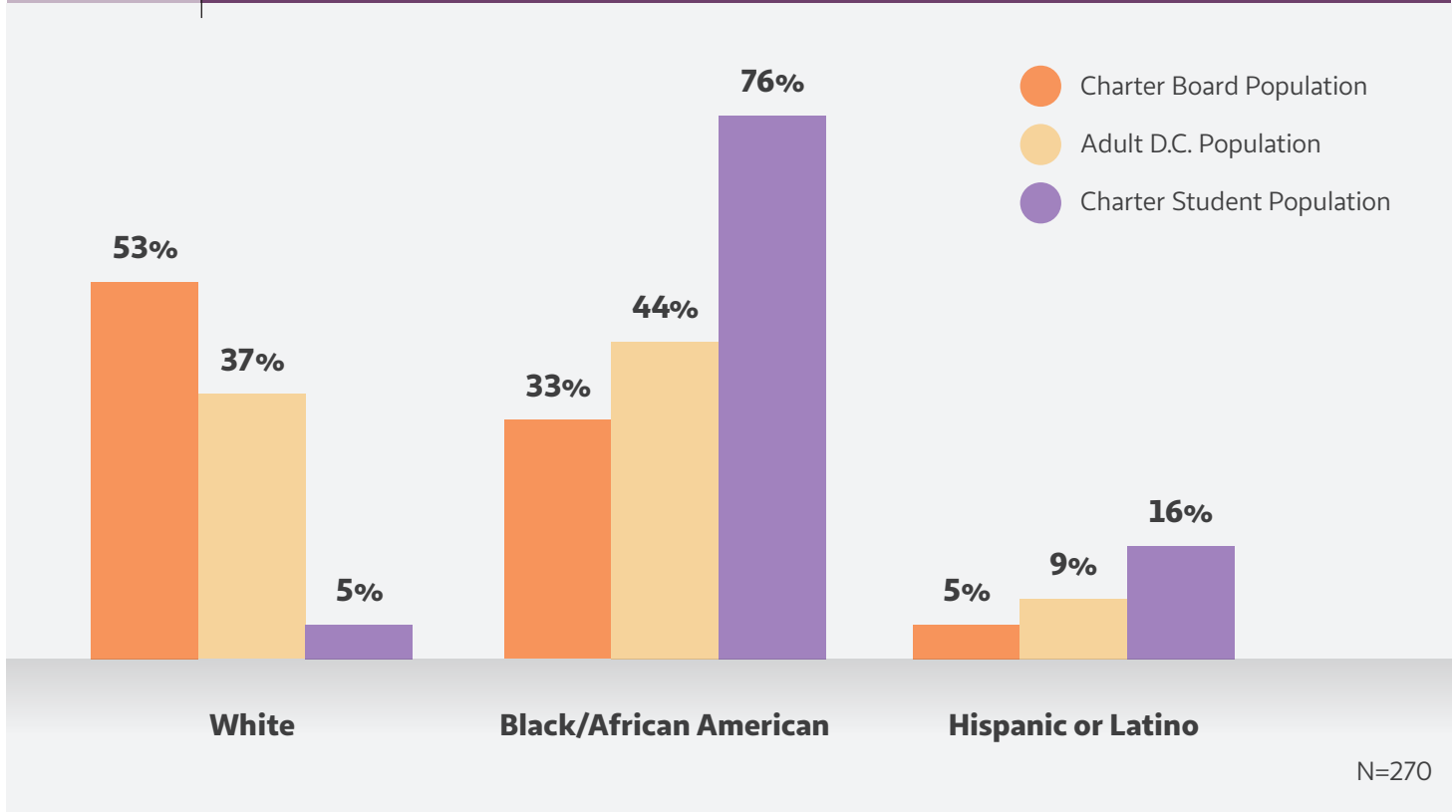
N=262

We found limited political diversity among charter school board members in the District. Just 7 percent of respondents described themselves as “conservative” while 56 percent indicated “liberal” and 34 percent “moderate.” This may be explained in part by D.C.’s charter law, which requires that a majority of each school’s board reside within the District, where only 6 percent of registered voters are Republicans.³⁷

We also compared the gender and ethnic composition of charter school boards to D.C.’s adult population and the charter sector’s student population (see Figure 2). Compared to D.C.’s adult population, charter school boards are slightly more female—60 to 53 percent (not shown)—and significantly whiter: 53 to 37 percent. African Americans are correspondingly underrepresented, with about one-third of charter school board members in the former population compared to 44 percent of the adult D.C. population; likewise, 5 percent of board members are Hispanic or Latino, versus 9 percent in D.C.’s adult population. Asian and mixed-race individuals make up 10 percent or less of both the D.C. population and board members (not shown).³⁸ These patterns are more pronounced when one compares the population of board members to the charter sector’s student population, in which just 5 percent are white, 76 percent are African American, and 16 percent are Hispanic or Latino.³⁹

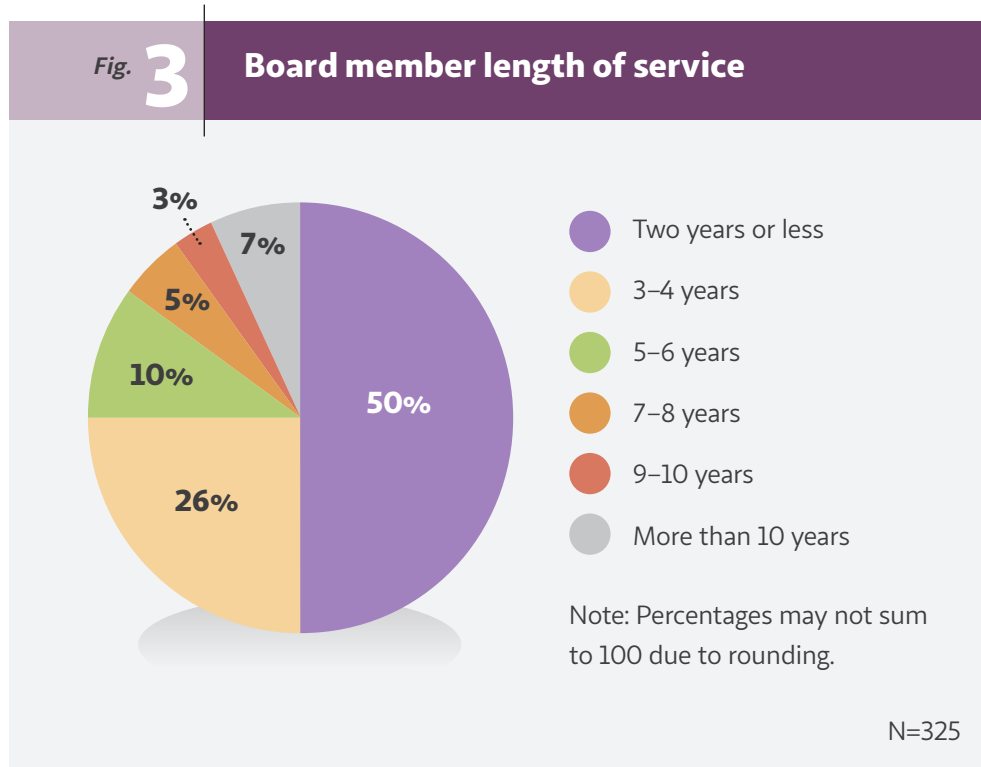
Fig. 2

Racial/ethnic board composition compared to adult D.C. population and charter sector student population



Board members are fairly evenly distributed by age, with about 30 percent between thirty-one and forty years old, 33 percent between forty-one and fifty years old, and 35 percent over the age of fifty. Just seven board members in our sample are thirty years of age or younger. (Save for a handful of student representatives, virtually all board members are presumably over the age of 18.)

A significant majority of board members are relatively new to their roles; one-half of board members have served on their boards for two years or less (see Figure 3). This may be attributable to the newness of many D.C. charter schools or term limits established in board bylaws. Yet it is noteworthy that board-member tenure in



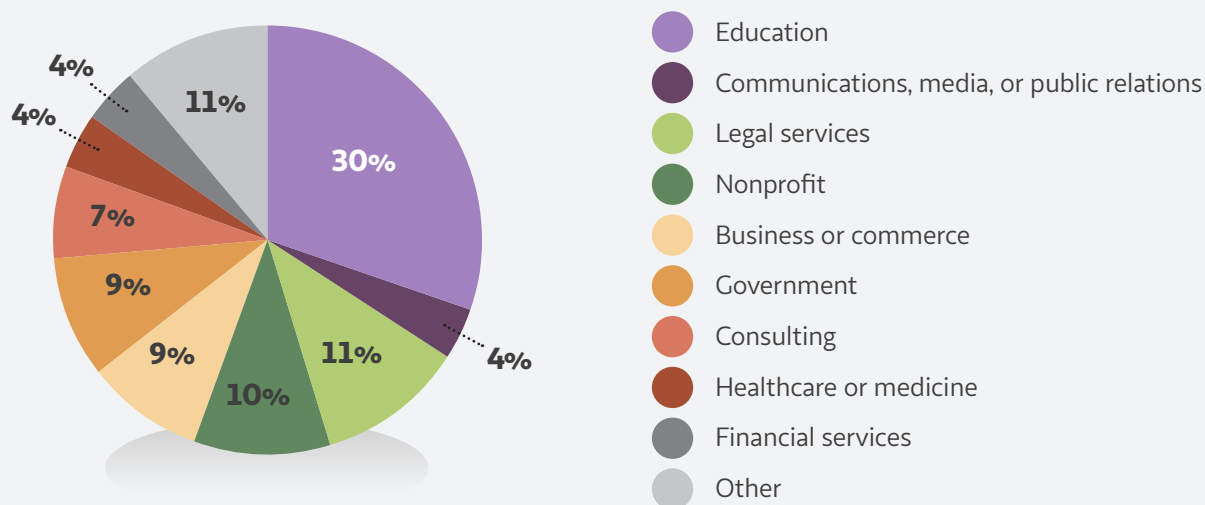
D.C. is significantly shorter than the average for district school board members, as reported by Hess and Meeks in 2010; they found that just 22 percent served for two years or less, while 23 percent served for more than ten years.⁴⁰ This is particularly interesting in light of Ford and Ihrke’s research on district school boards, which found a relationship between board-member practices and district achievement—but only for members who have served for five or more years.⁴¹

On the other hand, many D.C. charter school board members bring with them professional experience in education. Of the members, 30 percent report that their occupation (or occupation prior to retirement) is in education, and 23 percent report that they have at some point been educators. This proportion is similar to that observed on traditional school boards.⁴² Other common occupations, each accounting for about 10 percent of board members, include legal services, nonprofit, business, and government (see Figure 4).

Overall, charter school board members in D.C. tend to be affluent and highly educated individuals with moderate or liberal political leanings who have served fewer than four years on their board. Although most board members are white, there are a significant number of black and Latino board members. In addition, members are fairly evenly distributed by age, and though many professions are represented, a significant proportion work or have worked in education.

Fig. 4

Board member current or previous occupations



Note: Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

N=316

Question 2: What board characteristics and practices are associated with school quality?

To identify relationships between school quality and the practices and characteristics of charter school boards, we analyzed survey data in relation to schools' tier ratings (DC PCSB's composite assessment of school quality) as well as schools' reenrollment rates (which we regard as a proxy for how families judge school quality). Several interesting relationships emerged:

- Finding 1: Board members of high-quality schools are more knowledgeable about their schools.
- Finding 2: Board members of high-quality schools are more likely to participate in training, engage in strategic planning, and meet monthly.
- Finding 3: Board members of high-quality schools are significantly more likely to evaluate their school leaders and use staff satisfaction as a factor in such evaluations.
- Finding 4: Regardless of school quality, charter school board members in D.C. have much in common, including board makeup and shared beliefs about education, school-finance practices, and their role and responsibilities.

We explain each of these findings in more detail on the following pages.

FINDING 1:

Board members of high-quality schools are more knowledgeable about their schools.

Our survey included several questions regarding schools' demographic, academic, and financial characteristics (see "Testing board members' knowledge"). We compared board members' responses to actual data reported by the DC PCSB and found that most board members are reasonably well informed about their schools, regardless of school quality. (This is also true of district school board members, who tend to possess accurate information when it comes to district finances, teacher pay, collective bargaining, and class size.⁴³) Even with relatively high

knowledge overall, however, boards of high-quality charter schools possess even greater knowledge of their school, including more accurate information about their school's tier rating, student population, and finances.⁴⁴

● Testing board members' knowledge

What is your school's

- Tier rating?
- FRL population?
- SPED population?
- ELL population?

Did your school have a budget deficit for the 2014–15 fiscal year?

A charter school's tier rating is a fundamental piece of information. As determined by the DC PCSB, it is an annual gauge of school quality and a signal as to whether a school is well regarded by or in hot water with its authorizer. It is therefore a measure of which board members ought to be aware.

