



# HIGHMARK QUARTERLY

Say it. Mean it. Live it. Plan it. Work it. In it together. Do it Once. Do it Right. Own it. Love it.

## Director's Message



Doug Talbot

Building a new school is a challenging endeavor. Highmark School Development exists not only to provide schools with the financing but to facilitate the design and construction process. We have worked with many clients to deliver facilities that support the desired curriculum and school program for a truly personalized approach.

Our process begins with an analysis of the school's operational budgets to determine what it can afford for a facility payment and overall project development. We then search the market to locate a property that could meet the school's needs and desired lease. We not only look at listed properties but also approach property owners of potential sites to see if there is an interest to sell. We conduct property inspections on the site or existing building and determine if the site is suitable for a school facility. Once we have selected the property and our client has executed the Project Development and Reimbursement agreement (PD&R) we begin the design-builder selection process.

Highmark School Development delivers each project utilizing the design-build delivery system. This system streamlines the design and engineering process and mitigates the risk exposure for the school and Highmark. Our Request for Proposal (RFP) is issued to selected design-build firms based on the school's initial programming requirements. And once the responses are received, we analyze each RFP submittal with the school to select a partner to move forward.

One important aspect of the design-build process is that the architect and engineers work directly for the design-builder. This is a very important element as it ties the design and construction together to deliver a project that meets the budget, code, and timeline for the school.

Design begins with each of the stakeholders present. Our design charrette is about the school describing their curriculum, staffing, enrollment projections, and school facility needs.

Continued on page 3...



The team at Highmark School Development would like to congratulate the class of 2017! We know it takes a lot of hard work and dedication from the school leaders, the administration, the teachers, the families, and of course the students.

### ARIZONA

- AZ Compass Prep School
- Skyline Prep High School
- Benjamin Franklin Charter School JH-HS

### CALIFORNIA

- BASIS Independent Silicon Valley

### DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

- BASIS Washington DC

### GEORGIA

- Fulton Leadership Academy

### NEW YORK

- BASIS Independent Brooklyn

### NORTH CAROLINA

- Kestrel Heights School
- Phoenix Academy High School
- North Carolina Leadership Academy
- North East Carolina Prep

### SOUTH CAROLINA

- Lowcountry Leadership Charter School

### TENNESSEE

- Dubois School of Arts & Technology
- Dubois School of Entrepreneurship & Leadership & Public Policy

### TEXAS

- Cumberland High School
- UME Preparatory



AZ Compass Prep School Graduation  
Arizona

## School Spotlight

Pineapple Cove Classical Academy opened its doors in the fall of 2015 with 433 students in grades K-6. This year they serve grades K-7 with more than 500 students and have a long wait list of over 400 applicants for the 2017-2018 school year.

The mission of Pineapple Cove Classical Academy is to develop graduates in mind and character through a classical, content-rich curriculum that emphasizes the principles of virtuous living, traditional learning, and civic responsibility. PCCA aims to build intelligent, virtuous American citizens.

PCCA provides a rigorous, classical liberal arts and sciences education for students by reinforcing the common principles of scholarship, citizenship, and moral virtue that promote academic potential and personal character. Students are intentionally taught the benefits of a virtuous character and are challenged through the lessons taught within the curriculum to develop and strengthen their character.

PCCA, in its first year of operation, made its mark on the 2015-2016 Florida State Assessments. The English Language Arts results show PCCA is performing higher than both the state and its district! We are impressed with PCCA and enjoy learning of their growth and success. There is a lot to learn from their first years and from the exciting future we know they will have.



Pineapple Cove Classical Academy  
Palm Bay



Pineapple Cove Classical Academy  
Palm Bay



Pineapple Cove Classical Academy  
Palm Bay



## Board Best Practices Part 1 of 3

### Darlene Chambers PhD

Highmark continuously works to bring our school partners the most relevant and up-to-date expertise in the field. We seek out best practices, leading experts, and leading guidance within the ever-changing landscape. One area that is crucial to school success is effective board governance. As such, Highmark monitors school governance and operations as part of both our initial due diligence with new schools and our ongoing reporting with our existing portfolio. We utilize resources from around the country to ensure that we incorporate industry standards and are excited to be bringing you a three part series on board governance. Through multiple perspectives from leaders who are authorizers, school leaders, national trainers, and board members themselves, we hope that you can glean vital information and stimulate engaging dialogue.

