2024 Charter School CEO Compensation & Turnover Study

Key Factors Affecting Our Top Leaders

BoardOnTrack
BY TRANSACT

Introduction

In 2019, Board on Track released the first-ever study of charter school CEO compensation — just months before a global pandemic would upend public education and place unprecedented demands on charter school leaders. Since then, the role of the charter school CEO has only grown more complex, and the critical importance of strong, intentional board-CEO partnerships has become even clearer.

Today, we return to this critical topic with new data and fresh insights. While the pandemic may no longer dominate daily life, the aftershocks remain. Charter school CEOs are still navigating persistent challenges — from unfinished learning and enrollment fluctuations to workforce pressures and political scrutiny. And yet, they are also leading through opportunity: reimagining what high-quality public education can look like in a new era.

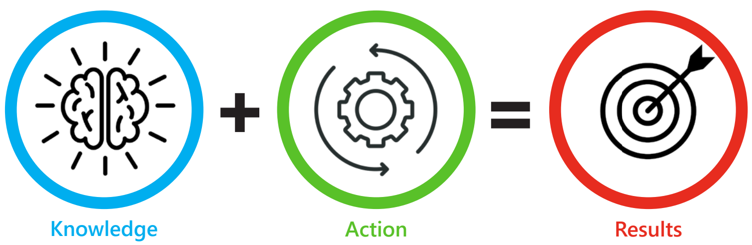
In this second edition of our CEO compensation study, we examine what has — and hasn't — changed in the last six years.

We will also continue to explore the deep connection between strong governance practices and fair, competitive compensation. When boards understand the CEO's role, conduct regular evaluations, and build strong, trusting partnerships with their leaders, CEOs are more likely to be paid appropriately — and more likely to stay.

This report offers more than just numbers. It offers a roadmap for action. By understanding CEO compensation and the governance practices that support strong leadership, boards and CEOs can take meaningful steps to ensure stable, effective leadership.

As always, our goal is to give you the knowledge and tools you need to drive exceptional outcomes for your students, your schools, and the communities you serve.

The Board on Track Approach



Key takeaways

There were a number of key takeaways from this year's study, many of which are consistent with the 2019 study. They include:

1. CEO **salaries have not increased substantially** over the past five years.

2. CEOs who receive regular performance evaluations from their boards are **more likely to receive annual compensation increases,** and....

3. CEOs who receive regular performance evaluations from their boards tend to **earn higher salaries** overall.

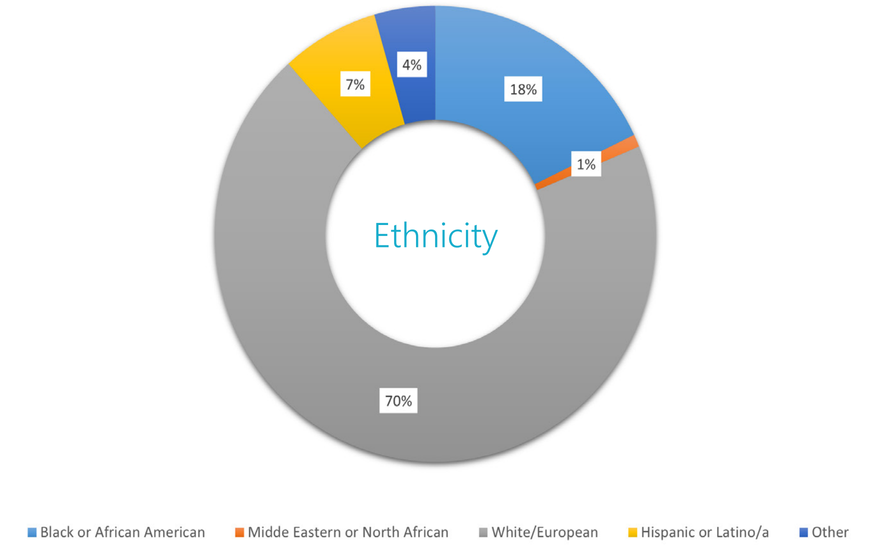
4. A **strong board-CEO partnership** correlates with a **higher CEO salary**.

