



Promoting Quality  
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**Audubon Center  
of the North Woods**

## Hiring a Charter School Leader

### **It Happens**

Change in leaders is an inevitable fact of life in most organizations and charter schools are no exception. Sometimes school leaders leave after serving in their important role for a brief period of time while other school leaders serve for many years prior to their departure.

Regardless of the reason a school's leader may leave their position and whether or not it is sooner rather than later, the topic of replacement of the school leader is likely to be on the agenda sometime while you are serving on the board. The following information is intended to remind school board members of their legal obligations under MN §124E as it pertains to hiring a school leader and to provide information boards may find useful as they engage in planning for and conducting a school leader replacement cycle. Most board members find that the process is challenging and not as easy to accomplish as they may originally think because of the many complexities that can and often do arise during the replacement cycle.

### **What Minnesota Statute Says About Charter School Leader Hiring: MN §124E.12 Subd. 2(a)**

**The board of directors shall establish qualifications for all persons who hold administrative, supervisory, or instructional leadership roles. The qualifications shall cover at least: instruction and assessment; human resource and personnel management; financial management; legal and compliance management; effective communication; and board, authorizer, and community relationships. The board of directors shall use those qualifications as the basis for job descriptions, hiring, and performance evaluations of those who hold administrative, supervisory, or instructional leadership roles.**

# Hiring A School Leader

Statute indicates that charter school boards are responsible for hiring charter school leaders (this includes leaders who may be identified as Director, Executive Director, or other similar titles) and in so doing must do the following:

**1. Create and approve the job description for their school leader. Include, at a minimum, the following in that job description:**

- A. Instruction and assessment
- B. Human resource and personnel management
- C. Financial management
- D. Legal and compliance management
- E. Effective communication
- F. Board, authorizer, and community relationships
- AND**
- G. Other topics of the board's choosing (see below)

**2. Use the board approved school leader job description as a basis for hiring the school leader.**

It is important to note that regardless of the support staff that may exist at the school (Curriculum and Assessment Director, Finance Director, Operations Director, etc.), the charter school leader is ultimately responsible and accountable for the items above – and therefore must be selected and evaluated based on the individual's ability to oversee them. The charter school board may use a variety of processes and procedures to execute the hiring of a new school leader, but it is important to remember that **it is the board's legal responsibility, and no one else's, to hire the school leader.**

## **A Note About Job Descriptions**

- i. Job descriptions should contain the responsibilities of the position described in a way that can be qualitatively evaluated by the board even if some of that evaluation is subjective in nature. (This includes the topics from statute as a minimum.) For example: 1) Effectively and efficiently supervises and leads the school's instructional program. 2) Creatively and effectively seeks ways to retain currently enrolled students and to recruit new students to the school.
- ii. Job descriptions should include aspirational responsibilities for the school leader; those that will encourage, inspire and grow the knowledge and skills of the school leader and that will also well serve the school. For example: Actively "looks over the horizon" and keeps the board informed about future educational trends, opportunities, and challenges for the school. These should be personalized for your specific school's situation.
- iii. From the job description, the board may, if it wishes, then create a list of duties for the school leader; however, care should be taken not to have the list of duties replace or become synonymous with the leader's job description. They are two distinctively different documents. In fact, many school leaders can perform quite well without a board approved list of duties as they focus on the elements of the job description rather than on the detailed list of activities that can take focus away from it.

## Suggestions for Charter School Boards as They Hire School Leaders

The following suggested steps are for charter school boards to consider after they receive the school leader's resignation from his/her position, and a new school leader must be hired. Each charter school board is able to use whatever processes and procedures it wishes to use and there are many variables that may go into the decision about the process that will be used in a particular situation. Thus, these steps are for information only and charter school boards should feel free to use them as is, to modify them, or to use other processes not included here. At the end of whatever process a board decides to use, it should result in the identification and hiring of a well-qualified school leader whose experience, professional skills and talents, personality and style best match the school's current needs as identified by the board. Along the way, the process to accomplish this end should be transparent, fair, and involve others in the school community with the school board maintaining the ultimate responsibility for the selection and hiring of the new school leader.

1. Review and revise, if necessary, administrator's job description
2. Determine whether the board needs assistance with finding qualified candidates. If yes, seek proposals from search consultants, evaluate them, and select one to assist the board with the process. If no, determine who on the board will take the lead on the search for a new administrator. Will it be one person or a subcommittee of the board?
3. Establish a timeline for the search for a new leader.
4. Establish milestones to be completed during the process, e.g. approximate due dates for applications, review of applications, possible interviews of promising candidates, including the range of salary and benefits the board will consider for the selected candidate.
5. Create a communications plan to ensure all school community members are kept apprised of the board's activities regarding the search for a new school leader. Identify one person (e.g. the board chair) to be the one and only official spokesperson for the board.
6. Select and hire the candidate that most closely matches the professional and personal profile the board identified for the ideal candidate. If none of the candidates measure up enough to satisfy the board, consider reopening the search to recruit and attract additional candidates.



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## Other Factors for the Board to Keep in Mind:

- **Transparency:** To instill trust that the selection is fair, make sure all steps along the way of hiring a new school leader are done in the open with the full board’s participation.
- **Communication:** Designate one person to be the official school board communicator, both to internal and external audiences.
- **Involvement:** Identify participants and their roles, e.g. search consultant, board subcommittee, school and community stakeholders.
- **Timeline:** Establish a timeline for hiring, from its beginning to its end and identify activities/milestones to be accomplished along the way.
- **Interim school leader or not:** This decision depends on many variables such as the timing of the school leader’s departure (e.g. at the end of the school year or sometime during the school year) and the availability of qualified people who can successfully carry out the interim positions responsibilities as identified by the board.

## Summary

Since the position is so critical to the overall success of a charter school, hiring a new school leader is serious business and it requires the board’s full attention to all aspects of the process. In addition, this importance is reinforced by the fact that MN §124E specifically charges the charter school board with the responsibility to carry out the process and to identify and hire its school leader based on statute specific qualifications, and others as established by the school board.

*Remember: It Happens*

