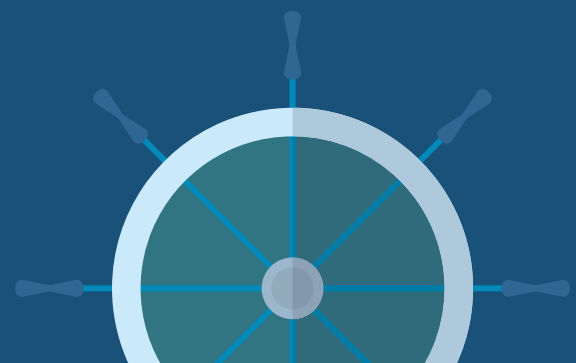


Governance

**How do effective boards help
guide schools to fulfill their
mission and achieve their goals?**

2
EDITION



**Public schools,
whether district
or charter, are
accountable to
the public for
serving all their
students well.**

**School boards
are a bridge to
the community
and a source
of insight and
support.**

**Hard-working,
responsive
boards are fiscally
accountable,
provide guidance
on important
issues, and help
schools stay on
track.**

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT



01

How does a board monitor a school's performance and hold it publicly accountable?



02

How can board members and staff work together to develop fair and effective policies regarding student enrollment, calendar, hiring, procurement and purchasing, curriculum, and other matters?



03

How can a board champion a school, support innovation to find new solutions to persistent challenges, and build public support in the community? What array of skills, knowledge, and connections can board members bring to the table?



