



Ohio Community School Governance: An Overview

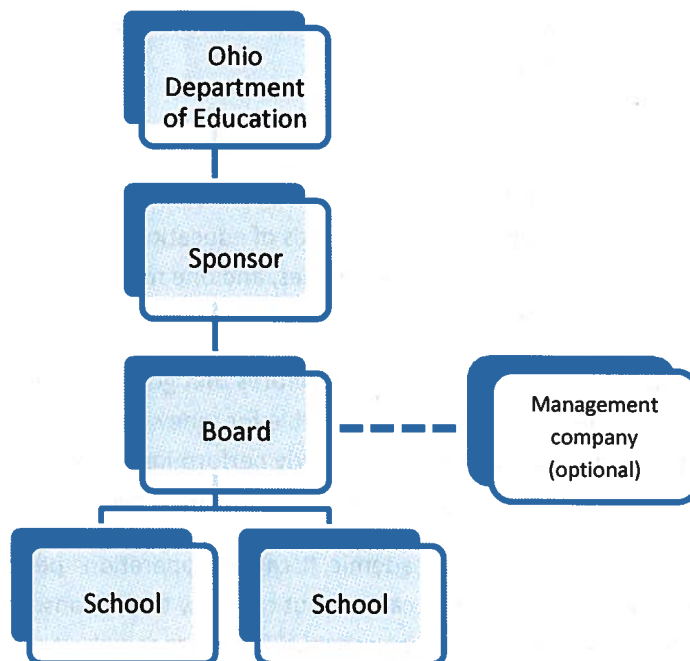
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traditional public schools within the city of Columbus. School boards answer to ODE and the state board of education.

On the other hand, the hierarchy of community schools looks something like this:



This graphic demonstrates that, like traditional public schools, community schools are overseen by boards. Unlike traditional public schools, however, community school boards are not elected. They also have an additional layer of hierarchy between the board and ODE. This entity is known as a sponsor (or an authorizer). In this paper, each level of the community school hierarchy will be explored, beginning with the roles and responsibilities of ODE.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

Ohio Department of Education

The Ohio Revised Code explicitly states that ODE is responsible for the oversight of any and all sponsors.⁶ When ODE approves an entity to become a sponsor, ODE and the entity sign a written agreement. This initial contract lasts for seven years. Under current law, one year is added to the contract for every year that the sponsor is rated “exemplary” or “effective” under the sponsor evaluation system.⁷ There are exceptions in the law⁸ that allow entities⁹ to sponsor schools without ODE’s approval, but these exceptions do not excuse the sponsor from ensuring that their contracts conform with the Ohio Revised Code. In addition, with or without ODE’s approval, all sponsors are under the oversight powers of ODE.

If ODE determines that a sponsor is not in compliance with its contract, the state board of education is required to hold a hearing. If the hearing confirms that the sponsor is not in compliance with the

definition of “at-risk,” or students who are within a specific geographical location. Ohio Revised Code notes that “at-risk” students may include those who are identified as gifted students; this is why Menlo Park—Ohio’s only K–8 community school for gifted students—is permitted. Boards may also establish single-gender schools for either sex. In addition, they may establish schools that simultaneously serve both non-disabled and autistic students.¹⁸ Despite these powers, boards are still required to ensure no discrimination is permitted in the admission of students. Furthermore, boards are not allowed to limit admission based on intellectual ability, achievement, aptitude, or athletic ability. Boards are required to annually report on the number, demographics, and certain designations of students enrolled in their schools.¹⁹ Community schools are funded based upon student enrollment and the needs of students.

Boards are permitted to hire management companies to run the day-to-day operations of schools instead of handling those duties themselves. However, even if a board hires a management company, it remains the entity ultimately responsible and accountable to its sponsor for the operational, financial, and academic performance of schools.²⁰

Operators

As mentioned previously, boards have the option to hire management organizations. Ohio refers to management organizations as “operators.” If hired, operators are permitted to offer either full service or a narrow and limited amount of service; the range varies based on what the board decides. For example, operators can provide support in the supervision and coaching of school leaders, professional development for teachers, staff recruitment, transportation, fundraising, and other areas.²¹ There are two types of operators: nonprofit organizations (known as community school management organizations, or CMOs) and for-profit organizations (known as education management organizations, or EMOs). Operators are often networks of schools that share a common mission and leadership and operate multiple schools, sometimes in multiple states.