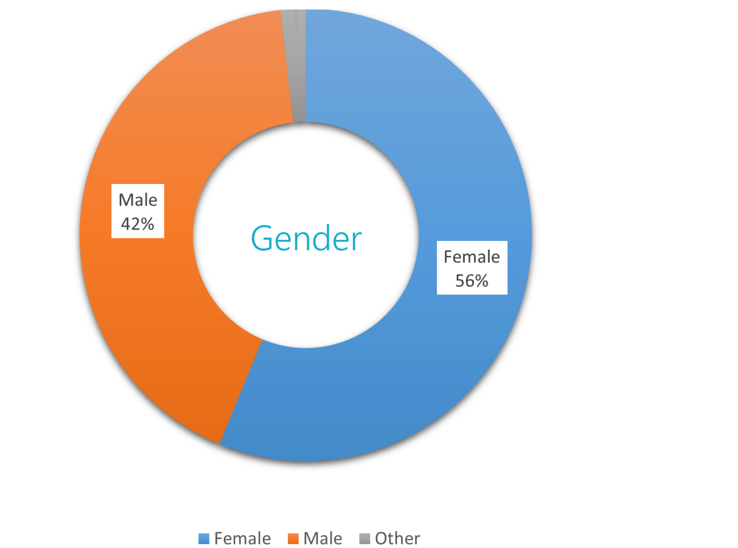
5. CEOs who receive regular performance evaluations from their boards **express stronger commitment to staying at their current organization**.

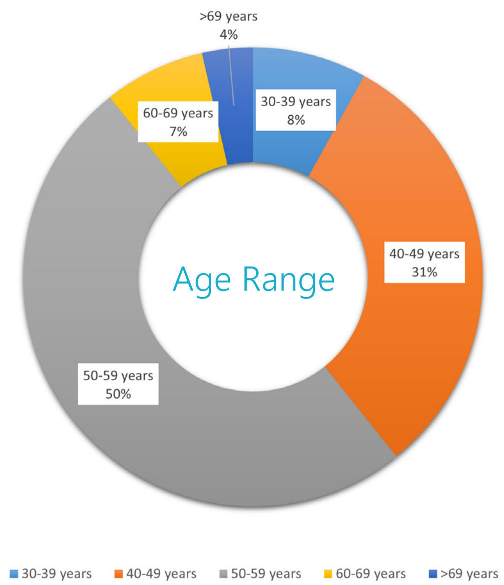
Respondent profile

In late 2024 we launched a survey and captured a diverse range of responses from charter school CEOs, offering interesting insights into leadership compensation. Among respondents, the majority hold advanced degrees, with Doctorate and Master's degrees most commonly reported. The age range of participants spans from early-career leaders to veteran CEOs, though most respondents fall between the ages of 40 and 60.

While the survey includes voices from various backgrounds, it is important to note that the majority of respondents identified as White/Caucasian.