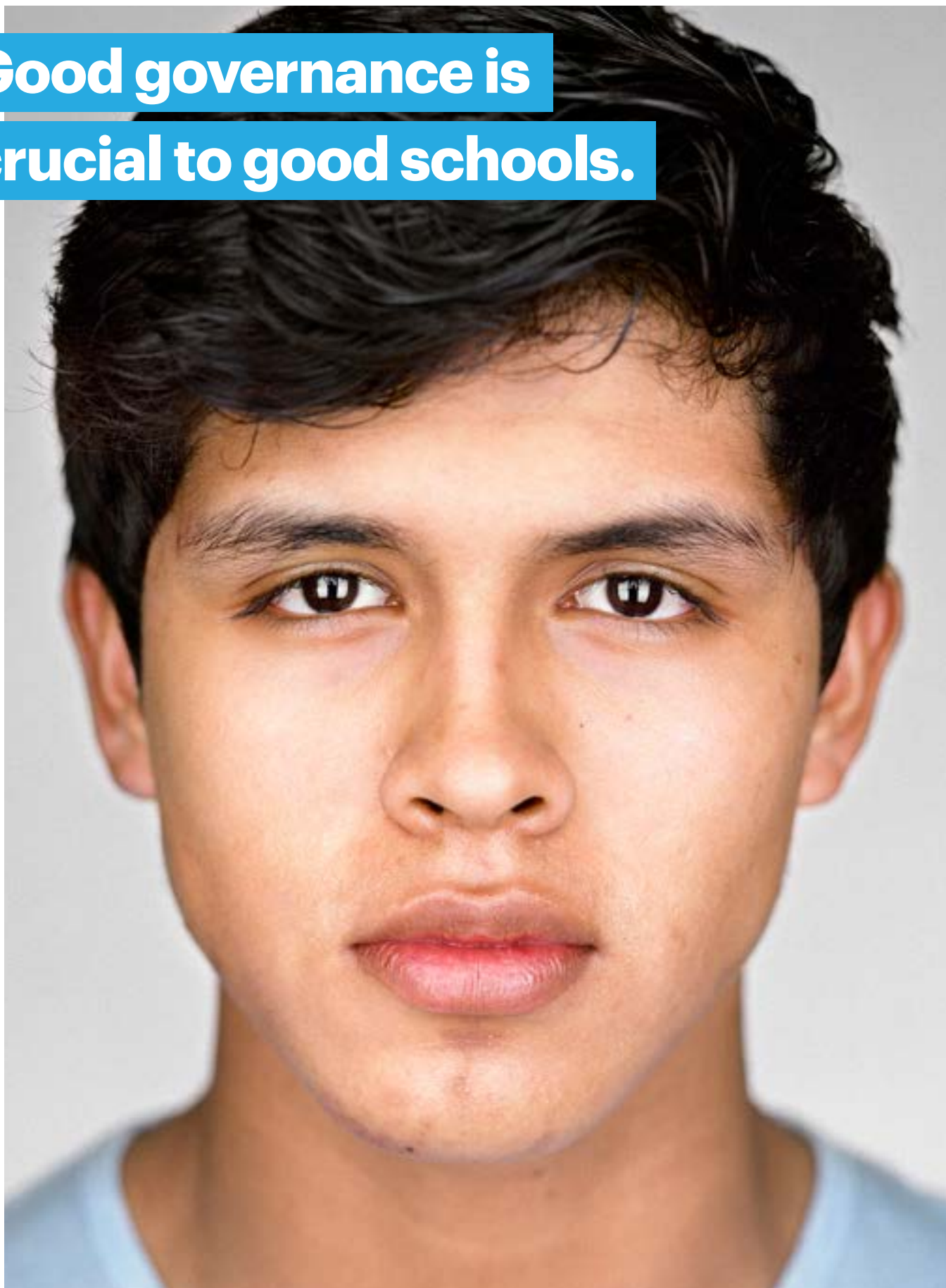
04

How can students and parents influence school governance? What opportunities do students have to exercise leadership?

**OPEN,
TRANSPARENT,
AND TRULY
PARTICIPATORY
GOVERNANCE
IS ESSENTIAL
TO THE
SUCCESS OF
ANY SCHOOL.**

FACT 34

**Good governance is
crucial to good schools.**



Good governance puts student success first and helps create an environment that's conducive to learning.

A great board adds tremendous value to a school. The board oversees school operations, but it doesn't manage the day-to-day work, and it should never micromanage. Members of the board actively partner with school leadership to envision the long-term goals for the school and how to serve all students effectively. To do that, the board must frequently and candidly examine school data and student performance, scrutinizing outcomes and considering possible improvements with school or district leaders. An accountable board listens to feedback from students, families, staff, and community members, and responds judiciously.

The board works to build public support for schools and for key school policies—including changes, improvements, and innovations that some people may find uncomfortable. In other words, a good school board is willing to lead. A highly effective governing board has the following traits:

- + Strong belief in mission and core values
- + Clear collective vision
- + Well-defined role and responsibilities
- + Focus on results
- + A solid structure—size, composition, committees, officers
- + Regular meetings with strategic questions, not just report-backs
- + Mutual trust and respect

Think About →

Who are the right people to serve on a school's governing board or advisory council? What preparation do they need in order to excel in their roles?



Every public school—district and charter—must operate within the governance regulations of its state.

+ District schools are typically governed by their locally elected school boards.

+ Charter schools are governed by boards that oversee either individual schools or all the schools in a charter network.

In either case, a governing board is responsible for ensuring a school has capable leadership, strong finances, and high student achievement.

Charter School Board Toolkit

Access a suite of tools from BoardOnTrack, which is designed to help formulate an effective charter school board, including job descriptions, quizzes, sample minutes, and much more.



School Board Resources

Visit the National School Boards Association resource library for reports on school law, federal education regulations, and other issues.



Charter School Governance

These guidelines from Brown University's Annenberg Institute for School Reform include policy recommendations and a wealth of practical advice about effectiveness, transparency, and accountability.