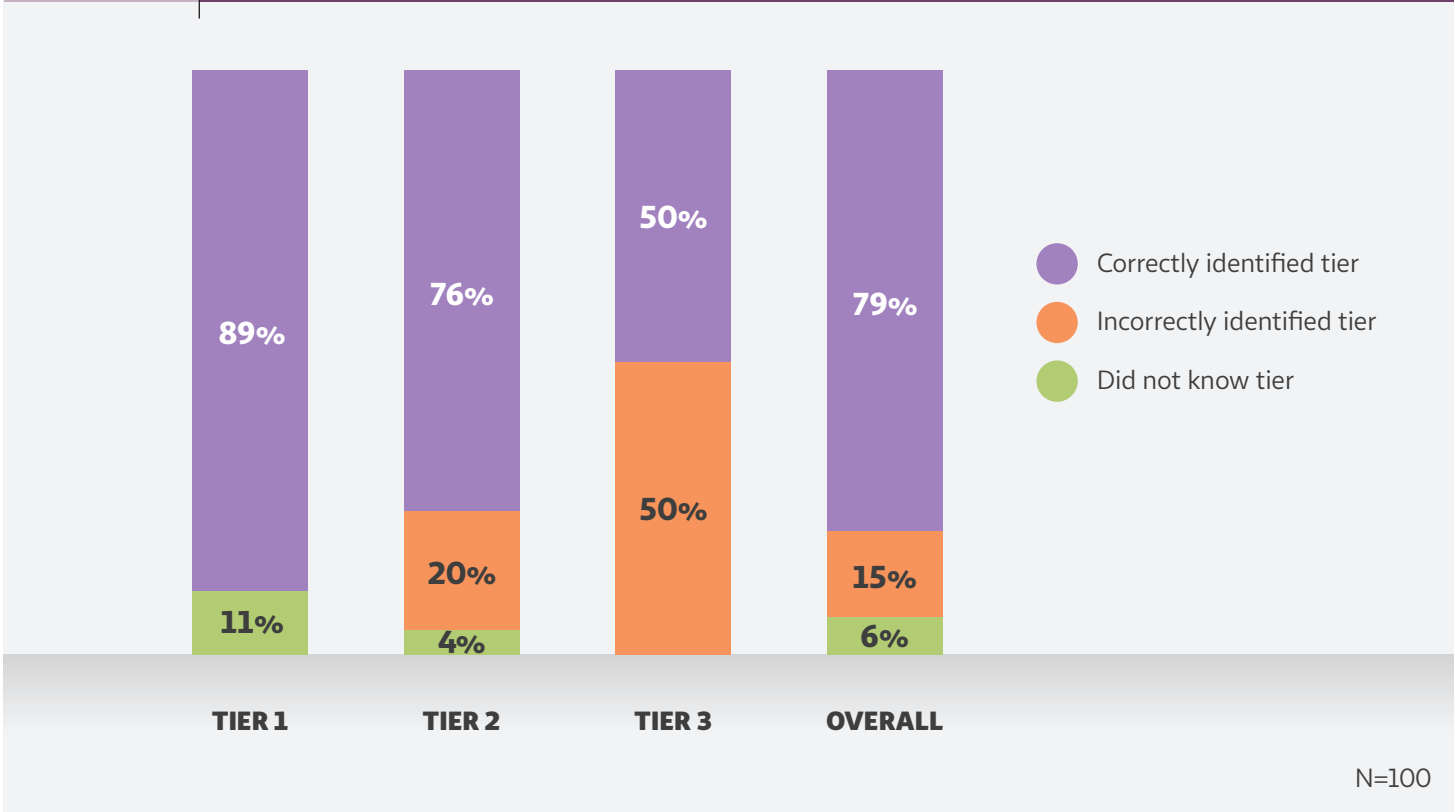
As some boards in D.C. oversee multiple schools, we limited our sample in this analysis to those that oversee a single school (totaling one hundred responses). Overall, 79 percent

of board members correctly identified their school's most recent tier rating and 21 percent incorrectly identified or didn't know their school's tier. But greater numbers of Tier 1 board members demonstrated this knowledge; 89 percent accurately identified their school's tier compared to 76 percent of Tier 2 board members (see Figure 5). Of the board members of Tier 2 schools, 16 percent incorrectly indicated that their school was Tier 1⁴⁵ (the sample size for Tier 3 in this analysis was too small, only two schools, to yield reliable information). The same trend emerged when we used reenrollment rates rather than tier ratings as the measure of school quality.

We also tested survey respondents' knowledge of their student population by asking them to indicate the percentage of pupils who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch (FRL), who have special needs (SPED), and who are learning the English language (ELL). For boards with multiple schools, we asked members to estimate the average across their schools. A significant number of individuals indicated that they didn't know this information: 24 percent said they didn't know their school's FRL population, as did 29 percent for SPED populations and 32 percent for ELL populations.

Fig. 5

Board member knowledge of school's tier



Among those who submitted estimates, we found a significant difference between knowledge held by board members of Tier 1 schools versus Tier 2 and Tier 3. Overall, board members slightly overestimated FRL populations (by about five percentage points). Yet while Tier 1 members overestimated their school's FRL population by just five percentage points, Tier 2 members underestimated it by about 13 percentage points (see Figure 6).

Board knowledge of other student populations did not reveal any differences by tier or reenrollment rate; overall, board members underestimated SPED populations by about four percentage points. Board members were also somewhat inaccurate in estimating their school's population of ELL students, which they overestimated by almost eleven percentage points.

Finally, we tested knowledge of school finances by asking board members to indicate ("yes," "no," or "don't know") whether their school completed the 2014–15 fiscal year with a budget deficit. Overall, 87 percent of board members indicated that their school did not have a budget deficit, 7 percent indicated that they did, and 6 percent did not know. Of these respondents, 84 percent were correct. For board members of Tier 1 schools, none of which actually had budget deficits in 2014–15, their responses were much more likely to be correct, at 97 percent. In comparison, just 77 percent and 86 percent of board members of Tier 2 and Tier 3 schools, respectively, were correct (see Figure 7 on page 28).

Fig. 6

Average differences between estimated and actual percentage of school's FRL population by tier



Discussion

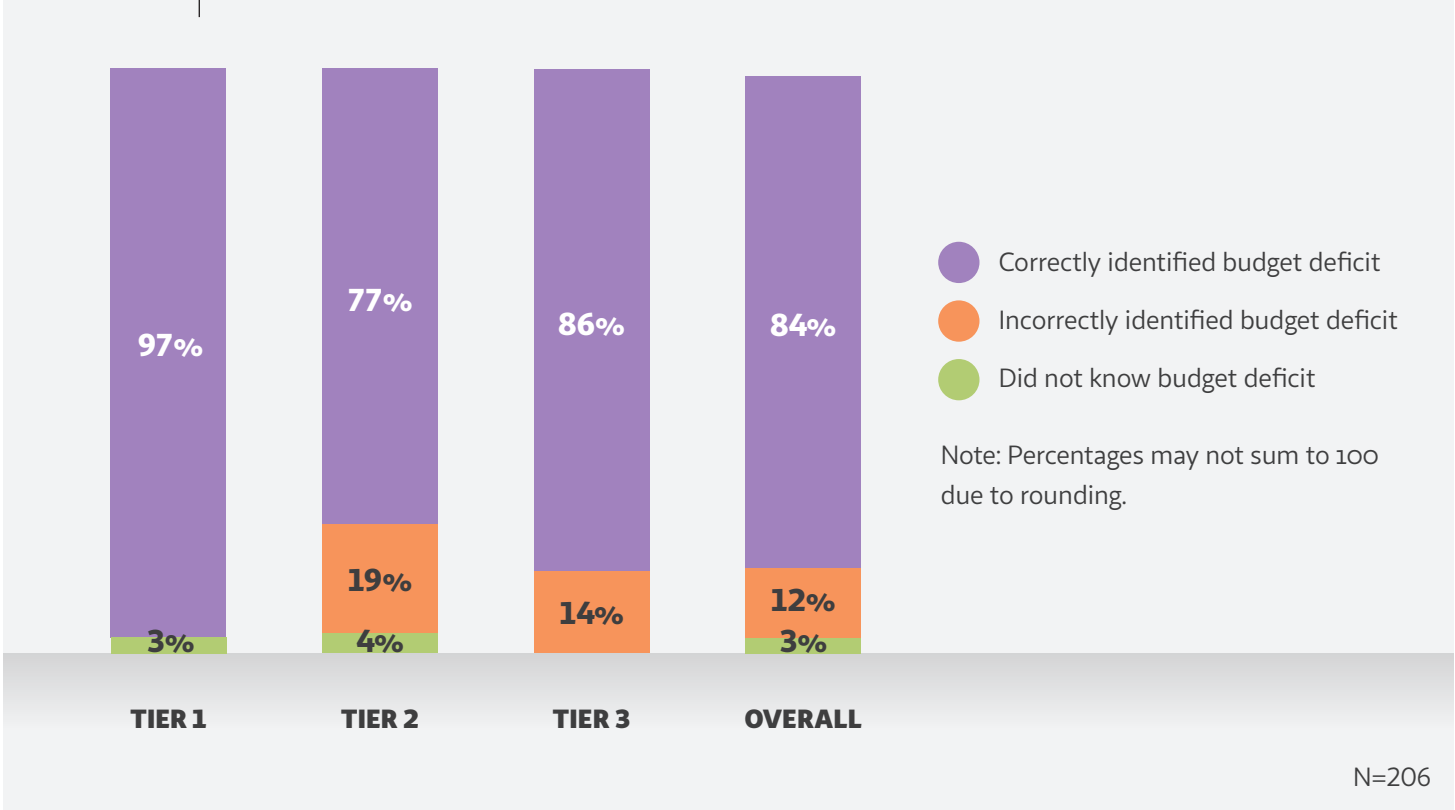
There's definitely a link between the depth and accuracy of board members' knowledge of their charter school, on the one hand, and school quality on the other. What's not clear is how that association works. We would like to think that better-informed board members make for better schools. After all, charter school board members with accurate understanding of basic school facts—including publicly reported measures of quality, the population the school serves, and its financials—should be better equipped to advise their school leaders, set appropriate goals for the school, and hold the leader accountable for progress in relation to those goals.

However, it's also possible that the relationship works in the opposite direction, with higher-quality schools attracting board members who are more likely to take such data seriously and with precision. Effective school leaders may also be more likely to convey key school information regularly and consistently to their boards, for example. Finally, high-quality schools may simply have fewer concerns for board members to track, which is a likely explanation for the relationship between school quality and board-member knowledge of a budget deficit. Nearly all board members indicated their school did not have a budget deficit, and because none of the Tier 1 schools actually had a budget deficit, Tier 1 board members were therefore more likely to be correct.

“
At the full board level, we do ongoing education of board members . . . so we are informed and best able to support and advise our school leader.
 ”
TIER 1 BOARD MEMBER

Fig. 7

Board member knowledge of school's budget deficit



While more accurate in the estimates they provided, board members of Tier 1 schools were also more likely to select “don’t know.” Their willingness to admit that they did not know some of the information and the accuracy of the information they did provide could suggest that they value accuracy and are less willing to guess.

FINDING 2:

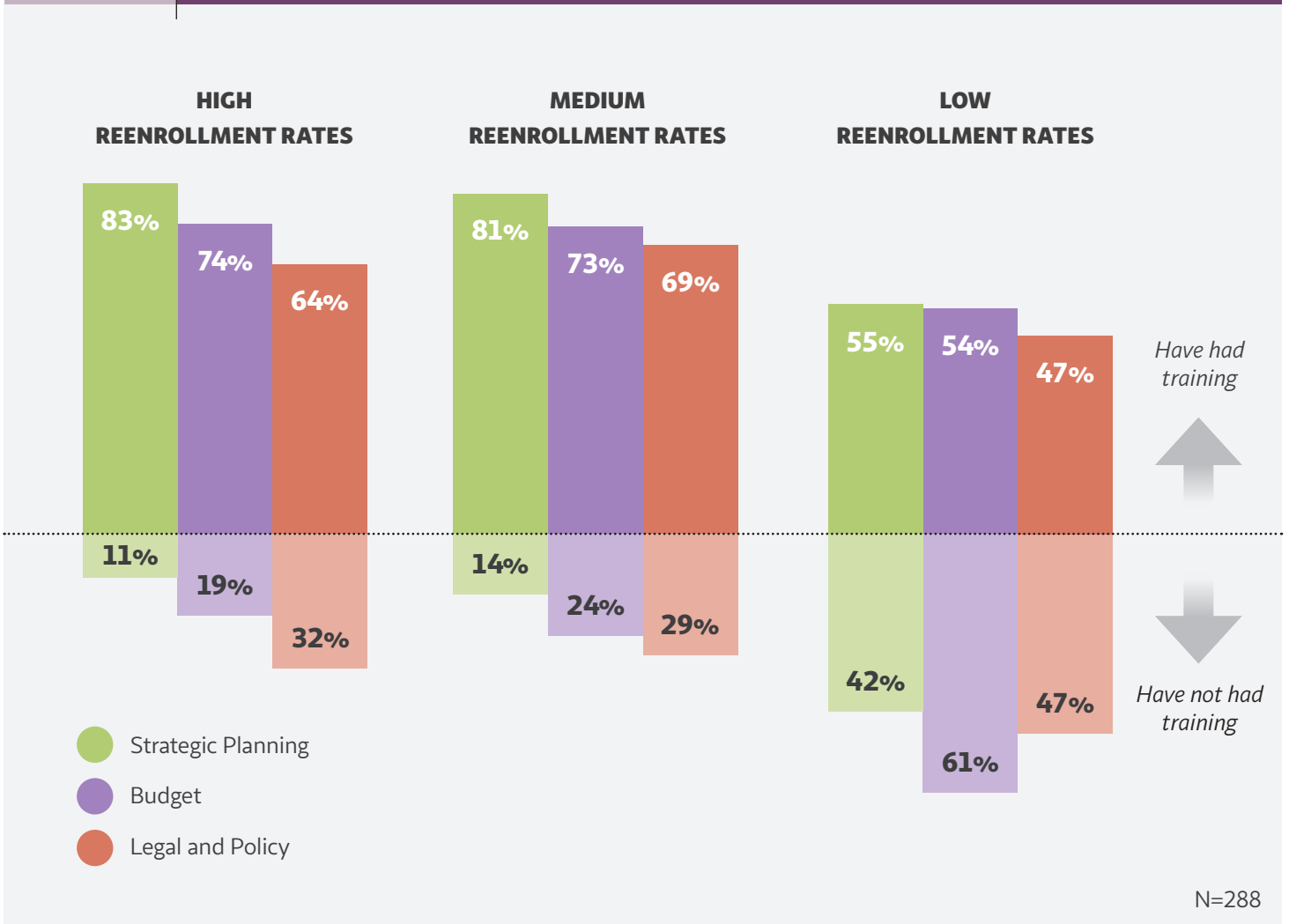
Board members of high-quality schools are more likely to participate in training, engage in strategic planning, and meet monthly.