Our first expert is Darlene Chambers, currently the Senior Vice President for Programs and Services at the National Charter Schools Institute. Darlene is in her 46th year in the education field and has been hired by boards to do training and evaluation work. She has been a teacher, an authorizer, a founding member of a charter school, and has served on multiple boards as a student, a community member, an educator, and a fighter for social justice.

#### **HM: What do you view as the main purpose and function of a charter school board?**

DC: The word “charter” itself means a contract; therefore, it has expectations that guide the work that has to be done and what is legally bound with the authorizer. If we pay attention to this important word, if we follow the title, then we know that the board must live by the words within the contract. The board exists to provide good governance- summarized by:

- deliverance of positive student outcomes
- accountability to the tax payer that provides the public funds
- provide meaningful choices for parents (remember it in your purpose and function)
- deliver social justice, promote socially progressive issues- civil rights, multi-culturalism, equality for all kids no matter what zip code
- ensure that we are winning for all kids

#### **HM: Is there an ideal board composition? If so, what is it and why?**

DC: I wish there was a magic number for board

size, but as we know, there is no “one size fits all” for anything related to charter schools. The ideal size is very school dependent- mission, community and setting, age and evolution, state law all factor in. As a guide, start with state law and code, then take context into consideration. Be very mindful of the tipping point. There comes a time when there are too many voices in the room, too many conversations occurring, which leaves no space for any one to get heard. If I had to choose a number, my latest thinking would be that the magic number might be seven. More becomes unmanageable and inputs get blurred. As it relates to committees, the standing committees should be defined in the board bylaws and there are four that are vital to success: finance, academics, development, and governance. Make sure that officer roles are clearly defined and expectations are laid out. Everyone should know what it is they are supposed to deliver and why. Always keep the board vital, strategically implement succession planning, and make sure you have the right people on the board doing the hard and important work.

#### **HM: Describe and provide examples of governance vs. management.**

DC: This is often a fine line. The principles of good board governance teach us to refrain from interfering with school leadership and those that the board hires to run the school. There must be an active balance and, to use one of my favorite quotes, “a charter school board should remember that its role is to continually ask how well is everything going, not to direct how it will be done (Dr. Brian Carpenter).” Basic steps must be followed to maintain this balance. The board should set expectations with the authorizer, be mindful of code and law, and always ask the critical questions, listen to the answers, and be responsible for knowing that the expectations are being met.

Boards are and should be volunteers who govern. Management and operations are done by qualified individuals or organizations to do the vital work of running the school. The board is the bottom line, members must always be responsible and prepared to ensure that the contract (mentioned above) is being delivered. Keep in mind, management is accountable to the board, and the board is accountable to the public.

#### **HM: How does the board evaluate the board itself, the school leader, school performance,**

#### **and if applicable, a management company?**

DC: Evaluation is at my heart and soul. It is an area that most boards struggle with the most, but yet one that is crucial to success. As for evaluating themselves, many boards wonder why they should or have to if they are simply volunteers. With management companies, boards sign an agreement and then forget. With a school leader, they trust their choice, so why should an evaluation have to occur? It is important to make these evaluations vital and keep them at the forefront of good governance. To me, evaluation means setting clear and strong expectations at the beginning through board structure, bylaws and leadership. Again, pay attention to the contract and create evaluations based on that foundation. Develop and implement partnerships and do these evaluations at least annually.

#### **HM: What is the board’s role in establishing and maintaining a healthy authorizer relationship?**

DC: My social work background allows me to think of the charter as almost a marriage contract. Good marriages last when the relationship is based on truth, trust, and expectations that were established at the start. Pay attention to how each side grows and matures, be aware and respectful of one another’s perspectives, and don’t create opportunities for surprises.