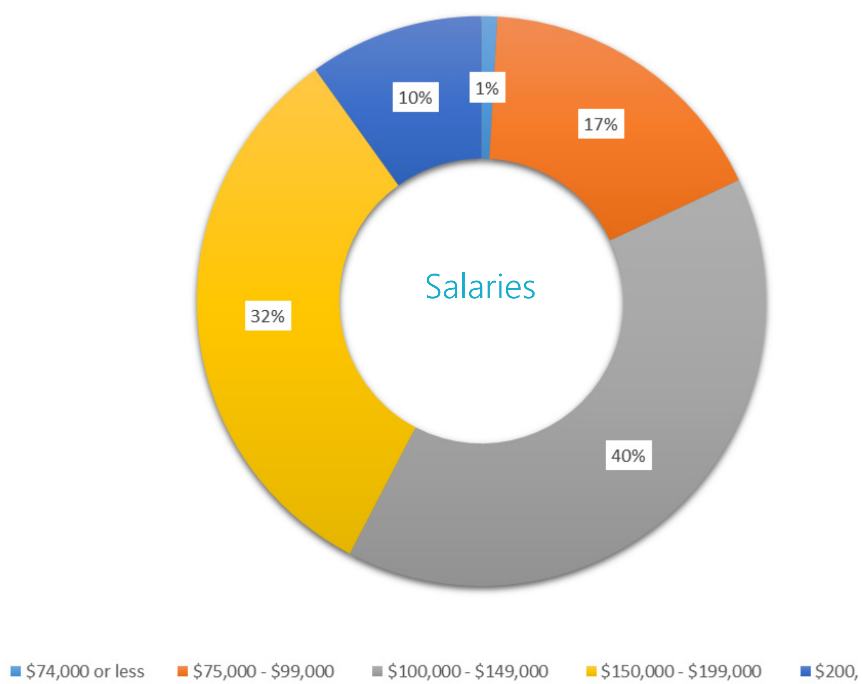




What charter school CEOs earn today

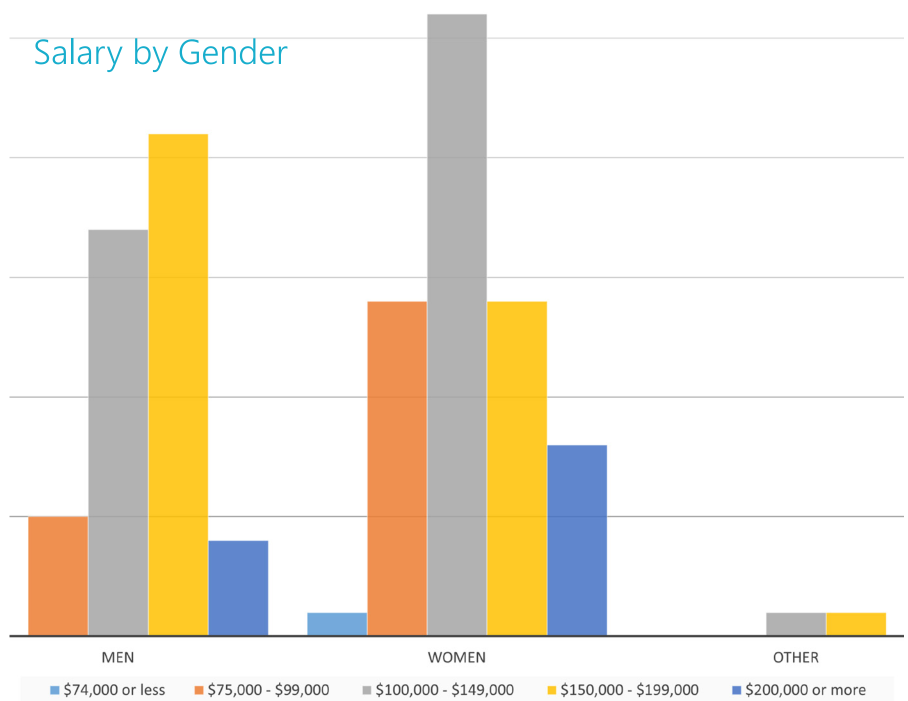
Stagnating salary levels?

At face value, the compensation for charter school CEOs in this study is fairly straightforward. Across all respondents, the majority (40%) fall into the $100,000 - $149,000 salary segment and the second largest band is $150,000 - $199,000, both of which align with the results of the 2019 study, indicating that overall, CEO salaries have not increased substantially in the past five years.



The gender gap

The salary gender gap seen in 2019 appears to remain in 2024 to some extent. In this most recent study, while there were more female respondents earning $200,000 and above, there were fewer in the $150,000 - $199,000 band and far more in the $100,000 - $149,000 band than their male counterparts. What's more, the number of people earning at this level is split evenly across single-site schools and networks of schools. So, this disparity isn't a result of men being more likely to lead larger organizations.



