

# How to Achieve a High-Performing Back Office

**Part II:  
Performance Management  
& Evaluation**

*By Joe Keeney*

*Editor's Note: This is the second in a two-part series on the importance of investing in and achieving an efficient back-office operation. To read the first article, please see the [May issue, page 30](#).*

**O**ur first article in this series urged you to invest in top talent for your charter school business office. We recommended that you “pay up” for experience and competence, hire the right number and right kind of people, ensure financial controls are in place, and consider outsourcing as an effective solution.

Assuming you have implemented all of those strategies, you now need to ensure you can maintain a high level of performance. For that purpose, we will focus this article on performance management and evaluation.

Performance management is a hot topic in the education sector today. School districts are hiring directors of performance management; Race to the Top money is fueling investment in instructional improvement systems that put student achievement data and analysis tools in the hands of teachers; and education organizations are adopting benchmarking, operating dashboards and balanced scorecard practices that are common in the private sector.

Rather than simply create a laundry list of key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor performance, high-performing organizations align their metrics to their overall mission and values. For example, at Friendship Public Charter School, which operates six charter schools serving 4,000 students as well as

turnaround schools in partnership with the District of Columbia and Baltimore City, two of the four “value drivers” of its mission are “Create an Environment Conducive to Learning” and “Maintain Organizational Strength and Long Term Viability.”

Some of the key metrics it has identified to manage its performance against these value drivers are listed in the table below and on page 39.

## Value Driver: Create an Environment Conducive to Learning

### Key Metrics

Number of building, health code or safety violations.

100% of certificates up to date (occupancy, elevator).

Work orders exceeding 3 days.

School hours lost to facilities issues.

% of monthly calendar events submitted by deadline.

Stakeholder satisfaction survey results about facility.

Student surveys: “I feel safe at school.”

Number of workers’ comp claims.

Average time between incident and claim.

These are just a few examples of the kind of metrics a board or principal can use to measure the performance of its business management function. Reporting on an agreed set of metrics is one step. Ensuring proper resources and other supports, such as time from the board treasurer and business manager professional development, is another step. Then the metrics must be woven into a performance evaluation process that provides actionable feedback to the business manager and has appropriate positive (bonus!) and negative (the opposite!) consequences.

The biggest problem with performance evaluation is many people and organizations never get around to it. Why? People are exhausted at the end of the year. They already know who is staying and who is going. There is not much money available for bonuses, nor is there much opportunity for promotion. People are uncomfortable giving feedback. Many traditional rubrics used for performance evaluation seem “icky” because they distill a year’s worth of sweat, blood and tears into vapid language or a 1 to 5 rating scale.

The process is much easier with data. Way back in the olden days, 99 percent of all teacher evaluations were “satisfactory” because there were no multiple measures of performance and student achievement data was not a factor in the evaluation. Now, by establishing, monitoring and reporting publicly on performance data, one key part of performance evaluation is simply a report on the key metrics — typically the data are transparent so those being evaluated can even produce their own evaluation reports.

Performance evaluation at charter schools should not just be limited to staff. Board members should consider an annual evaluation process and engage a third-

## Value Driver: Maintain Organizational Strength and Long Term Viability

### Key Metrics

- Number of external reports submitted on time.
- Number of e-mail notices of late or incorrect submission received.
- Number of formal notices of late or incorrect submission received.
- Unscheduled network downtime.
- Number of errors identified in internal audit of student data records.
- Number of funding applications completed.
- Percent approval of timesheets by deadline.
- Number of manual checks cut.
- Average expense reimbursement time from time of submission.
- Number of audit reclassifications and adjustments.
- Number of contracts amended to increase amounts.
- Percent of expenditures on school site.
- YTD revenue and expense vs. budget.
- Percent of monthly financial reviews attended by business manager and principal.
- Percent of financial reports submitted to board accurately and on time.
- Percent of annual budget added to reserves.
- Dun & Bradstreet credit rating.
- Clean audit; number of issues in management letter.

party facilitator to assist. Nothing fancy here. Board members could even write a statement of their own self-evaluation and identify board accomplishment and deficiencies over the year, with the goal of creating actionable feedback to each other. Marci Conrell-Feist, founder and CEO of The High Bar, has designed an excellent self-evaluation instrument to measure board-member effectiveness. A sample form can be [downloaded here](#).

Contractor evaluation also is an important opportunity to achieve high performance in your charter school's operations. If your charter school outsources any of the "big four" subcontracts — foodservice, transportation, custodial or security — or if you have an education or charter management organization (EMO or CMO),

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you should evaluate them formally and not less than annually.

Performance metrics for these contractors can be incorporated into a Service Level Agreement and attached as an exhibit to your contract. A sample instrument for evaluating contractors is [available here](#) from Charter School Tools and is among the website's most popular downloads.

I am always astonished by the lack of communication and feedback between charter schools and major contractors. Too often they let resentments fester until their relationships must be terminated, rather than create clear performance measures and provide regular evaluation of a contractor's performance.

More than 50 years ago, Peter Drucker wrote, "What gets measured gets managed." He was right, not only when it comes to student achievement data, but also for charter school back-office performance. 

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