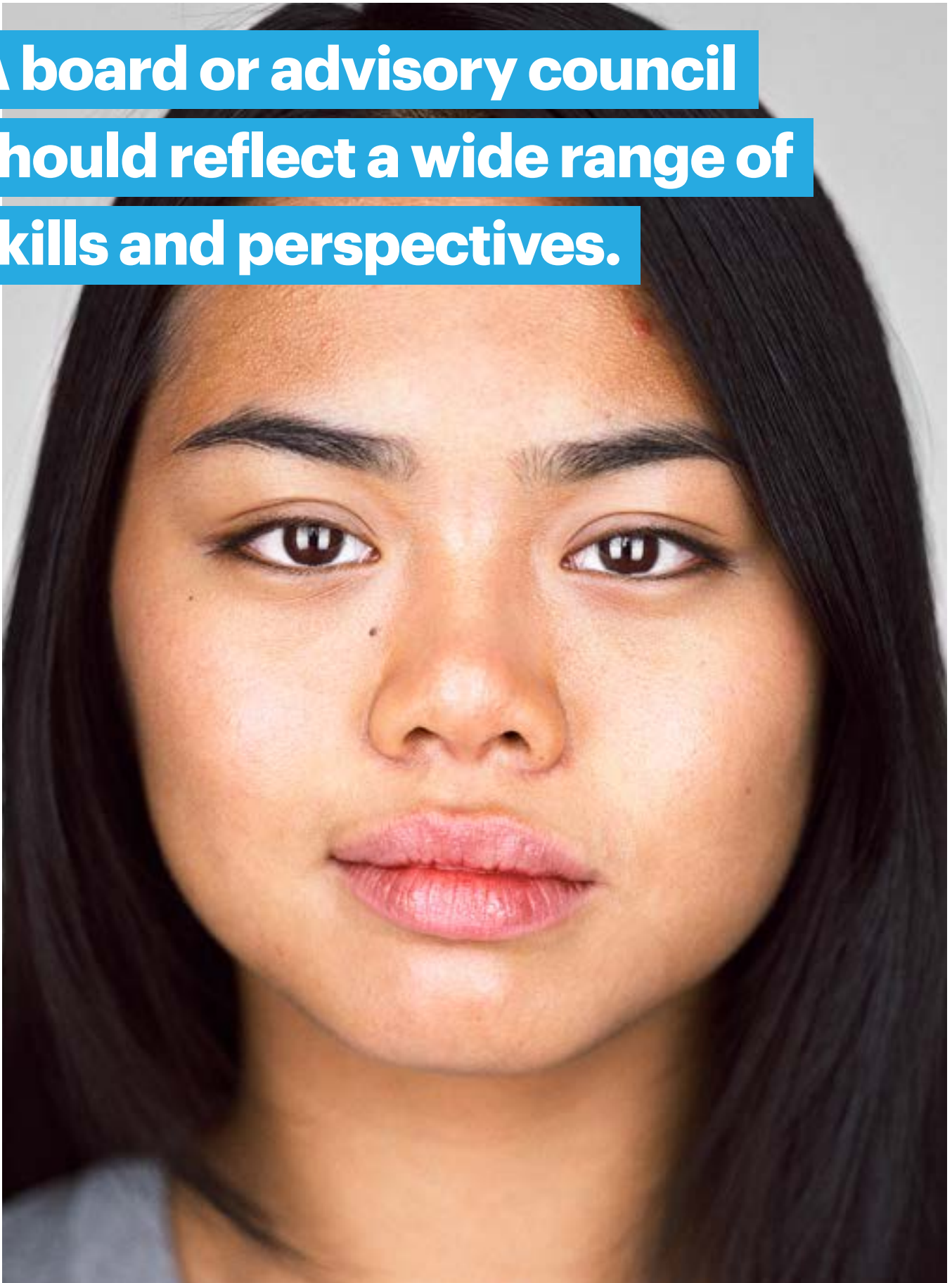
Principles For Nonprofits

Independent Sector offers 33 principles to keep in mind when crafting the legal and financial requirements of sound nonprofit governance.



FACT 35

**A board or advisory council
should reflect a wide range of
skills and perspectives.**



A board should be collaborative, fiscally responsible, and committed to its school's mission.

School boards have serious responsibilities. To simultaneously carry out essential tasks, while seeking opportunities to advance the learning agenda, members of a board must be competent and committed. Board members should strive to build a spirit of collaboration, candor, and trust among themselves and with key school leaders. They should establish and maintain an open and transparent relationship with the public.

A well-balanced board often includes people with varied professional backgrounds, skills, and expertise. Board members also bring other assets: their experience as parents or students, their professional connections and community networks, their personal histories. Diversity of perspective and opinion strengthens a board, but to ensure productivity, it's important to establish guidelines and shared commitments as a framework for dialogue and decision-making.

To fulfill the mission of a school, board members must be willing to work hard year-round—attending meetings, and spending time at the school. Board members should be good communicators, comfortable under public scrutiny, and willing to spend time considering school performance and finances.

Think About →

How can your local school board find the right mix of knowledge, skills, backgrounds, and stakeholder and community connections to drive positive high school change and effectiveness in your community?