Approximately nine in ten board members have participated in some board training over the past year, but the type of training they have received varies by school quality. Using reenrollment rates as our indicator of school quality, we found that board members of low-quality schools are significantly less likely to have received training in developing and approving their school’s budget, strategic planning, and legal and policy issues (see Figure 8). In their 2014 analysis of traditional school boards, Shober and Hartney also found a positive

“
We are at a critical juncture to train and empower new trustees so they are engaged and active.
 ”
TIER 1 BOARD MEMBER

Fig. 8

Participation in training by reenrollment rates



relationship between district performance and board-member participation in training.⁴⁶

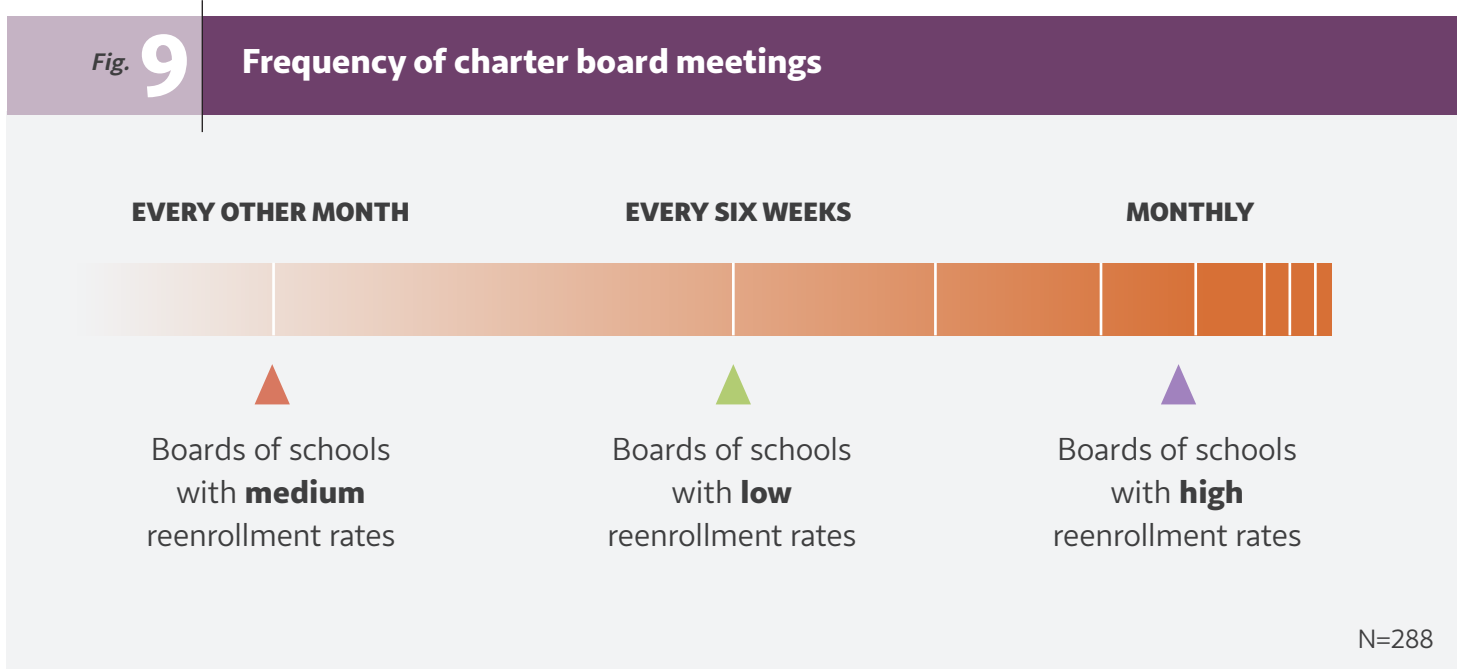
Given that board members of high-reenrollment schools are more likely to have received training on strategic planning, it is unsurprising that 85 percent of them report being engaged in their school’s strategic planning process, compared with 71 percent of board members for schools with medium reenrollment rates and 66 percent for schools with low reenrollment rates.

Board members of high-reenrollment schools also meet somewhat more frequently: between once a month and every

“
We have undergone a tremendous amount of change in the past year, which required us to be focused more on the ‘now.’ As things begin to settle, it’s critical that we begin thinking more strategically about the school’s future.
 ”

TIER 2 BOARD MEMBER

six weeks. Boards of schools with middling and low reenrollment rates tend to meet approximately every eight and six weeks, respectively (see Figure 9). Note that almost all charter school boards convene far less often than traditional district school boards, which typically meet at least once per month and often twice. Charter school board members also report spending an average of six hours per month on board service; in comparison, just 7 percent of district school board members report spending fewer than seven hours per month, and 42 percent report spending twenty-five hours or more.⁴⁷



Discussion

Why do board members of high-quality schools tend to be more engaged? It may be that such schools recruit people who are better able to and more interested in spending time on such activities. It is certainly likely that such schools are more stable in their operations and are thus more able to devote resources to board development and strategic planning. Low-quality schools may be so busy putting out fires that long-term investments such as these seem like luxuries.

Alternatively, these board practices may have positive effects on school quality. Training may—as it certainly should—help boards provide effective, efficient oversight, just as engagement in strategic planning may help both boards and school leaders to develop common understandings of their school’s mission and set measures that define its long-term success. Boards that meet less frequently probably have more limited opportunities to engage with their colleagues and conduct probing discussions of important issues. As one board member lamented, “We don’t meet frequently enough to get good in-depth discussions going.”

“
The best [way] to aid school success is to support the school leader and hold her accountable [for] results.
 ”
VETERAN BOARD MEMBER

FINDING 3:

Board members of high-quality schools are significantly more likely to evaluate their school leaders and use staff satisfaction as a factor in such evaluations.

Boards of high-quality schools are more likely to report evaluating their school leader on an annual basis. They are also more likely to use staff satisfaction as a factor in those evaluations. Of the board members from schools with high reenrollment rates, 85 percent report conducting an annual leader evaluation, compared to 78 percent from schools with low reenrollment rates.⁴⁸ Fewer than seven in ten board members of medium-reenrollment schools report conducting annual evaluations.

Using tier data as our school-quality indicator, we also found that board members of Tier 1 schools were significantly more likely to use staff satisfaction as a factor in leader evaluations. Three out of four board members flagged staff satisfaction as a factor, compared to half for Tier 2 and 65 percent for Tier 3. Numerous board members cited the importance of the school leader in building and maintaining an effective instructional staff, with one board member indicating that he or she would like to see “significant improvement in staffing quality and norms, which badly declined under [the] previous leader.”

Despite different practices in evaluating their school leaders, 85 percent of all board members indicate that holding the leader accountable is among the board’s three top responsibilities. In addition, six in ten board members report that “advising the school leader” is one of the top three activities that take up most of their time.

Discussion

Once again, we see plausible alternative explanations for the differences in whether and how boards of high-quality schools evaluate their school leaders. It could be that it’s easier or more pleasant to conduct a formal evaluation of a successful leader than to provide critical or constructive feedback to one whose school is faltering. It’s also possible that boards of high-quality schools are more stable, better organized, and have more time and energy to develop coherent processes for leader evaluations and/or to collect and analyze data like staff satisfaction.

Alternatively, we would like to think—but cannot be sure—that annual school-leader evaluations and the inclusion of staff satisfaction have a positive influence on the quality of the school. After all, such evaluations are an important means of gauging progress towards a school’s goals and taking action to replace the school leader if necessary. Moreover, substantial research demonstrates that teachers are the most important in-school factor when it comes to affecting student achievement,⁴⁹ and it’s logical that retention of effective educators is a priority for high-performing schools. This would seem to argue for paying close attention to staff satisfaction and morale and using it to inform evaluations of the school leader.

“
The board can help the school succeed by taking care of staff to ensure happiness and retention.
”
VETERAN BOARD MEMBER

FINDING 4:

Regardless of school quality, charter school board members in D.C. have much in common, including board makeup and shared beliefs about education, school-finance practices, and their role and responsibilities.

Regardless of school characteristics and performance, charter school board members in D.C. have much in common. They have similar demographic and professional compositions and similar ideas about the core goals of a quality education. All struggle with the tension between the out-of-school factors that may affect a child's learning and the school's responsibility for what that child learns. Boards of schools of all quality levels demonstrate similar practices regarding school finances. And although members generally display a solid understanding of their oversight role in relation to day-to-day school operations, a significant proportion misunderstand the board's role in relation to the DC PCSB. Let's take each in turn.

Board composition

Charter school boards across D.C., regardless of school quality, reflect similar demographic and background compositions, including gender, racial or ethnic background, educational attainment, annual income, occupation (or former occupation), and whether or not they are the parents of K–12 students. Perhaps due to their many similarities (see “Question 1: Who serves on charter school boards?” on page 21), we did not find any relationships between board composition and school quality.⁵⁰

There is a great deal of interest in diversity in education and in other sectors. Many believe that diverse backgrounds and viewpoints among an organization's leadership team—whether defined by race, age, skills, or experience—can help an organization be successful.⁵¹ As one board member commented, “I am very proud of the diversity of perspectives, experience, and expertise on our board, as well as everyone's passionate energy for accomplishing our mission.” Unfortunately, due to the lack of variation in board composition overall, our D.C. data do not allow us to examine board-level diversity or its potential impact.

Beliefs about education

A large majority of board members share two primary goals for a quality education: ensuring that students achieve strong academic outcomes and providing a safe and stable learning environment. Fully three-quarters of respondents chose the former as their first or second most-important goal, and 66 percent chose the latter (see Figure 10).⁵² In contrast, research on district school board members shows no similar consistency; their focus on academic outcomes varies greatly.⁵³

“

I hope that [my school] will continue to work with children in an underserved community to show others that all students can achieve if they have the right academic and emotional support.

”

BOARD MEMBER OF A NEW SCHOOL

Fig. 10

Core goals of a quality education

Ensuring students achieve strong academic outcomes



Providing a safe and stable learning environment



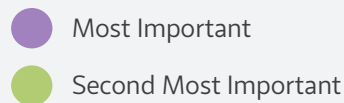
Developing students' social-emotional skills



Encouraging students to be engaged members of their community



Developing students' ability to understand those from diverse backgrounds



N=325

We also asked two questions intended to elicit board members' views on whether schools can achieve strong outcomes despite their students' life circumstances. For each, we provided respondents with two statements and asked them to choose the one that better reflects their beliefs. Option 1 placed full responsibility on the school for students' academic growth; Option 2 allowed for the effects of out-of-school factors (see Figure 11).

There is some variation in board members' responses to these statements, which may suggest that

board members place somewhat more responsibility on the school, perhaps because the school is within their own control. However, like much of the education-policy community, charter school board members appear to be of two minds on this topic. On each question, a significant proportion of board members endorse each statement. We also analyzed whether board members were consistent between the two statements—choosing Option 1 for both questions or choosing Option 2 for both questions. In fact, four in ten board members responded inconsistently—choosing Option 1 for one question and Option 2 for the other (not shown).

Interestingly, we did not find any evidence that high-quality schools are more likely to have board members who believe that schools are responsible for student learning, regardless of the out-of-school factors that students face.

