

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFICE

November 2025 Board Communication

❖ Welcome Kelly Buckmaster and Jack Gilbert to the CSO Team

Kelly Buckmaster joined our team in October as the CSO Associate Director. She is from Cadillac, Michigan. She earned her bachelor's degree in education from Central Michigan University, a master's in educational leadership, and an Education Specialist degree from Grand Valley State University.

In her career, she has had the opportunity to teach middle and high school English Language Arts and health, and a few college courses. Her administrative experience spans roles as a preschool program director, elementary principal, high school principal, alternative high school principal, and central office administrator. Among her most rewarding professional experiences was serving as a turnaround principal at an elementary school performing in the second percentile—an experience that taught her about the power of collaboration and transformation.

When she is not working, Kelly enjoys spending time with family including her husband and adult children, reading, and running, and is currently pursuing her doctorate in Educational Leadership at CMU.

Jack Gilbert began in June 2025 as the Field Representative for Bridge Academy, Learn4Life Pontiac, Pillars Academy and William C. Abney Academy. He began his teaching career in McMinnville Oregon after earning a master's degree in special education. His family moved to Michigan where he taught in Alpena before moving to the Grand Rapids area. He taught and coached in Greenville Michigan before serving as assistant principal in Menominee and then back to Greenville.

Jack continues to live in the Greenville area with his wife of 43 years, Sally. They have 3 grown children. His oldest is an elementary teacher. He is proud grandfather of 3 boys and another on the way. He enjoys spending all the time he can with his family and Rhodesian Ridgebacks that are part of his family. Jack enjoys assisting in this valuable enterprise to serve the youth of our communities.

❖ 2025-2026 CSO Competitive Grant Program

School leaders don't forget to submit in Epicenter your application for the CSO Competitive Grant Program by November 15th. The grant may be used for one of four "bucket" areas: Safety and Security, Extra Curricular Activities, Staff Professional Development or Other Projects. The total amount of funds for the grant program offered by the Ferris State University Charter Schools Office is **\$400,000**.

The CSO Competitive Grant Request Application can be found in Epicenter. You'll need to outline the project, anticipated cost and rationale for the project. Grant requests may be for any amount up to, but not exceeding **\$20,000** to fund specific projects not covered by the Academy's general fund. The grants are not meant to supplant general budget money, but to enhance offerings or projects that the Academy would not be able to fund otherwise. The grant must benefit academy students and/or staff.

Academies may apply for more than one grant, but must use a separate application for each request. Award amounts are cumulative, no academy will be awarded more than **\$20,000** in total funding. The CSO will notify school leaders of their grant status no later than November 28, 2025. Grant awards will be disbursed with the December 2025 State Aid payments.

❖ Does Your Board Govern or Manage?

Have you ever left a board meeting frustrated about the amount of time spent in the weeds on a particular issue? Does your board spend more time discussing processes more than sharing their vision or defining outcomes? If you resonate with these questions, board members may be unclear about their board role and how to best contribute.

The difference between governing and managing is often misunderstood. One can tell whether a board is governing by the questions that are asked by the board members. Boards who are managing will focus on small details and departmental processes. Boards who govern are concerned with organizational health, strategic relevance and results.

The Board of Directors, as the governing body, is responsible for setting the strategic task of setting the school's goals, direction, limitations and accountability frameworks. Management is responsible for the allocation of resources and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the school. In other words, the board is responsible for defining the **what** and management is responsible for the **how**. As in, **what** are the school's priorities and **how** will the goals be reached?

Governance is responsible for where the organization is going, why it's going there, what it will accomplish, and when. Management focuses on how we are going to get there, how much it will cost, and who is going to do it. In summary, boards govern, educational service providers manage and the school leader is the bridge between the two.

For more in-depth information on this topic, we strongly recommend board members to register for the November 11th board professional development webinar presented by Angie Irwin from AirWin Educational Services.

❖ Virtual Board Professional Development Opportunities

Mark your calendar for the next webinar in the 2025-2026 board professional development series, **Governance Growth: Strengthening Boards, Empowering Schools**. This session, *Strategic Oversight vs. Micromanagement*, is scheduled for Tuesday November 11th at 7pm. The facilitator will help board members understand how to set direction, monitor progress and hold leadership accountable without overstepping into the day-to-day management of the school. To register for this session, board members look for an email invitation from AirWin Educational Services with registration information.

In case you missed the September virtual board professional development session, below is the link to the recordings. If you would like a copy of a presentation or handouts, please contact Sharon Hopper at SharonHopper@ferris.edu.