More schools = higher compensation

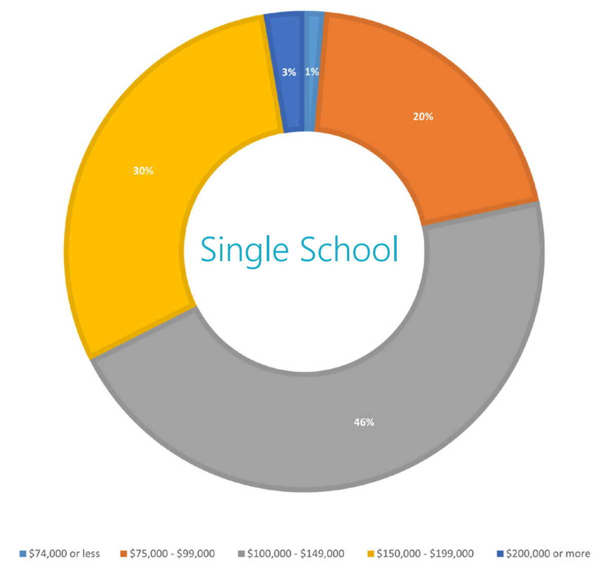
CEOs who oversee more schools receive higher compensation.

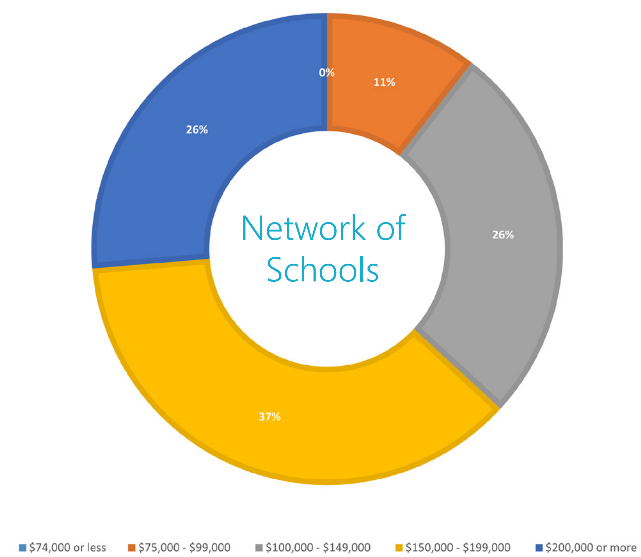
When broken down by those who are responsible for single-site schools vs. those overseeing a network of schools, the latter have considerably higher salaries.

The majority of participants at networked schools (37%) earn between $150,000 and $199,000. Twenty-six percent of CEOs overseeing a network of schools earn $200,000 or more, compared to only 3% of respondents from single-site schools.

This disparity presumably reflects the increased scope of responsibilities associated with leading multiple schools, including managing larger staffs, overseeing broader budgets, and addressing more complex operational and academic needs.

As the scale of an organization grows, so does the demand for strategic leadership and oversight, which is often recognized through higher compensation.





Insights

What conclusions might we draw?

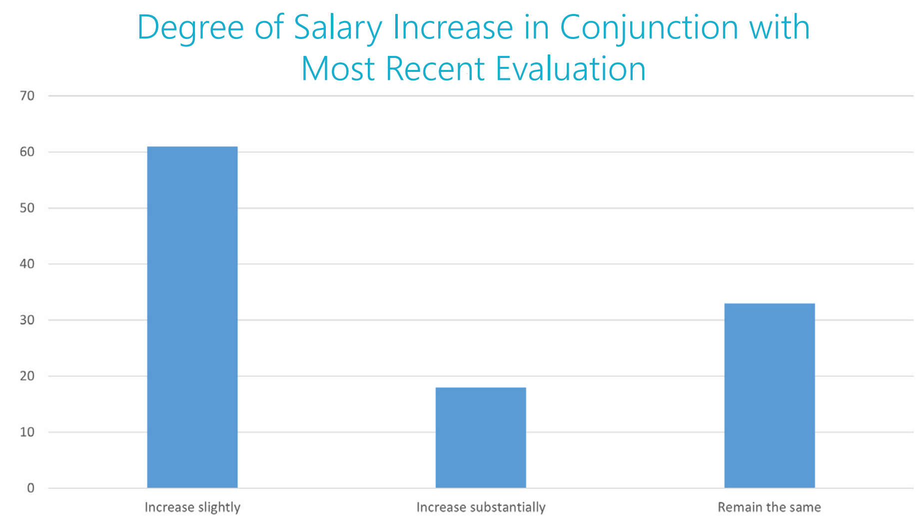
Due to the limited size and diversity of this year's respondents, more research would be warranted to understand any correlations between CEOs' salaries and gender or ethnicity.