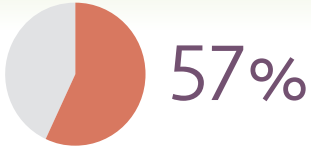
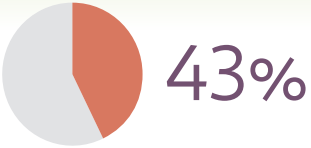
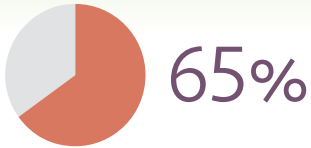
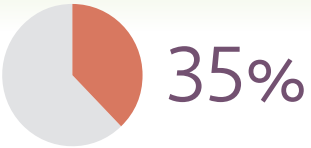
School-finance practices

Managing school funds is one of the most important responsibilities of a charter school board. When charter schools make headlines, it is too often because of financial mismanagement or worse. Yet charter school board members in our sample reported similar practices in the realm of financial management, regardless of school quality.

Fig. 11

Board member beliefs on factors that influence academic progress

While you may agree with both statements below, please indicate the statement that most closely resembles your beliefs.

	OPTION 1	OPTION 2
<p>Question 1</p> <p>A student's life circumstances are outside the control of the school, and we can't let those circumstances impede that student's academic progress.</p> <p>N=325</p>	 <p>57%</p>	 <p>43%</p>
<p>Question 2</p> <p>The teacher and/or school are ultimately responsible for a student's academic growth.</p> <p>N=321</p>	 <p>65%</p>	 <p>35%</p>

When asked to identify their boards' top three responsibilities, nearly six in ten board members selected "to ensure that public funding is used appropriately." Of the board members surveyed, 69 percent indicated that financial management is a factor in school-leader evaluations. More than 90 percent of board members review their schools' financial statements at least quarterly, and 50 percent do so monthly. Perhaps reflecting the high-income composition of D.C.'s charter school boards, 83 percent also report that they are expected to raise funds for their school, either through personal donations or outside fundraising.

“
The Board must be careful stewards of the funds of the public and also of private donations.
 ”
 TIER 1 BOARD MEMBER

Interestingly, practices vary significantly for members who are aware that their school finished the last fiscal year with a deficit. Those who correctly acknowledged that their school had a budget deficit (see page 25) were also significantly more likely to indicate that their board had a committee dedicated to development and fundraising and reviewed financial statements on a more frequent basis (i.e., monthly as opposed to quarterly).

● Are low-quality schools responding to pressure?

In several cases, the responses of board members of low-quality charter schools fell between those of high- and middling-quality schools rather than below them.

Tier 3 board members had less accurate knowledge about their school's FRL population than Tier 1 board members but were more accurate than those responsible for Tier 2 schools. The same was true for knowledge of whether their schools had budget deficits. Tier 3 board members were also more likely than those in Tier 2 to use staff satisfaction as a factor in school-leader evaluations.

Further, board members of schools with low reenrollment rates were *more likely* than schools with medium reenrollment rates to report evaluating their school leader annually. They also met more frequently.⁵⁴

What may explain this increased knowledge and vigilance by boards of weaker schools? Such schools may be experiencing greater oversight and monitoring from the DC PCSB, and therefore their boards may be paying close attention to key school indicators and doubling down on school-leader accountability. Some research suggests that pressure from accountability regimes and enrollment loss can influence school behavior.⁵⁵ Board members themselves may also recognize the urgency of improvement and may dedicate more time and energy to the immediate needs of their school. As one board member of a Tier 3 school commented, “The board has been very involved in an evaluation of the school's performance and the decisions to bring in consultants and turnaround partners to improve the programs in the school and increase student success.”

Alternatively, these schools may be experiencing board turnover (perhaps encouraged by the DC PCSB), and the survey data might reflect practices by newer board members. There is an opportunity for future research to examine and better understand how board members respond to the pressures of accountability.

Board role vis-à-vis school operations

The vast majority of charter school board members know that their role is to govern their schools for long-term success rather than engaging in day-to-day operations.





As with the example regarding their beliefs about education, we asked board members two questions, which required that they choose between a pair of competing statements. In the first, they were asked to indicate whether their role is to focus on day-to-day operations or longer-term strategies.

Of the board members surveyed, 96 percent chose the statement reflecting a strong understanding that the board's role should be one of governance rather than daily management.

In the second question, board members read a hypothetical situation, in which a parent shares a concern about discipline in their child's classroom and were asked how they would respond. Would board members approach the teacher directly or relay the concern to the school leader and ask for a follow up at the next board meeting? The vast majority of respondents responded that they would avoid involving themselves in day-to-day school operations of this sort (see Figure 12).

Fig. 12

Board member perceptions of oversight versus operations

QUESTION	OPTION 1	OPTION 2
<p>While you may agree with both statements, please indicate the statement that most closely resembles your beliefs.</p> <p>N=324</p>	<p>As a board member, I must make sure that day-to-day operations run smoothly at my school.</p>  <p>3%</p>	<p>As a board member, I must make sure that my school has the right long-term strategy.</p>  <p>96%</p>
<p>Hypothetically, you are attending a school event and speaking informally with a few parents. They express some concerns about their children's classroom teacher, in particular that the teacher has been sending their children to the office for minor class disruptions. The parents are concerned that their children are missing out on instructional time and think the teacher should do more to address behavior within the classroom. As a board member, what would be your first step?*</p> <p>*6% selected "don't know"</p> <p>N=307</p>	<p>Approach the teacher, relay the parents' complaints, and request that he or she describe his or her approach to classroom management.</p>  <p>2%</p>	<p>Notify the school leader of the complaints and request a report at the next board meeting on discipline trends at the school.</p>  <p>93%</p>

Board role in relationship to the Public School Charter Board

Despite a strong understanding of their proper role in school operations, many board members demonstrated misunderstanding about their role in relation to the DC PCSB. Charter school boards in the District are ultimately accountable to that body for the quality of their schools. The DC PCSB has authority to approve, monitor, and evaluate charters, and if schools persistently fall short, it can revoke or decline to renew their contracts.

We listed six responsibilities and asked board members to select all that apply to the DC PCSB (see Table 2). Included in the list were four answers considered correct and two that were incorrect. The incorrect answers were intended to indicate responsibilities that should be owned by the schools' own board (such as holding the school leader accountable) or where the DC PCSB would be overstepping its role as an authorizer (for example, assisting in the operation of the school).

Table 2. Percent of board members indicating that DC PCSB has that responsibility*

CORRECT		INCORRECT	
Hold the board accountable for the performance of the school	65%	Hold the school leader (or network leader) accountable for the performance of the school	47%
Ensure my school is in compliance with rules and regulations	90%	Assist the school leader (or network leader) in the operation of the school	27%
Provide transparency to D.C. stakeholders about the quality of charter schools	86%	* Respondents could select multiple responsibilities.	
Close underperforming schools	68%		

A significant number of board members selected incorrect answers. One in four indicated that the DC PCSB is responsible for assisting the school leader in the operation of the school. Nearly half indicated that it is the DC PCSB’s responsibility to hold the school leader (versus board) accountable for school performance. Moreover, a relatively low percentage selected correct answers: only 65 percent indicated that the DC PCSB is responsible for holding the school’s board accountable for its performance, and one-third said it is not the DC PCSB’s responsibility to close underperforming schools.

There were no statistically significant differences in incorrect or correct answers by school quality. This may suggest widespread misunderstanding of where the school’s (and board’s) responsibilities end and where those of the DC PCSB begin. It may also reflect that board members’ observations of the DC PCSB’s role in practice deviates from its role by design, either because the authorizer can be very involved in school operations or because its staff become valuable resources to school leaders.

Discussion

There are several possible explanations for the *lack* of relationships between school quality and board composition, member beliefs, boards’ financial practices, and boards’ understanding of their role.

First and foremost, it is likely that D.C.’s charter sector is not representative of the national charter sector. For instance, it is possible that the range of school performance in D.C. is narrowed by the DC PCSB’s willingness to close weak schools or that its rigorous application-review process weeds out charter applicants that do not show capacity to implement the commonly accepted practices we evaluate here. It’s also possible that charter-support organizations have effectively fostered some of these practices in most D.C. boards. All would have the effect of homogenizing our sample and could prevent varied relationships from emerging.

Alternatively, it’s possible that such characteristics and practices are simply unrelated to school quality.

● Opportunities for future research

Our findings suggest many fruitful avenues for additional research. First and foremost, more analysis is needed to explore possible causalities in the relationships identified here. Do knowledgeable charter school board members positively influence school quality? Does using staff-satisfaction data in school-leader evaluations cause leaders to pay closer attention to retaining effective teachers, thus contributing to student growth?

Second, do our D.C. findings resemble those for charter school boards in other cities and states? If charters in D.C. have a narrower range in quality, how might our results look different in a charter sector that is struggling or simply displays greater variability? Research in a jurisdiction with a much wider distribution of school performance could shed more light.

Third, we have not used our data to assess potential differences between boards that govern independently operated schools and those that have teamed up with external charter-management organizations (CMOs), nor do existing data allow us to examine how board practices may differ relative to the terms of management agreements between boards and CMOs. Although outside the scope of our research questions here and limited by our sample size, these types of analyses could help shed light on substantive differences in the practices of boards that do (or don't) work with a CMO.

Finally, do charter school boards alter their behavior in response to the threat of school closure? There is a hint in our data that this occurs (see “Are low-quality schools responding to pressure?” on page 35). Research that compares board practices before or after a change in accountability status (for example, moving from Tier 1 to Tier 2, Tier 2 to Tier 3, or in reverse) could help shed light on how boards respond to evidence of declining quality and whether certain board behaviors correlate to schools that are able to turn things around.

Whether and how board characteristics and practices affect school quality are complex but important questions. Researchers have attempted for decades to quantify the effects of teachers on student achievement. They've also struggled to gauge the effects of school leaders on achievement. Assessing the potential effects of charter school boards is thornier still, but given the singular role of boards in the charter sector, it's an exceptionally important undertaking.

This study is one of the first to use quantitative data to identify relationships between charter school board characteristics and practices and school quality. Our findings are not causal, nor do they necessarily apply outside of Washington, D.C.; thus, with humility, we offer a few considerations.

We find that board members of high-quality schools are more likely to be knowledgeable about their schools. Charter advocates and other sector leaders may want to pay particular attention to board members' knowledge, either by recruiting individuals who demonstrate the interest and ability to be informed and engaged or by helping school leaders effectively and consistently communicate key information about the school.

Board members of high-quality schools are also more likely to conduct formal annual evaluations of their school leaders and to use staff-satisfaction data as one component in such evaluations. Evaluating the school leader is widely thought to be one of any governing board's most important functions, and our analysis lends some credence to this view. Board members, support organizations, and others may consider investing in boards' capacity to fulfill this responsibility with relevant data, measures, and goals.

In charting their own course for continuous improvement, board members may also find it useful to imitate the boards of high-quality schools by meeting somewhat more often, participating in training, and engaging in school strategic-planning processes.

Of course, it is striking that a number of characteristics and practices commonly thought to affect school quality do *not* appear to do so, including board composition, member beliefs, and understanding of their governance role. Additionally, there does not appear to be a link between school quality and board practices relative to school finance. The charter sector invests a great deal of time, energy, and funding based on the assumption that such characteristics and practices matter. Is it for naught? Of course not. It's just as likely that we don't see linkages because the efforts to promote these characteristics and practices have yielded a homogeneous set of board-member practices in the District of Columbia.

This study serves as a reminder of how much we still do not know. Policymakers, in particular, should take heed and refrain from writing specific board characteristics or practices into rigid laws or regulations. As the charter sector continues to grow, policymakers and authorizers will likely face increasing questions about how charter school boards should look and function. We know more about charter school governance than we did when charter schools first

launched twenty-five years ago, but we cannot say with any certainty what works, let alone what might work across different schools and contexts.

Charter school boards will play an important role in educating the next generation of American children, and they merit greater attention from public officials, charter-sector leaders, and analysts. While we seek to better understand and improve them, we also should not forget that charter school boards represent a phenomenon unique to American democracy in which voluntarism plays a significant role in cultivating civil society and shaping the common good.

Survey design and administration

Our thirty-seven-item survey asked board members about themselves, their motivations and experiences serving on a board, and how their boards operate to fulfill their responsibilities, among other areas.⁵⁶

Prior to launching the survey, we sought feedback from veteran leaders of the charter sector who have played critical roles in supporting and assessing boards, and we piloted the instrument with a handful of charter school board members outside the District. This feedback resulted in a number of revisions before the survey was administered.

In early 2016, we distributed the final survey to all 639 members of sixty-two charter school boards, overseeing more than one hundred schools in Washington, D.C. To identify board members, we requested 2015–16 board rosters from the DC PCSB via the Freedom of Information Act in the fall of 2015. The DC PCSB responded with the names of all charter school board members, and we searched online to identify contact information for each school's board chair, board members, and school leader.

We distributed a web-based survey link to board members via email and also benefited from the assistance of the DC PCSB, Charter Board Partners, and Friends of Choice in Urban Schools (FOCUS) in circulating the survey request and link to their own curated email lists. Board members completed the survey on a secure site and in a confidential manner.⁵⁷

We received 325 responses during an eleven-week window, for a robust final response rate of 51 percent.⁵⁸ This sample represents members of 94 percent (fifty-eight out of sixty-two) of charter school boards in D.C., including fifty board chairs and forty-eight parent representatives.⁵⁹ The average response rate by board was 50 percent, while participation between boards varied from 8 percent (one response out of twelve members) in one case to 100 percent in several others. We encouraged participation in the survey by rewarding the ten boards with the highest response rates with \$150 donations to their schools.