[Navigating Your Role as a New Board Member](#)

❖ Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

As a public institution, the academy and its Board of Directors are subject to the Michigan Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). As such, your board has a board policy regarding public records and has appointed a FOIA Coordinator. For further FOIA details, please refer to your board policy and the [Freedom of Information Handbook - Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel](#). For specific guidance regarding FOIA, the Board President may want to consult with the board's attorney.

❖ Important Epicenter Deadlines

November 1, 2025 – Audited Financial Statement and Management Letter (Board Received & Reviewed)
November 1, 2025 – Lease Amortization Schedule
November 1, 2025 – Transparency Compliance-Certification of Completion **(new requirement)**
November 1, 2025 – Support Indicators-Financial AFS 2024-2025
November 15, 2025 – 2025-2026 FSU CSO Competitive Grant **(optional)**
November 16, 2025 – Student Count
November 30, 2025 – Hylant Insurance Policy Submission

❖ Important Date

November 11, 2025 – Board Professional Development Webinar Strategic Oversight vs. Micromanagement

❖ Did You Know?

The Charter Contract states:

- ★ All board members and the FSU CSO Field Representative should receive a complete board packet no later than three (3) days prior to the meeting. It may be delivered in hard copy or electronically, based upon the preference of the board.
- ★ Board members should not be given new information and asked to vote on that material at the same meeting.
- ★ The Board President should have the final review and decision as to the board meeting agenda.
- ★ Special board meetings (meetings outside of the official board calendar) may be called for specific agenda items that cannot wait until the next regularly scheduled meeting or items that are of an emergency nature. In all cases, special meetings should not be a replacement for the full agenda of a regularly scheduled meeting.
- ★ The Board should conduct an annual review of the educational service provider to determine the Academy's progress towards goals and the status of meeting the conditions set forth in the Charter Contract.
- ★ Any financial transaction over \$150,000 shall be submitted to the CSO Director for review prior to the transaction.
- ★ The Academy Board shall include as a member (1) at least one parent or guardian of a child attending the school and (2) one professional educator, preferably a person with school administrative experience.

❖ Board of Directors Question Toolbox

The Ferris State University Charter Schools Office is happy to provide you with a few questions to help further your conversations this month. The question focus could come from one or more of our four School Support Pillars: Academics, Fiscal, Operations, and Compliance.

Please note that this is meant as a reference, some items may not apply to all schools, and that there are many questions a board member may choose to ask. If you have questions, please reach out to your Field Representative or the Ferris State University Charter Schools Office.

We will focus on Pillar #3 Operations:

- What deficiencies, if any, were noted in the FSU School Safety and Security Checklist? What is the plan and timeline to correct those deficiencies?
- What is the level of commitment of each board member to attend every regularly scheduled board meeting?
- What insights does school leadership see during their classroom observations regarding instructional practice? On climate and culture?
- If staff/teacher positions are still vacant, what is the plan to fill, eliminate or modify that role? How is the school leader ensuring the functions of that role are being completed?
- Does the Board appear independent from the school leader and management company?

❖ Board Meeting Content

The most common problem with board meetings is that too much time is spent listening to “for information only” reports or discussing matters that could better be discussed and decided upon by the school leader and his/her team or a committee of the Board. To be sure, *some* of the matters that are “for information only” could be conceived of as necessary, in that they help the Board conduct its due diligence function of ensuring that everything is running well and according to plan. Identifying these matters requires careful thought. However, certain reports from committees or school staff may not necessarily have to actually consume board meeting time, unless they contain motions requiring board level decisions.

It is critical to distinguish between the two types of meeting content, board actionable matters and information only items. The following are key components of a productive school board meetings.

- ★ **Distribute informational content in advance.** Share background materials, reports and routine updates in the board packet at least a week before the meeting. Use a consent agenda to approve all non-controversial informational items with a single vote.
- ★ **Structure the agenda for action.** The meeting agenda should prioritize strategic items that require active discussion and a decision. Avoid spending valuable meeting time presenting information that board members should have already reviewed.
- ★ **Summarize effectively.** Include an executive summary at the beginning of any complex informational document. This helps board members quickly absorb the key takeaways and focus their attention.
- ★ **Protect board time.** A meeting filled with “informational” updates is often considered frustrating and unproductive. Use time wisely by directing the board’s collective energy toward high-impact, decision-oriented discussions.

Any Questions?

You may contact your FSU Field Representative or Sharon Hopper if you have any questions regarding this Board Communication. Important and/or urgent information that cannot wait until the next Board Communication will be sent to you by email.