However, the results of this research were solidly consistent on one thing: the role that the board-CEO partnership plays in CEO compensation. And, perhaps more importantly today, a CEO's likelihood to look for a new job soon — or to already be looking.

CEOs with regular evaluations are more likely to receive annual salary increases.

Results of the study indicated that the majority of CEOs (71%) received a compensation increase during their most recent evaluation.

For CEOs who do not receive formal annual evaluations, there may be less clarity around leadership expectations and professional growth, as well as fewer structured opportunities to assess performance, provide feedback, and determine salary adjustments based on measurable outcomes.



More consistent evaluations and strong board partnerships correlate with higher salaries.

Both CEOs with very consistent evaluations and those with stronger board partnership ratings were found to have higher average salaries than those without.

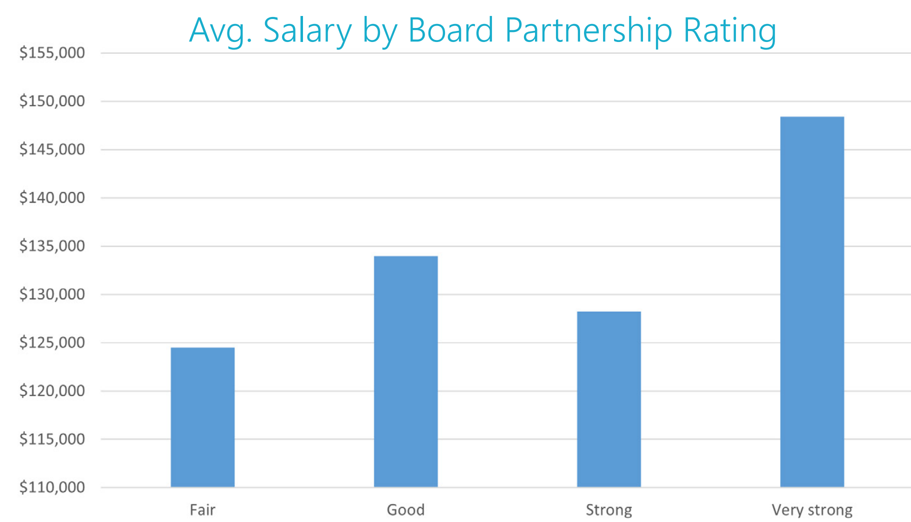
The average salaries of those with consistent evaluations and with strong board partnerships were slightly above $145,000 as compared to those in the remaining categories.

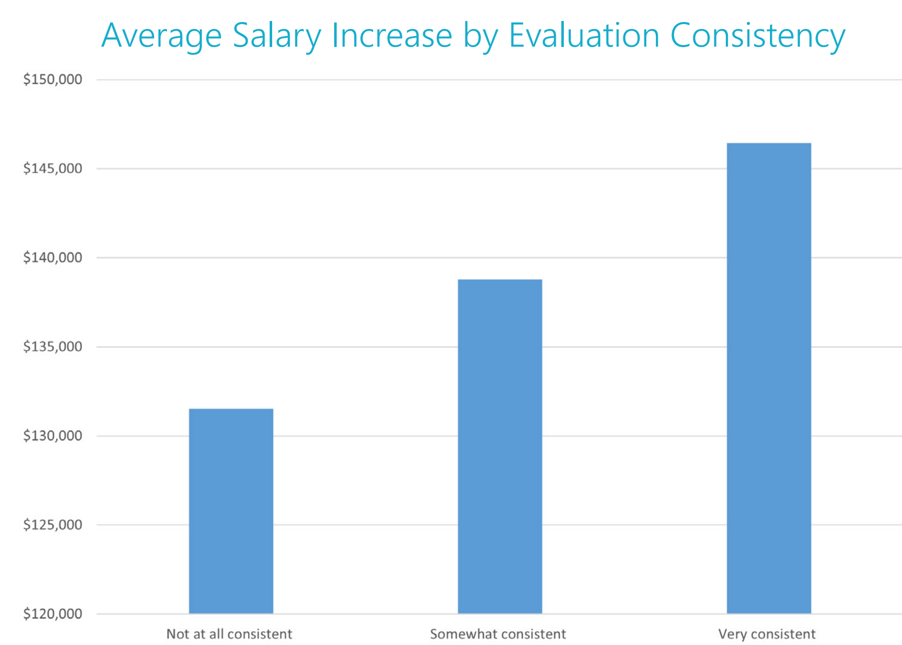
This difference may reflect a greater understanding of assessment criteria and achievement as well as closer alignment on overall charter school goals.