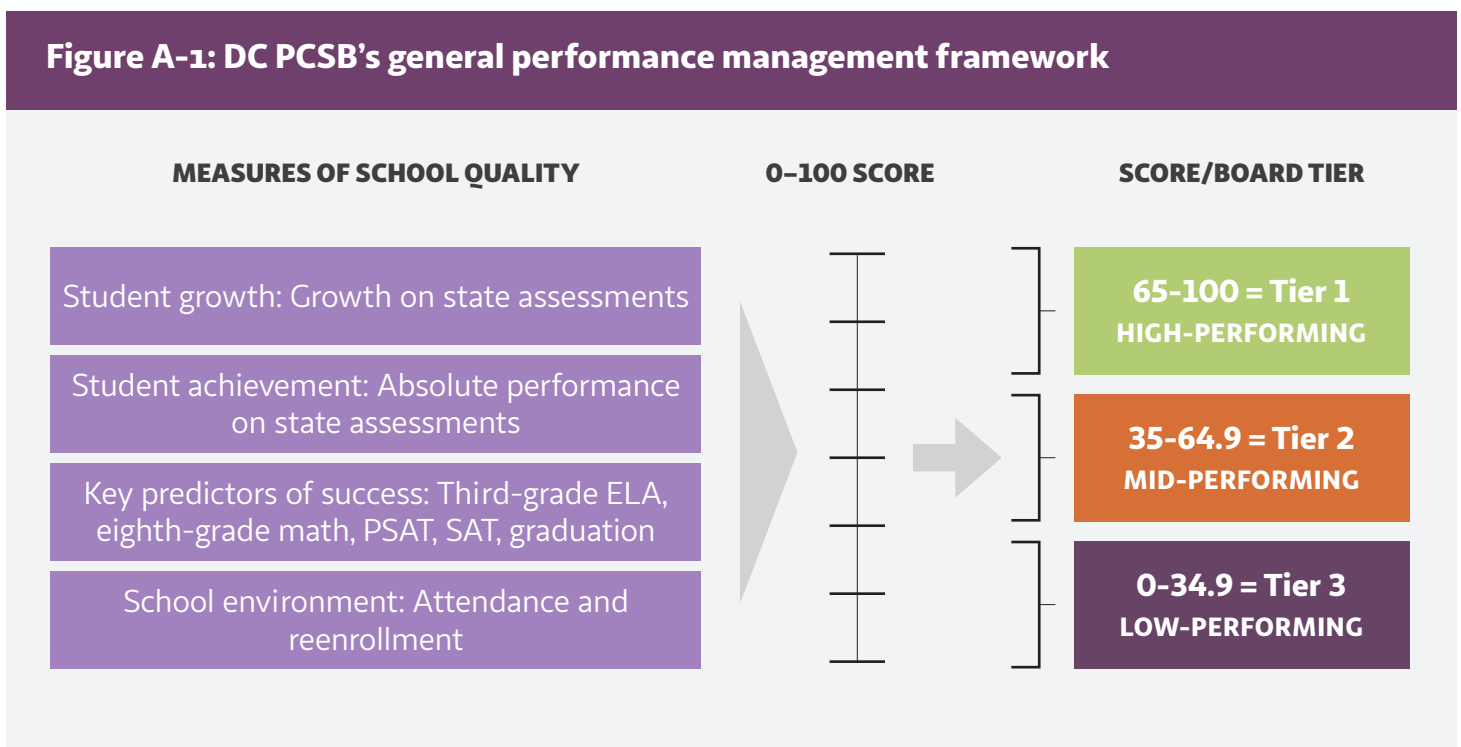
School-quality data

To identify associations between board practices and school quality, we differentiated survey responses using school-level data from the DC PCSB. First, we used schools' overall tier ratings on the PCSB's PMF as a composite measure of school quality. Second, we used reenrollment rates (which are also among the measures used in tier ratings) as a separate indicator of school quality and, specifically, of how parents perceive school quality (more on each below).⁶⁰

The DC PCSB uses annual tier ratings to assess and monitor charter school performance. Schools are rated in three tiers: Tier 1 (high-performing), Tier 2 (mid-performing), and Tier 3

(low-performing).⁶¹ Schools in Tier 3 are often subject to increased monitoring from the DC PCSB and may be subject to closure. With few exceptions, tier ratings used here are from the 2013–14 school year; the DC PCSB did not issue tier ratings for most schools for the 2014–15 school year, due to the city’s transition to the new Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) assessments.

For most schools, the tier rating is determined by a score of zero to one hundred. The PMF designates thirty-five points for student growth, twenty-five for student achievement, ten for gateway indicators that predict students’ future educational success (such as PSAT and SAT scores), and thirty points for school-environment factors such as attendance and reenrollment (see Figure A-1).⁶² One complication with using tier ratings as a school-quality indicator is that some boards oversee more than one school. In these cases, such as KIPP D.C. and Friendship Public Schools, we averaged the scores of each of the schools overseen by the board to create a single, network-level measure of school quality.⁶³



Eight charter schools that we surveyed serve a dropout-recovery and adult-education population. These schools serve students over the age of sixteen and help them “advance their postsecondary education, academic skills, and employability,” often by helping them complete their General Education Development (GED) tests or career and technical certifications.⁶⁴ The DC PCSB has developed a separate PMF for these schools, since they serve a unique student body and have missions different from other charters.

The Adult PMF uses a different set of measures (that is, GED completion rates, rather than eighth-grade math proficiency) to yield a tier rating (see Figure A-2). The Adult PMF also uses sixty-five points and thirty-five points as tier cutoffs, and each measure is weighted equally.⁶⁵ Because scores for these charters do not rely on PARCC assessments, these schools’ ratings are from the 2014–15 school year.

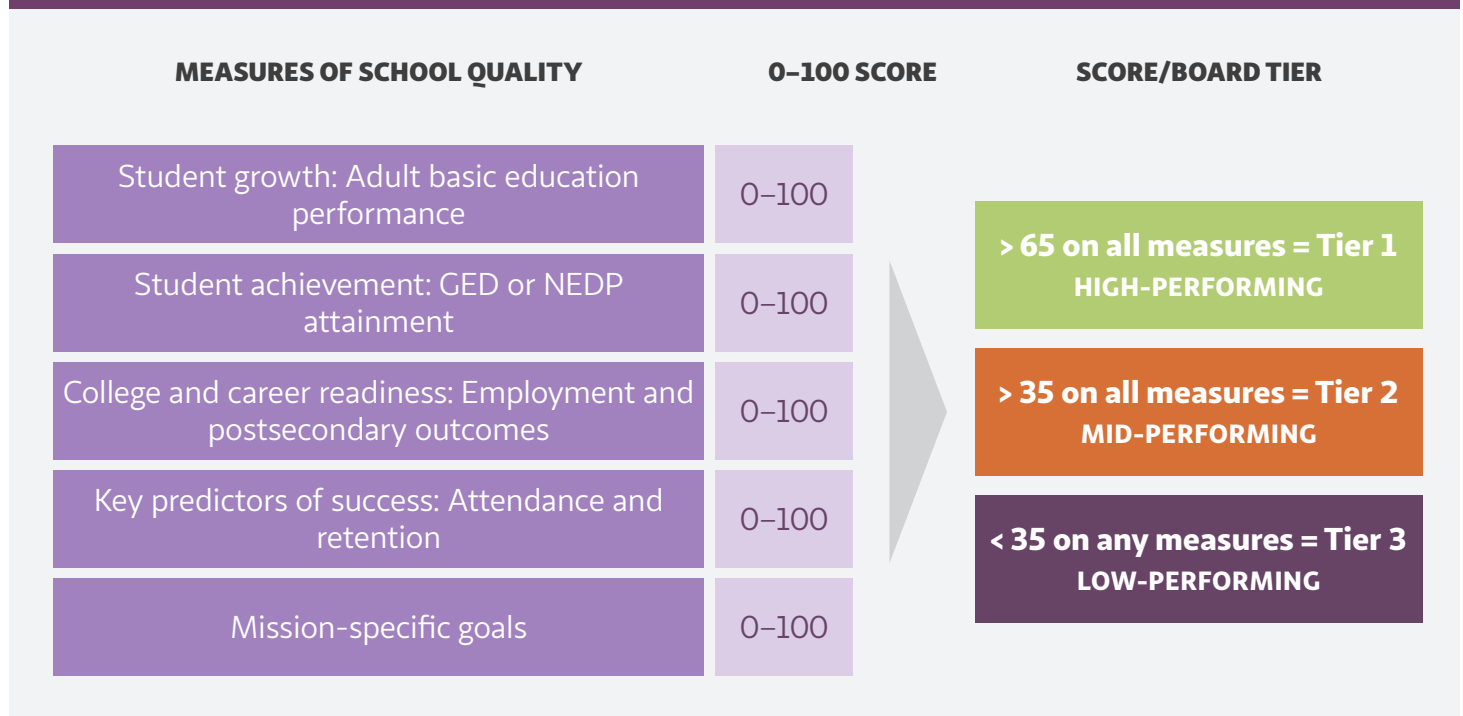
We also used each school’s reenrollment rate as a second measure of school quality. In a choice-based system, a parent’s decision to reenroll her child is a reflection of her positive view of the school (otherwise, families could choose to withdraw).

We understand that a mix of factors is apt to inform parental decisions, not simply school quality gauged by academic performance. For instance, a survey of charter school parents in New Orleans revealed that, alongside location and academic quality, parents value extracurricular activities and extended school days.⁶⁶ In a survey of students who participate in voucher programs in Indiana, the authors find that parents’ decisions often incorporate a school’s learning environment, class size, safety, and the responsiveness of teachers and administrators.⁶⁷ Reenrollment is therefore a useful composite indicator of the many observable and unobservable factors that inform how parents assess school quality.

Every year, the DC PCSB determines a charter school’s final enrollment in early October, commonly referred to as “count day.” To determine reenrollment rates, the DC PCSB identifies the number of students currently enrolled who were also enrolled in the same school on count day the previous year. Importantly, the denominator excludes students who have graduated from the school and those who have moved out of the district. In short, reenrollment rates reflect the proportion of students who are eligible to remain at their school and choose to do so.

For boards that oversee multiple schools, we used the same strategy described for tier data and averaged the reenrollment rates to create a single, network-level reenrollment rate. We note in the text any instances in which we use different samples than those described here.