#### **HM: What are the telltale signs of a highly functioning board, and conversely, a struggling board?**

DC: Here’s Darlene’s style, broken down and easy to remember. Struggling is easy to remember- it is the opposite of a highly functioning board- the absence of these points:

- good meeting attendance
- solid interest and belief in the mission of the school
- ownership of not only the success of the school, but the failures- knowing “the buck stops here”
- contribution- monetary or other related services in terms of development
- well selected and trained, with a willingness to train others
- strong, consensus-seeking chair
- able to have a solid plan for board succession

With a successful board, you can read body language. Members shouldn’t be on their devices; they should be engaged, leaning forward in their chairs, mention kids throughout their work, and show up. It is important to participate, to review the minutes and agendas, do the committee work, feel the intangibles, read the braille, don’t wait for the ship to go down, but to get involved before it begins to sink.

#### **HM: What are the most important policies the board should have in place?**

## Board Expert Interview Continued...

DC: Policies are about establishing appropriate boundaries. Policies should be the basis upon which the governing board can execute action. Policies should hold management 100% accountable for school culture and student results. The policies should be formed with boundaries that are both minimal and strong. It is imperative for boards to ask the right questions, stay alert to trends and data within the policy boundaries. As a piece of advice, if a consultant or lawyer is establishing the policies, make sure the board is reviewing them, making them live, vital and a part of decision making.

### HM: What types of board training are most effective/useful? What do you recommend when transitioning from a founding team to a governing body?

DC: Training also goes to my core. The founding board is all hands on deck when getting a school launched. Passion for the work and for the mission is a necessary starting point, but it is then essential that there is effective onboarding at this crucial point. The governing body has to be the watchdog for the school- for the mission, the kids, and the public- they need to be equipped to do so. Again, there is no magic number for hours or requisite trainings. Please remember to follow the law and the regulations within the states or as they are laid out in your contracts. And, make sure you hit on the following types of trainings:

- onboarding and orientation
- improvement training (related to evaluation)
- new expectations or changing law
- leadership and consensus building
- fundraising

### HM: What is the biggest challenge for the board?

DC: Board governance is a dance, a delicate balance to ensure the public and its many constituents, are delivered what was promised. The board has to pay attention to the promises made and the promises they must keep.

### HM: Why would an individual choose to serve on a charter school board?

DC: Flat, simple phrase- to win for the kids! It's a great opportunity to contribute to the community, to serve the underserved, to share their area of expertise more broadly and to give back.

## Building Maintenance



It's summer time! Kids are out of school, enjoying their months of freedom before heading back in the fall.

When educational facilities – schools, campuses, etc. – are empty (or less busy) during the summer, it's the ideal time for projects to be completed and a thorough cleaning initiative. Schools that aren't packed with students allow facility managers to get a lot more done and use their maintenance resources most effectively. During the summer months, many items should be checked, inspected, fixed, cleaned, or replaced to prevent future problems.

### Exterior

- Building address - clearly visible?
- Exterior lights - in working order?
- Paved surfaces
- Playground equipment
- Irrigation covers - are they all in place?
- Entrance doors - all working properly?
- Landscape survey - replace dead or dying plants

### Interior

- Vents - free from obstructions?
- Hot water heaters
- Fire alarm status, system, and valve - Inspect and test
- Ceilings - any water stains and leaks?
- Toilets - are they stable and leak free?
- Electrical panels - locked and secure?