Two steps for solidifying the partnership.

Strengthening your board-CEO partnership begins with two things: setting goals and conducting an annual CEO evaluation.

Set clear goals for your board and for your CEO and then actively track your progress through the year. And, if you're not already doing so, do an annual CEO evaluation as part of your year-round CEO support and evaluation practice.





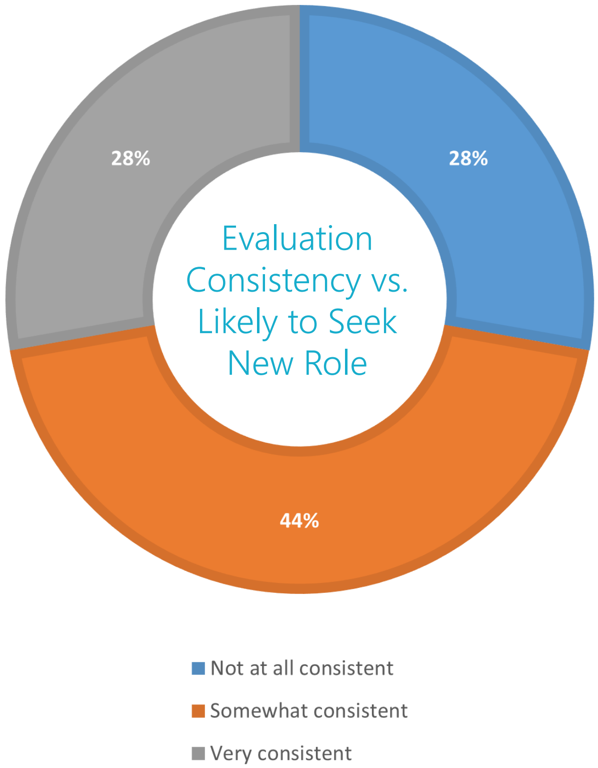
The board-CEO partnership

CEOs who receive regular evaluations are more likely to stay with their current organization.

A key finding from this survey indicates that charter school CEOs who regularly receive evaluations are more likely to remain in their positions. In contrast, seventy-two percent of CEOs planning to leave their roles within the next 12 months reported that they do not have a consistent evaluation process in place.

The main takeaway is that charter school boards that fail to routinely and effectively evaluate their CEOs are more likely to experience a higher turnover rate among their leaders. This turnover can negatively affect leadership continuity and have an adverse impact on school performance.

Moreover, when boards lose their CEO, they incur the costs associated with recruiting and filling that position. According to the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), replacing an employee can cost an organization between 1.5 and 2 times the employee's annual salary. This figure includes both direct and indirect costs, such as recruitment and training expenses, as well as lost productivity while the position remains unfilled.



What are the barriers boards face in understanding their CEO's role?

CEOs who lack confidence in their board's understanding of their role cite a variety of factors.

In both the 2019 and the 2024 studies, CEOs noted that a lack of experience in the education sector as well as a lack of understanding of the CEO's role as the principal executive (rather than a traditional building-level Principal) as contributing factors to an overall lack of understanding of the scope and complexities of the role.

In 2024, additional factors cited included:

- Low board member engagement overall
- A lack of time for board training as well as a lack of time on the boards' part for board activities
- Board turnover as a contributing factor

> "Comparing the CEO/ Principal position to the traditional Principal when it comes to work load and salary."

> "My entire Board turned over over the last two years so the learning curve has been steep."

> "Several of our members are experienced educators and only see the Executive Director (aka CEO) as nothing more than a building level principal."