According to BoardOnTrack, board members “should be selected because they bring the requisite skills to govern a multimillion-dollar public enterprise.” That doesn’t mean that everyone on your board needs strong financial skills, but at least some members should be financially savvy enough to understand the school’s overall financial landscape and the fiscal implications of key decisions. Every board member should have:

- + Passion for the school’s mission
- + Time to meet frequently
- + A commitment to fairness and objectivity

Keep It Positive

Problematic board members are no joke. This post from *Education Week* describes some painful habits every school board member should avoid.



What Makes School Boards Work?

There are over 90,000 members of school boards in the United States. They are important contributors to a district’s success, and should be taken seriously. Read more from The Thomas B. Fordham Institute.



Mission-Driven Governance

How do we change the mission of nonprofit governance from one of legal oversight to one where members and executives work together to advance the critical mission of the organization? Stanford Social Innovation Review presents a new framework.



Best Practices for Charter School Boards

Charter Board Partners outlines steps for an effective charter board, including characteristics of a good board chair, and tips on how to run a productive meeting.



FACT 36

**Students, teachers, parents,
and other community members
provide key input to your board.**



The perspectives of its young people are key to a school's success.

Students, teachers, and anyone with a stake in a school need authentic avenues for participation and input. When the board and school leadership genuinely engage important constituencies in governing a school, they usually produce policies that are better attuned to community needs and more likely to inspire community buy-in. A school climate survey can be a good way to open up a conversation about what's great, what's not so great, and where improvement is needed in a school.

As boards take on the challenge of rethinking high school, they need to listen to young people and actively engage them in envisioning the changes needed to prepare all students for the demands of college and career. For students to have a real voice in school governance, they need opportunities to express themselves and develop their leadership skills. Young people are insightful diagnosticians and creative problem solvers. Formal and informal dialogue with students should be a part of a board's routine, so that student voice is driving the analysis of school needs and design improvements.

A board should also be deeply connected to the aspirations and concerns of the wider community. A commitment to public accountability and transparency should be central to a board's operations, particularly how it handles challenges and crises.

Think About →

Does the membership of the school board in your community represent the community it serves? Does the board enable ongoing input from, and leadership by, students?



Young people and community members can provide fresh perspectives and valuable insights on how legal and fiscal policies play out in real life. Here are some best practices for combining good governance with healthy engagement:

- + Structure and capacity for youth and community engagement
- + Youth-adult partnerships
- + Skills and knowledge about best practices
- + Connections (formal and informal) to the community
- + Plans to sustain ongoing engagements with young people and community members
- + Schools that are great for students and their families

PAM GARZA AND PAM STEVENS
Coalition of Community Foundations for Youth

School Climate Surveys

A school climate survey can help a board see more deeply into how students, teachers, and families experience school. The National School Climate Center offers resources.



The Importance of Community Governance

Community governance entails community members being stakeowners, not stakeholders. Learn more about what that means in this article in *Nonprofit Quarterly*.



State and City Charter Laws

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools has an extensive database of laws and statistics.



Involving Youth in Board Governance

Some organizations choose to include young people on their boards. This case from *Nonprofit Quarterly* shares how the Girl Scouts have done just that—and offers some real-life lessons to take into account.



Public education is a public good that is foundational to American democracy

A board must hold itself to the highest standards on behalf of students and its community.

In a rapidly changing world, board members have a responsibility to think about the knowledge, skills, and attributes students need to develop in order to thrive as adults in all areas of life. Today's students will soon be voters and leaders in our communities. What are the implications for high schools?

GET INSPIRED



Recruiting the Right Board Members

Charter Board Partners helps charter schools recruit better boards. Read about some of their success stories here.



Bridgespan on Boards

The Bridgespan Group, a nonprofit consulting firm, provides a set of resources and tools for nonprofit boards.



Learning from For-Profit Boards

This report from the Stanford Business School's Corporate Governance Research Initiative shares processes from nonprofit and for-profit boards, so each can learn from the other.



Governing for Innovation in New Orleans

The Cowen Institute for Public Education Initiatives at Tulane University reports back on five New Orleans governance models developed since Hurricane Katrina.



**EXCELLENT
GOVERNANCE
YIELDS
EXCELLENT
SCHOOLS**