### Continued from page 1...

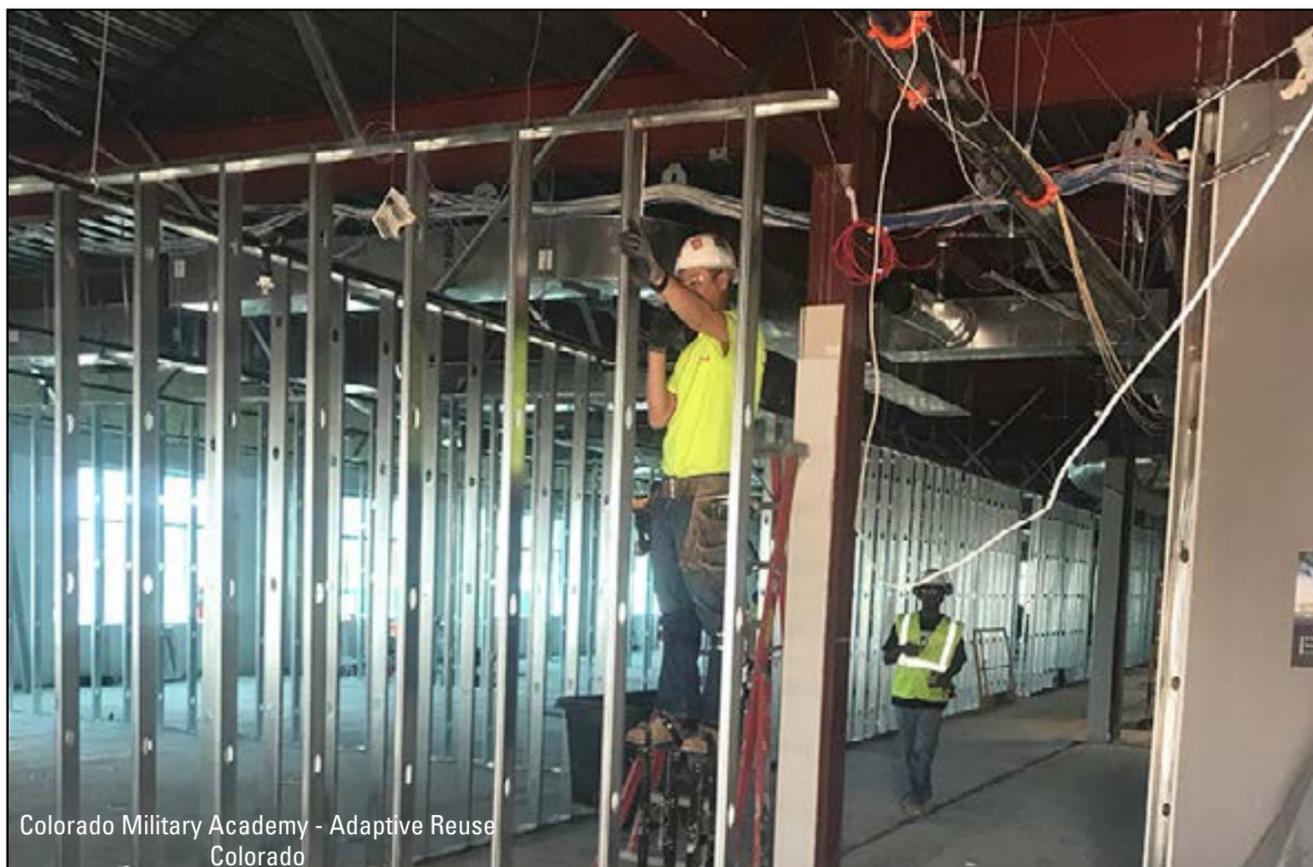
Typically a school board appoints a building representative to discuss design criteria. Such topics may include the following:

- Traffic and queuing concerns and potential solutions.
- Classrooms layouts: is this a project-based learning (PBL) environment or a more traditional design?
- How do we create an environment that supports collaboration and still allows the student to find that quiet space?
- Security and circulation concerns.
- Administration, cafeteria and food preparation needs; full service kitchen or a warming kitchen?
- Master plan showing future expansion.

Our initial design charrette allows the design-build team to proceed to the next milestone: the design development stage. The team then prepares the conceptual layout for the school. We further develop the thoughts and ideas that were discussed in our initial design charrette and show how the design is solving the school's design requirements. This process is backed up with a cost analysis that keeps us within the budget constraints.

This process continues throughout the preconstruction process. Our design-build team continually monitors the design and the budget to ensure that we in fact have a project that can meet the school's needs both functionally and financially. Once the design and engineering documents are ready for permitting we have the final "all hands on deck" review of the completed design. This collaborative process allows the school to participate from start to finish in the design of the new school and helps to ensure that the facility meets the needs of the community for years to come.

**Doug Talbot**



Colorado Military Academy - Adaptive Reuse  
Colorado



Darlene Chambers PhD  
Senior Vice President for  
Programs and Services  
with the National Charter  
Schools Institute

To see more about Dr.  
Chambers  
[Click Here](#)