Figure A-2: DC PCSB’s adult-education performance management framework

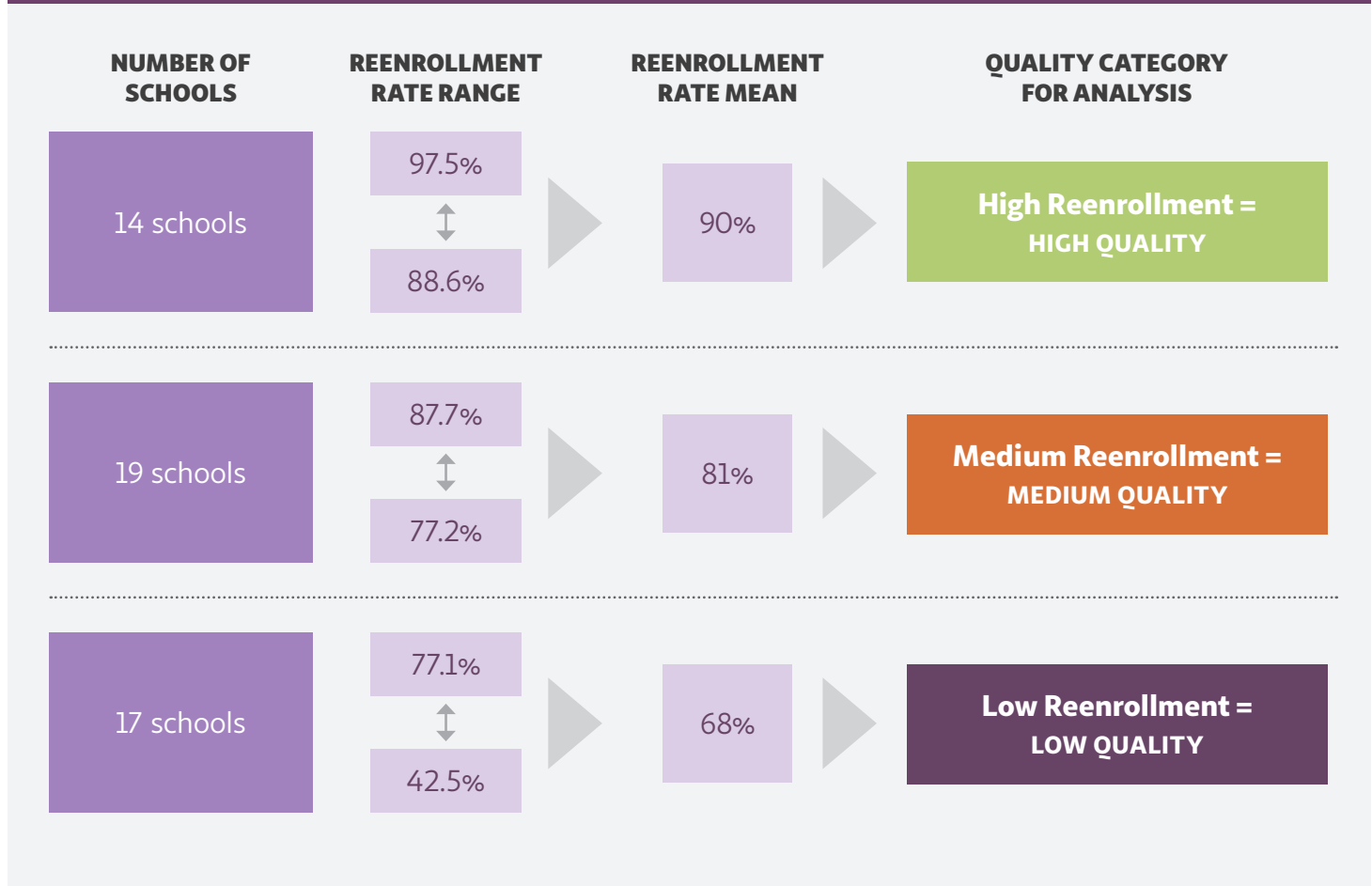


Sampling methods

Not all charter schools in D.C. currently have tier ratings from the DC PCSB because some have not been open long enough and others only serve pre-K–2 students.⁶⁸ To analyze the relationship between school board characteristics and practices and school quality, we narrowed our sample to 208 respondents, including only those respondents from schools with tier ratings. Including ratings from the general PMF and the Adult PMF, about 61 percent of D.C.'s charter school boards currently oversee at least one school with a tier rating. That equates to thirty-eight out of sixty-two schools, comprising eleven Tier 1 schools, twenty-two Tier 2 schools, and five Tier 3 schools.

Reenrollment rates are an advantageous additional measure of school quality because the DC PCSB reported reenrollment rates during the PARCC transition year. As a result, more charter schools have reenrollment rates than have tier data, so our analysis here yields a larger sample of 288 respondents (covering a total of fifty schools).

Figure A-3: Reenrollment rate as a measure of school quality



To analyze the reenrollment data, we divided reenrollment rate ranges into thirds. The top third of schools had a mean reenrollment rate of 90 percent and included fourteen schools and 103 respondents. The middle third had a mean reenrollment rate of 81 percent and included nineteen schools and ninety respondents. The bottom third had a mean reenrollment rate of 68 percent and included seventeen schools and ninety-five respondents (see Figure A-3). The differences in reenrollment rates across groups were statistically significant, suggesting that our approach to dividing the sample reasonably identified distinct groups for comparison.

Appendix B summarizes results from the full sample of 325 respondents, regardless of whether their school(s) had a tier score or reenrollment data. This information provides a broad sense of board compositions, priorities, and practices across the city.

Data analyses

We linked original survey data regarding the characteristics and reported practices of charter school board members to school-quality data from the DC PCSB and conducted a series of chi-square analyses to identify relationships between them. Data from some survey items (for example, estimates of the percentage of students with special needs within a school) were continuous. For these few items, we used ANOVA to determine whether responses varied significantly between tiers or by reenrollment.

Complete Survey Data

Question 1. How long have you served on the board?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
2 years or less	162	49.8
3–4 years	83	25.5
5–6 years	33	10.2
7–8 years	17	5.2
9–10 years	9	2.8
More than 10 years	21	6.5
Total	325	100

Question 2. Are you currently the board president or chair?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	50	15.4
No	275	84.6
Total	325	100

Question 3. Are you the parent or guardian of children in pre-K through 12th grade?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
No, I am not the parent or guardian of a child in pre-K through 12th grade	202	62.2
Yes, my children attend the same charter school (or charter school network) for which I serve on the board	48	14.8
Yes, my children attend a different charter school	11	3.4
Yes, my children attend a district school	13	4.0
Yes, my children attend a private school	29	8.9
Other	22	6.8
Total	325	100

Question 4. How did you first become aware of the opportunity to serve on this board? Select all that apply.		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
I am the parent or guardian of a child in this school (or school network)	46	14.2
Personal relationship with another board member	91	28.0
Personal relationship with school leader or staff member(s)	74	22.8
I was matched to this school by Charter Board Partners	57	17.5
Professional network	66	20.3
Through online resources (for example, LinkedIn, Idealist)	3	0.9
Other	52	16.0

Question 5. Please select the two most important factors in your decision to serve on a charter school board.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Give back to the D.C. community	168	51.7
Desire to support the school leader	53	16.3
Professional development and/or networking opportunities	42	12.9
Desire to apply own experience and expertise to education reform	131	40.3
Inspired by the school's specific mission	182	56.0
Belief in providing families with school choice	49	15.1
Other	25	7.7
Total	650	200.0

Question 6. The following statements describe some common perspectives on the core goals of a quality education. Please drag and drop the following statements into the order of their importance to you, so that "1" is the most important.

Answer choices	Rank 1		Rank 2		Rank 3		Rank 4		Rank 5	
	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent	Freq.	Percent
Providing a safe and stable learning environment	113	34.8	101	31.1	48	14.8	33	10.2	30	9.2
Developing students' social-emotional skills such as perseverance and self-awareness	15	4.6	107	32.9	135	41.5	48	14.8	20	6.2
Developing students' ability to understand and relate to those from diverse backgrounds	5	1.5	19	5.8	52	16.0	141	43.4	108	33.2
Ensuring students achieve strong academic outcomes	176	54.2	70	21.5	46	14.2	17	5.2	16	4.9
Encouraging students to be engaged members of their community	16	4.9	28	8.6	44	13.5	86	26.5	151	46.5
Total	325	100	325	99.9	325	100	325	100	325	100

Question 7. While you may agree with both statements below, please indicate the statement that most closely resembles your beliefs.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
A student's life circumstances are outside the control of the school, and we can't let those circumstances impede that student's academic progress.	184	56.6
A student's life circumstances are outside the control of the school, and we must understand that those circumstances may impede that student's academic progress.	141	43.4
Total	325	100

Question 8. While you may agree with both statements below, please indicate the statement that most closely resembles your beliefs.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
The teacher and/or school are ultimately responsible for a student's academic growth.	210	64.6
There is only so much a teacher and/or school can do to support a student's academic growth.	111	34.2
Missing	4	1.2
Total	325	100

Question 9. While you may agree with both statements below, please indicate the statement that most closely resembles your beliefs.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
As a board member, I must make sure that day-to-day operations run smoothly at my school.	11	3.4
As a board member, I must make sure that my school has the right long-term strategy.	313	96.3
Missing	1	0.3
Total	325	100

Question 10. Which of the following do you consider to be the three most important responsibilities of your board?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
To ensure public funding is used appropriately	189	58.2
To hold the school leader (or network leader) accountable	267	82.2
To build relationships with the community	82	25.2
To raise funds for the school	115	35.4
To represent the school to the D.C. Public Charter School Board and other city leaders	59	18.2
To advocate on behalf of charter schools in D.C.	38	11.7
To help students achieve their academic goals	195	60.0
Other	30	9.2
Total	975	300

Question 11. Are you expected to raise funds (through personal donations or fundraising) for your school?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	251	77.2
No	59	18.2
Don't know	15	4.6
Total	325	100

Question 12. How often does your full board meet?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
More than monthly	1	0.3
Monthly	167	51.4
Every six weeks	16	4.9
Every other month	73	22.5
Quarterly	67	20.6
Twice a year	1	0.3
Annually	0	0
Total	325	100

Question 13. On average, how many hours do you spend per month on board work (including meeting time)? Click the slider below and move it to the left or right to indicate your answer.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
1	5	1.5
2	32	9.8
3	33	10.2
4	62	19.1
5	15	4.6
6	39	12.0
7	7	2.2
8	25	7.7
9	4	1.2
10	35	10.8
11	2	0.6
12	18	5.5
13	1	0.3
14	6	1.8
15	2	0.6
16	3	0.9
20	8	2.5
Missing	28	8.6
Total	325	100

Question 14. Considering the time you spend on board work, please select the three activities that take up the greatest amount of that time.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Preparing for and attending board and/or committee meetings	307	94.5
Advising the school leader (or network leader)	193	59.4
Evaluating the school leader (or network leader)	78	24.0
Participating in board training	38	11.7
Raising funds	56	17.2
Reaching out to parents or community	50	15.4
Attending or participating in school events	156	48.0
Representing the school to the D.C. Public Charter School Board or other city leaders	36	11.1
Other	61	18.8
Total	975	300

Question 15. Hypothetically, you are attending a school event and speaking informally with a few parents. They express some concerns about their children's classroom teacher, in particular that the teacher has been sending their children to the office for minor class disruptions. The parents are concerned that their children are missing out on instructional time and think the teacher should do more to address behavior within the classroom. As a board member, what would be your first step?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Approach the teacher, relay the parents' complaints, and request that she describe his or her approach to classroom management.	6	1.8
Notify the school leader of the complaints and request a report at the next board meeting on discipline trends at the school.	301	92.6
Not sure	18	5.5
Total	325	100

Question 16. Within the past three years, have you received board training or support for any of the following areas?

Answer choices	Have had sufficient training/support		Have had training/support but want more		Have not had training/support but would like to		Have not had training/support and don't want/need it		Don't Know		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Board roles and responsibilities	181	55.7	81	24.9	39	12.0	13	4.0	11	3.4	325	100
Student performance and assessment data	149	45.8	96	29.5	47	14.5	22	6.8	11	3.4	325	100
Developing and approving the budget	156	48.0	61	18.8	63	19.4	33	10.2	12	3.7	325	100
Legal and policy issues	115	35.4	80	24.6	96	29.5	21	6.5	13	4.0	325	100
Strategic planning	137	42.2	100	30.8	51	15.7	23	7.1	14	4.3	325	100
Community/parent engagement	92	28.3	79	24.3	94	28.9	36	11.1	24	7.4	325	100

Question 17. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

Answer choices	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Don't know		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Over the past year, the board used data to guide decision-making	12	3.7	6	1.8	23	7.1	106	32.6	169	52.0	9	2.8	325	100
Most of my fellow board members are disengaged	134	41.2	143	44.0	22	6.8	13	4.0	4	1.2	9	2.8	325	100
My board assesses our own performance every year	15	4.6	59	18.2	49	15.1	104	32.0	54	16.6	44	13.5	325	100
My board is effective	6	1.8	7	2.2	31	9.5	156	48.0	111	34.2	14	4.3	325	100

Question 18. Does your board have committees responsible for specific functions (for example, financial oversight, facilities management)?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	310	95.4
No	11	3.4
Don't know	4	1.2
Total	325	100

Question 19. Please indicate below whether each responsibility is delegated to a committee or shared by the full board. (Note: These are not necessarily the names of the committees, and some committees may do more than one function.)

Answer choices	Responsibility delegated to a committee		Responsibility shared by the full board		Don't know		Missing		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Board recruitment	170	52.3	118	36.3	22	6.8	15	4.6	325	100
Development or fundraising	166	51.1	131	40.3	13	4.0	15	4.6	325	100
Financial oversight	217	66.8	88	27.1	5	1.5	15	4.6	325	100
Facilities management	163	50.2	84	25.8	63	19.4	15	4.6	325	100
School-leader (or network-leader) evaluation	104	32.0	183	56.3	23	7.1	15	4.6	325	100
Board training and self-evaluation	71	21.8	160	49.2	79	24.3	15	4.6	325	100
Strategic planning	75	23.1	213	65.5	22	6.8	15	4.6	325	100
Academics and student performance	179	55.1	117	36.0	14	4.3	15	4.6	325	100
Student recruitment and marketing	77	23.7	109	33.5	124	38.2	15	4.6	325	100

Question 20. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: My board has a committee structure in place, but it is often ineffective.

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Strongly agree	97	29.8
Agree	117	36.0
Neither agree nor disagree	42	12.9
Disagree	41	12.6
Strongly disagree	8	2.5
Don't know	5	1.5
Missing	15	4.6
Total	325	100

Question 21. How engaged was your board in developing the school's strategic plan?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
My school does not have a strategic plan	20	6.2
Very engaged	176	54.2
Somewhat engaged	70	21.5
Not engaged	17	5.2
Not sure	42	12.9
Total	325	100

Question 22. Does the board formally evaluate the school leader (or network leader) every year?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	253	77.8
No	32	9.8
Don't know	40	12.3
Total	325	100

Question 23. Which factors or data sources below does the board consider when formally evaluating the performance of the school leader (or network leader)? Select all that apply.