5 differences among boards that understand the CEO's role very well

Feedback in the survey from CEOs revealed five key factors among boards who understand their CEOs' roles well:

1. **Partnership** — Excellent board-CEO communication and strong partnership between the CEO and Board Chair
2. **Proactive Practices** — BoardSavvy™ CEO practices that proactively guide the board to be a strategic partner
3. **Training & professional development for the board** — Training & professional development to help boards work as effective governance teams with CEO and staff
4. **CEO goals** — The CEO's goals are clear and the board understands them
5. **Governance-management line** — The board understands the governance-management line; they're clear on the board's role and how it relates to and differs from the CEO's role, and there are solid policies and procedures that clarify governance and management roles

> **"I am very grateful to have a good relationship with my board. It took a while for them to understand my role, but they have continued to educate themselves and that has been very helpful."**

A solid CEO evaluation process may help boards make more responsible compensation decisions

Charter schools rely on data to raise the bar in every aspect of their organizations, from staffing to academic excellence. The board — and the board-CEO partnership — should be no different.

Boards need to make decisions led by clear data — both regarding compensation benchmarks and metrics of CEO's performance. At minimum, a consistent, road-tested CEO evaluation process provides the board and CEO with a transparent, data-driven approach to driving compensation discussions and decisions.

If you haven't already done so, start by forming a [CEO Support and Evaluation Committee](). And select the right CEO evaluation tool for your organization.

What's standing in the way of a consistent evaluation process?

By far, the most common reason CEOs give for not having a consistent process for their own evaluation is that the board hasn't created a process for them.

Bring your desired process to the board. Or, at the least, suggest to your board chair you'd like to work with them to research options and select a process. If you show them the way and provide them the tools, they will run with it. And you'll all be better off.

"The evaluation has forced the board to look at my job beyond the scope of not receiving parent complaints. It provides me an opportunity to bring evidence of success or room for growth so they can see how my success or lack thereof can help or hinder the school-wide program implementation or strategic planning."

"Some parts are very subjective and based on feelings rather than the artifacts and outcomes."

"I would like to have a more consistent and agreed upon evaluation tool."

"We lack an actionable, measurable impact push from the board back to the CEO with the evaluation process."

"The evaluation doesn't concentrate on the major functions of my role."

Knowledge + Action = Results

This study clearly shows the correlation between a stronger board-CEO partnership and both CEO compensation and retention.

Take a pulse-check of your own board-CEO partnership. Consider how you might remove the barriers to the board's understanding of the CEO's role, running a consistent CEO evaluation process, or improving the board chair's partnership with the CEO.

And, if you need a partner, we're here to help.

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Visit BoardOnTrack.com or request a follow-up.

About the Board on Track Governance Platform

Board on Track empowers charter school boards to deliver exceptional results.

We equip trustees with a powerful combination of data and proven practices to govern for growth, without drowning in the details that form the underpinnings of good governance.

We enable charter school CEOs and senior staff to leverage their boards as strategic governing partners, without turning board management into {yet another} full-time job.

Board on Track members include hundreds of high-performing charter schools and charter management organizations throughout the nation.

In short, Board on Track simplifies board governance. We provide all that your board needs to help deliver on your charter promises, all in one place.

Survey questions

Profile

1. For how many years have you been in a charter school CEO/ Executive Director role?
2. What is the highest level of formal education you've attained?
3. How many schools are currently in your charter organization?
4. How many boards are there within your organization?

Board Partnership

5. Rate your level of partnership with your board chair
6. How much of a challenge is board turnover for your charter school?
7. How confident currently are you in the effectiveness of your board?
8. How well do you believe your board understands your role as CEO?
9. What do you believe are the key factors contributing to this?

CEO Evaluation/Turnover

10. How consistent is your annual CEO evaluation process?
11. What barriers do you face in having a consistent process?
12. How valuable do you find your annual CEO evaluation to be?
13. Why do you feel that way?
14. What is the annual compensation for your role?
15. In your current position, how frequently have you received compensation increases?
16. During your most recent evaluation, did your salary: (3 options)
17. "How likely are you to seek a new role in the next 12 months?"

Profile

18. With which gender do you most identify?
19. What is your age group?

20 Which racial designation best describes you?

21. Is there anything else about your position or your organization that you would like to share?


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