Answer choices	Does consider		Does not consider		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Student academic achievement	91	28.0	234	72.0	325	100
Student enrollment and retention	116	35.7	209	64.3	325	100
Staff satisfaction	134	41.2	191	58.8	325	100
Parent satisfaction	176	54.2	149	45.8	325	100
Management of school finances	106	32.6	219	67.4	325	100
Compliance with relevant rules and regulations	124	38.2	201	61.8	325	100
Other	43	13.2	282	86.8	325	100

Question 24. About how frequently does your board review the following information?														
Answer choices	Monthly		Quarterly		Annually		As needed		Does not review this information		Don't Know		Total	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Student-academic-achievement data	91	28.0	154	47.4	21	6.5	41	12.6	1	0.3	17	5.2	325	100
Student-enrollment and student-retention data	96	29.5	116	35.7	49	15.1	50	15.4	0	0.0	14	4.3	325	100
Staff-satisfaction data	14	4.3	38	11.7	99	30.5	65	20.0	50	15.4	59	18.2	325	100
Parent-satisfaction data	13	4.0	24	7.4	85	26.2	70	21.5	68	20.9	65	20.0	325	100
School financial data	184	56.6	106	32.6	10	3.1	15	4.6	1	0.3	9	2.8	325	100
Compliance data	67	20.6	74	22.8	32	9.8	88	27.1	14	4.3	50	15.4	325	100

Question 25. Please select all that apply. The D.C. Public Charter School Board's role is to:		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Hold the school leader (or network leader) accountable for the performance of the school	154	47.4
Ensure my school is in compliance with rules and regulations	292	89.8
Hold the board accountable for the performance of the school	212	65.2
Provide transparency to D.C. stakeholders about the quality of charter schools	280	86.2
Close underperforming schools	220	67.7
Assist the school leader (or network leader) in the operation of the school	88	27.1

Question 26. In the fall of each year, the D.C. Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) assigns schools to a tier based on school-performance data. To which tier did the DC PCSB assign your school this past fall?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Tier 1 (high-performing)	96	29.5
Tier 2 (mid-performing)	79	24.3
Tier 3 (low-performing)	17	5.2
My school has multiple campuses with multiple ratings	24	7.4
My school has not been rated	67	20.6
Don't know	36	11.1
Missing	6	1.8
Total	325	100

Question 27. Please estimate the following metrics for your school's student population during the 2014–15 school year. If your board oversees multiple campuses, please estimate the average across all campuses. Click on the sliders below and move it to the left or right to indicate your answer.

Answer choices	What percentage of the student body is eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (the federal measure for identifying low-income students)?		What percentage of the student body at your school has disabilities or special needs?		What percentage of the student body at your school is English-language learners?	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
0	2	0.6	3	0.9	23	7.1
1	1	0.3	0	0	17	5.2
2	0	0	1	0.3	10	3.1
3	0	0	1	0.3	5	1.5
4	0	0	1	0.3	3	0.9
5	0	0	9	2.8	11	3.4
6	0	0	5	1.5	2	0.6
7	0	0	2	0.6	3	0.9
8	0	0	5	1.5	0	0
9	0	0	6	1.8	6	1.8
10	3	0.9	28	8.6	8	2.5
11	0	0	6	1.8	2	0.6
12	2	0.6	7	2.2	3	0.9
13	0	0	5	1.5	2	0.6
14	0	0	6	1.8	2	0.6
15	3	0.9	14	4.3	6	1.8
16	1	0.3	6	1.8	4	1.2
17	0	0	10	3.1	2	0.6
18	2	0.6	3	0.9	3	0.9
19	4	1.2	5	1.5	5	1.5
20	6	1.8	23	7.1	12	3.7
21	2	0.6	5	1.5	3	0.9
22	0	0	7	2.2	2	0.6
23	1	0.3	4	1.2	1	0.3
24	2	0.6	2	0.6	2	0.6
25	1	0.3	8	2.5	4	1.2
26	2	0.6	1	0.3	0	0
27	0	0	1	0.3	0	0
28	0	0	3	0.9	1	0.3
29	4	1.2	3	0.9	0	0
30	2	0.6	12	3.7	7	2.2
31	0	0	4	1.2	1	0.3
32	3	0.9	1	0.3	4	1.2
33	0	0	1	0.3	4	1.2

Question 27. Please estimate the following metrics for your school's student population during the 2014–15 school year. If your board oversees multiple campuses, please estimate the average across all campuses. Click on the sliders below and move it to the left or right to indicate your answer.

Answer choices	What percentage of the student body is eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (the federal measure for identifying low-income students)?		What percentage of the student body at your school has disabilities or special needs?		What percentage of the student body at your school is English-language learners?	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
34	0	0	1	0.3	0	0
35	1	0.3	2	0.6	3	0.9
36	1	0.3	1	0.3	3	0.9
37	1	0.3	1	0.3	1	0.3
38	1	0.3	2	0.6	1	0.3
39	0	0	3	0.9	0	0
40	3	0.9	2	0.6	3	0.9
41	0	0	3	0.9	1	0.3
42	0	0	1	0.3	2	0.6
43	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.3
44	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
45	0	0	0	0	0	0
46	0	0	0	0	1	0.3
47	1	0.3	1	0.3	0	0
48	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
49	0	0	0	0	0	0
50	5	1.5	2	0.6	1	0.3
51	3	0.9	1	0.3	4	1.2
52	1	0.3	0	0	2	0.6
53	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
54	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
55	4	1.2	0	0	0	0
56	1	0.3	0	0	1	0.3
57	0	0	0	0	0	0
58	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
59	0	0	0	0	0	0
60	12	3.7	3	0.9	0	0
61	2	0.6	0	0	1	0.3
62	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
63	1	0.3	0	0	1	0.3
64	0	0	1	0.3	0	0
65	3	0.9	1	0.3	0	0
66	1	0.3	1	0.3	0	0
67	2	0.6	0	0	0	0
68	2	0.6	1	0.3	0	0

Question 27. Please estimate the following metrics for your school's student population during the 2014–15 school year. If your board oversees multiple campuses, please estimate the average across all campuses. Click on the sliders below and move it to the left or right to indicate your answer.

Answer choices	What percentage of the student body is eligible for free or reduced-priced lunch (the federal measure for identifying low-income students)?		What percentage of the student body at your school has disabilities or special needs?		What percentage of the student body at your school is English-language learners?	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
69	0	0	1	0.3	1	0.3
70	9	2.8	2	0.6	0	0
71	7	2.2	0	0	3	0.9
72	1	0.3	1	0.3	1	0.3
73	0	0	0	0	0	0
74	2	0.6	0	0	1	0.3
75	13	4.0	2	0.6	0	0
76	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
77	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
78	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
79	3	0.9	0	0	1	0.3
80	14	4.3	3	0.9	2	0.6
81	6	1.8	0	0	2	0.6
82	2	0.6	0	0	0	0
83	0	0	0	0	1	0.3
84	6	1.8	0	0	0	0
85	8	2.5	0	0	4	1.2
86	2	0.6	0	0	1	0.3
87	2	0.6	0	0	0	0
88	3	0.9	0	0	0	0
89	3	0.9	0	0	0	0
90	14	4.3	0	0	3	0.9
91	10	3.1	0	0	0	0
92	5	1.5	0	0	1	0.3
93	1	0.3	0	0	1	0.3
94	1	0.3	0	0	0	0
95	4	1.2	0	0	0	0
96	2	0.6	0	0	0	0
97	2	0.6	0	0	0	0
98	2	0.6	0	0	0	0
99	3	0.9	0	0	1	0.3
100	28	8.6	1	0.3	9	2.8
Don't know	77	23.7	89	27.4	109	33.5
Total	325	100	325	100	325	100

Question 28. Did your school finish the 2014–15 fiscal year with a budget deficit?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	23	7.1
No	276	84.9
Don't know	20	6.2
Missing	6	1.8
Total	325	100

Question 29. (Optional) Hypothetically, whether or not you have school-aged children, would you enroll your own children in your school?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	161	49.5
Maybe	49	15.1
No	62	19.1
N/A (my child already attends this school)	29	8.9
Missing	24	7.4
Total	325	100

Question 30. What is your age?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
30 or under	7	2.2
31–40	92	28.3
41–50	101	31.1
51--60	52	16.0
61 or over	55	16.9
Decline to answer	9	2.8
Missing	9	2.8
Total	325	100

Question 31. What is your gender?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Female	185	56.9
Male	121	37.2
Decline to answer	10	3.1
Missing	9	2.8
Total	325	100

Question 32. What is your race/ethnicity? Select all that apply.		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
White	156	48.0
Black/African American	98	30.2
Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin	16	4.9
American Indian/Alaskan Native	1	0.3
Asian	11	3.4
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	1	0.3
Other	14	4.3
Decline to answer	15	4.6
Missing	13	4.0
Total	325	100

Question 33. What is the highest level of education you have attained?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Some high school, no degree	0	0
High school graduate (or equivalent)	1	0.3
Some college, no degree	7	2.2
Associate's degree	3	0.9
Bachelor's degree	53	16.3
Advanced degree	246	75.7
Decline to answer	6	1.8
Missing	9	2.8
Total	325	100

Question 34. In which field is your current occupation? If retired, what was your most recent prior occupation?		
Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Arts	3	0.9
Business or commerce	29	8.9
Communications, media, or public relations	14	4.3
Consulting	21	6.5
Education	95	29.2
Energy or utilities	1	0.3
Financial services	13	4.0
Food services	1	0.3
Government	27	8.3
Healthcare or medicine	14	4.3
Legal services	35	10.8
Nonprofit	32	9.8
Real estate	8	2.5
Retail	0	0

Question 34. In which field is your current occupation? If retired, what was your most recent prior occupation?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Technology	11	3.4
Other	12	3.7
Missing	9	2.8
Total	325	100

Question 35. Are you a current or former educator (for example, a teacher or school leader)?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Yes	74	22.8
No	21	6.5
Missing	230	70.8
Total	325	100

Question 36. What is your annual household income?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Less than \$24,999	1	0.3
\$25,000–\$49,999	4	1.2
\$50,000–\$99,999	26	8.0
\$100,000–\$200,000	97	29.8
More than \$200,000	134	41.2
Decline to answer	54	16.6
Missing	9	2.8
Total	325	100

Question 37. What is your general political philosophy?

Answer choices	Frequency	Percent
Liberal	148	45.5
Moderate	90	27.7
Conservative	18	5.5
Other	8	2.5
Decline to answer	52	16.0
Missing	9	2.8
Total	325	100

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1. One notable exception is the work conducted by Michael Ford at the University of Wisconsin on charter and traditional board governance.
2. Both groups also have more than a quarter of members whose current or former occupation is education (27–30 percent).
3. Russell Gersten, et al., *Summary of research on the effectiveness of math professional development approaches*, REL 2014–010 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast), <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=391>.
4. Caution is required when parsing these comparisons. Our previous reports on elected school boards, while national, oversampled urban districts, preventing representative claims. The current report is on a single, distinctive charter sector in the nation's capital.
5. Minnesota's charter school law requires charter school board members to be elected by the charter school community. Minnesota Statute, Chapter 124E, Section 124E.07, <https://www.revisor.leg.state.mn.us/statutes/?id=124E.07>.
6. Nancy Walser, *The Essential School Board Book* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2009).
7. Frederick M. Hess and Olivia Meeks, *Governance in the Accountability Era: School Boards Circa 2010* (Washington, D.C.: National School Boards Association, Thomas B. Fordham Institute, and Iowa School Boards Foundation, 2010), table 14, <https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/HessFeb2011.pdf>.
8. Arnold F. Shober and Michael T. Hartney, *Does School Board Leadership Matter?* (Washington, D.C.: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2014), 17, <http://edex.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/publication/pdfs/Does-School-Board-Leadership-Matter-FINAL.pdf>.
9. Michael R. Ford and Douglas M. Ihrke, "Do School Board Governance Best Practices Improve District Performance? Testing the Key Work of School Boards in Wisconsin," *International Journal of Public Administration* 39, no. 2: 87–94, doi:10.1080/01900692.2014.982293.
10. Michael R. Ford and Douglas M. Ihrke, "Board Conflict and Public Performance on Urban and Non-Urban Boards: Evidence from a National Sample of School Board Members," *Journal of Urban Affairs* (2016): 1–15, doi:10.1111/juaf.12315, and Jason A. Grissom, "Is Discord Detrimental? Using Institutional Variation to Identify the Impact of Public Governing Board Conflict on Outcomes," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 24 (2012): 289–315, doi:10.1093/jopart/muso42.
11. Thomas L. Alsbury, "School Board Politics and Student Achievement," in *The Future of School Board Governance*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008), 247–72.

12. Iowa Association of School Boards, "The Lighthouse Inquiry: School Board/Superintendent Team Behaviors in School Districts with Extreme Differences in Student Achievement," (paper presented at the American Educational Research Association 2001 Annual Meeting, April 10–14, 2001), <http://connecticutlighthouse.org/Reports/Lighthouse%20Inquiry.pdf>.
13. Ivan J. Lorentzen, "The Relationship Between School Board Governance and Student Achievement" (dissertation, University of Montana, 2013), <http://scholarworks.umt.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2406&context=etd>.
14. Steven A. Peterson, "Board of Education Involvement in School Decisions and Student Achievement," *Public Administration Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 46–68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40861796>.
15. Paul A. Johnson, "School Board Governance: The Times They Are A-Changin'," *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* 15, no. 2 (2011): 83–102, doi:10.1177/1555458911413887.
16. For instance, in a 2007 Issue Brief, NACSA advised authorizers to evaluate the boards of schools in their portfolios on such criteria as whether a board has a shared definition of academic excellence, whether its members exhibit specific skills and expertise, and whether it demonstrates an understanding of its role and relationship to the school leader. Marci Cornell-Feist, *Good to Govern: Evaluating the Capacity of Charter School Founding Boards*, Authorizing Matters Issue Brief (Chicago: National Association of Charter School Authorizers, 2007), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED539287.pdf>. In 2008, the National Resource Center on Charter School Finance and Governance published a report on statutory requirements for charter school board composition and training, based on reviews of statutes and regulations and a slew of interviews with sector leaders. They examined state laws and identified pros and cons for each approach but did not recommend any one approach. See National Resource Center on Charter School Finance & Governance, *A Guide for State Policymakers: Creating and Sustaining High-Quality Charter School Governing Boards* (2008), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED536003.pdf>.
17. A 2011 doctoral dissertation by Bernita Marie Frazier at the University of Florida is also similar to our analysis. Frazier surveyed seventeen out of more than 300 charter school boards in Florida at the time. Although the results of the research provided food for thought, its validity is hampered by its small sample size. Bernita Maria Frazier, "Charter School Board Characteristics, Composition and Practices and Charter School Outcomes: An Organizational Effectiveness Approach to Evaluating and Understanding Charter Schools" (dissertation, Florida State University, 2011), <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu%3A182862>.
18. A previous study by Ford and Douglas M. Ihrke compares charter school governance practices to district governance but does not relate the findings to school quality. They find that charter school boards are less likely to prioritize public relations. They also have less conflict, less ideological diversity, and are less likely than traditional boards to leave key governance tasks to the school executive. Michael R. Ford and Douglas M. Ihrke, "A Comparison of Public and Charter School Board Governance in Three States," *Public Administration* 25, no. 4 (2015): 403–15, doi:10.1002/nml.21133.
19. Ford assesses board members' perception of internal conflict on the board, asking whether they agree that the board has high levels of cooperation or disagree that conflict often becomes personal. He also asks board members whether they engage in setting governance policies for their school, regarding academic standards, assessment, and discipline. Michael Ford and Douglas M. Ihrke, "Connecting Group Dynamics, Governance and Performance: Evidence from Minnesota Charter School Boards" (working paper, 2016).
20. Studies that focus on a single jurisdiction have limited generalizability. However, Nicholson-Crotty and Meier have shown that these single-state studies have greater internal validity. Sean Nicholson-Crotty and Kenneth J. Meier, "Size Doesn't Matter: In Defense of Single-State Studies," *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2, no. 4 (2002): 411–22, doi:10.1177/153244000200200405.

21. D.C. Public Charter School Board, *Key Facts and Background* (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Public Charter School Board, 2013), <http://www.dcpcsb.org/sites/default/files/data/images/key%20facts%20and%20background%20.pdf>.
22. Research conducted by Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes finds that D.C. charters have a significant positive impact on student outcomes. "Urban Charter Schools Impact in Washington, D.C." (presentation, Center for Research on Education Outcomes, March 2015), <http://urbancharters.stanford.edu/download/DC-impact.pptx>.
23. Numerous state charter laws, including those in Connecticut, Virginia, and Washington, D.C., require charter school boards to include parent representatives. Charter School Law, Connecticut General Statutes, Chapter 164, Section 10-66bb (d), http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/Equity/charter/charter_school_law2012.pdf; Public Charter Schools, Code of the District of Columbia, Chapter 18 § 38-1802.05, <https://beta.code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/38-1802.05.html>; and Charter School Law, Code of Virginia, § 22.1-212.6, http://www.pen.k12.va.us/instruction/charter_schools/charter_school_law_code_of_virginia.pdf.
24. State University of New York Charter Schools Institute, "Request for Proposals" (2016), 48, <http://www.newyorkcharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016-SUNY-RFP-Final.docx>; D.C. Public Charter School Board, "Application Guidelines for New Charter Schools" (2015), 40 <http://www.dcpcsb.org/sites/default/files/2014-15%20Charter%20Application%20Guidelines%20-%20Start%20Up%20-%20ore-release.pdf>; and Louisiana Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Louisiana Charter Application" (2014), 8, <http://www.louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/school-choice/2014-common-charter-application.pdf>.
25. Marci Cornell-Feist, *An Introduction to Charter Board Service: Charter Boards 101* (New Orleans, LA: New Schools for New Orleans, 2009), and Walton Family Foundation, *Expansion Grant Application* (2015).
26. "Who We Serve," Board Source, <https://www.boardsource.org/eweb/DynamicPage.aspx?Site=bds2012&WebKey=4f48faod-b122-4988-8ffc-7b2ado20981f>.
27. "About Us," Charter Board Partners, <https://charterboards.org/about>, and *Standards for Effective Charter School Governance* (Washington, D.C.: Charter Board Partners, 2015), https://charterboards.org/assets/misc/cbp_standards_1-21-15.pdf.
28. This response rate is notably higher than prior surveys of charter and traditional board members. Ford and Ihrke's survey had response rates of 18 percent from charter school board members and 22 percent from traditional school board members. Similarly, Hess and Meeks's response rate was approximately 24 percent.
29. D.C.'s charter school law requires each board to include two representatives who are parents or guardians of students currently enrolled in the school.
30. Participation between boards varied from 8 percent (one response out of twelve members) for one board to 100 percent for several others.
31. D.C. Public Charter School Board, *2014 Parent Guide to D.C. Public Charter Schools* (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Public Charter School Board, 2014), 3, <http://www.dcpcsb.org/sites/default/files/246585195-2014-Parent-Guide-to-School-Performance-English-3.pdf>.

32. The DC PCSB does not assign tier ratings to a school after its first year of operation. In addition, the DC PCSB suspended tier ratings in 2015 during the city's transition to PARCC assessments (our analysis is based on 2014 tier data). As a result, schools that opened as recently as 2013 and 2014 did not have tier data. Moreover, a handful of schools that serve early-childhood grades did not receive a tier rating, as the DC PCSB is in the process of rolling out a PMF targeted specifically to those grade levels. Reenrollment data was only available for those schools that served more than one grade level and had been open for more than one year.
33. Public Charter Schools, Code of the District of Columbia, Chapter 18 § 38–1802.05, <https://beta.code.dccouncil.us/dc/council/code/sections/38-1802.05.html>.
34. This particular analysis is not limited to the board members of schools with tier ratings or reenrollment data but describes the full survey sample of 325 respondents.
35. Sixty-three survey respondents (about 19 percent) declined to answer this question.
36. *Income and Poverty in the United States*, "Table 1: Income and Earnings Summary Measures by Selected Characteristics: 2013 and 2014," (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014), <http://www2.census.gov/programs-surveys/demo/tables/p60/252/table1.pdf>, and "Census Reporter Profile page for Washington, D.C., 2014" U.S. Census Bureau, accessed August 25, 2016, <https://censusreporter.org/profiles/16000US1150000-washington-dc>.
37. Katherine Shaver, Clarence Williams, and Martin Weil, "Rubio wins D.C. Republican primary; edges out Kasich," *Washington Post*, March 12, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-republicans-wrap-around-the-block-to-cast-primary-vote/2016/03/12/26a407f6-e87b-11e5-bofd-073d5930a7b7_story.html.
38. U.S. Census Bureau, "American Community Survey, 1-year Estimates," 2014, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs/technical-documentation/table-and-geography-changes/2014/1-year.html>.
39. "Facts and Figures: Student Demographics," D.C. Public Charter School Board, accessed August 25, 2016, <http://www.dcpccb.org/facts-and-figures-student-demographics>.
40. Hess and Meeks, *Governance in the Accountability Era: School Boards Circa 2010*.
41. Ford and Ihrke, "Do School Board Governance Best Practices Improve District Performance? Testing the Key Work of School Boards in Wisconsin."
42. Hess and Meeks's survey data indicate that 27 percent of traditional school board members work in education and 18 percent are former members of an educators' union. Hess and Meeks, *Governance in the Accountability Era: School Boards Circa 2010*, table 10.
43. Shober and Hartney, *Does School Board Leadership Matter?*
44. The trends in board members' knowledge of FRL student populations and budget deficits emerged using tier ratings as our measure of school quality; we did not find similar trends when basing school quality on reenrollment rates.
45. The remaining 4 percent of board members who answered incorrectly either indicated that their school was in Tier 3 or that it had not received a rating.

46. Shober and Hartney, *Does School Board Leadership Matter?*, 8.
47. Hess and Meeks, *Governance in the Accountability Era: School Boards Circa 2010*, 56 and 66.
48. This includes 85 percent of Tier 1 charter school boards, 78 percent of Tier 2 boards, and 74 percent of Tier 3 boards. These differences were not statistically significant, but significant differences did emerge when we used reenrollment as our measure of quality.
49. RAND Corporation, *Teachers Matter: Understanding Teachers' Impact on Student Achievement* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012), http://www.rand.org/pubs/corporate_pubs/CP693z1-2012-09.html.
50. Without participation by a more comprehensive sample of charter school board members in D.C., it is impossible to capture the exact composition of individual boards. Thus, to compare board characteristics with school performance, we grouped all board members of Tier 1 schools and all board members of Tier 2 and Tier 3 schools and compared the characteristics of the two groups. We also grouped all board members of high-, medium-, and low-reenrollment schools and compared the characteristics of the three groups. We did not find any notable differences between them.
51. Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 13.
52. In their 2014 report, Hartney and Shober find an association between school performance and the extent to which board members prioritize student achievement.
53. Shober and Hartney, *Does School Board Leadership Matter?*, 17.
54. Two data points buck this trend. Specifically, board members of low-reenrollment schools are much less likely to have been engaged in their school's strategic planning process or to have participated in board training. A state of crisis may prevent these boards from investing time and energy in longer-term strategy and training.
55. Cecilia Elena Rouse et al., "Feeling the Florida Heat? How Low-Performing Schools Respond to Voucher and Accountability Pressure," *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 5, no. 2 (2013): 251–81, doi:10.1257/pol.5.2.251, and Jay P. Greene, *An Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Accountability and School Choice Program* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Program on Education Policy and Governance, February 2001), <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/pepg/PDF/Papers/Florida%20A+.pdf>.
56. Three additional questions displayed only if relevant, based on respondents' previous answers. For instance, respondents who indicated that their board does not have committees were not subsequently asked about their perceived effectiveness of committees. The survey also included three optional, open-ended questions where board members could provide additional context to their board's past and future work.
57. We first asked board chairs and school leaders to share the survey with their boards and then directly sent the email request and link to as many individual board members for whom we could find reliable email addresses.
58. This response rate is notably higher than prior surveys of charter and traditional board members. Ford and Ihrke's survey had response rates of 18 percent from charter school board members and 22 percent from traditional school board members. Similarly, Hess and Meeks's response rate was approximately 24 percent.

59. D.C.'s charter school law requires each board to include two representatives who are parents or guardians of students currently enrolled in the school.
60. We also considered using other measures of school quality, like student growth and attendance. However, student-growth data relied on a translation between two assessments (the DC-CAS and PARCC) during the 2013–14 and 2014–15 school years. We also felt that the logical tie between attendance rates and school quality is too easily compromised by other factors such as school location.
61. D.C. Public Charter School Board, *2014 Parent Guide to D.C. Public Charter Schools* (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Public Charter School Board, 2014), 3.
62. *2015–16 Performance Management Framework Policy & Technical Guide* (Washington, D.C.: D.C. Public Charter School Board, 2014), 21–22, http://www.dcpcsb.org/sites/default/files/Vote--2015-16%20PMF_Policy%20%20Tech_March%20Meeting%20Final%20Clean%20Copy.pdf.
63. In some cases, a board may oversee some schools that have received a tier rating and some schools that have not. In these cases, the board's average includes only schools that have received a score from zero to one hundred and associated tier designation. Note that these average scores disguise variation and may not truly represent all of the schools the board oversees.
64. "Adult Education PMF," D.C. Public Charter School Board, December 3, 2015, <http://www.dcpcsb.org/report/adult-education-evaluating/adult-education-pmf>.
65. D.C. Public Charter School Board, *2015–16 Performance Management Framework Policy & Technical Guide*.
66. Douglas N. Harris and Matthew F. Larsen, *What Schools Do Families Want (and Why)?*, Policy Brief (New Orleans, LA: Education Research Alliance for New Orleans, January 15, 2015), <http://educationresearchalliancenaola.org/files/publications/ERA1402-Policy-Brief-What-Schools-Do-Families-Want-3.pdf>.
67. James P. Kelly and Benjamin Scafidi, *More than Scores: An Analysis of Why and How Parents Choose Private Schools* (Indianapolis, IN: Friedman Foundation for Educational Choice, November 2013), <http://www.edchoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/More-Than-Scores.pdf>.
68. Schools that serve only grades pre-K–2 are precluded from the existing PMFs. The DC PCSB has created a PMF specifically designed for early-childhood grades. Tier ratings were not yet available in 2013–14 and were not released in 2014–15 due to changes in the PMF and the new state assessments.