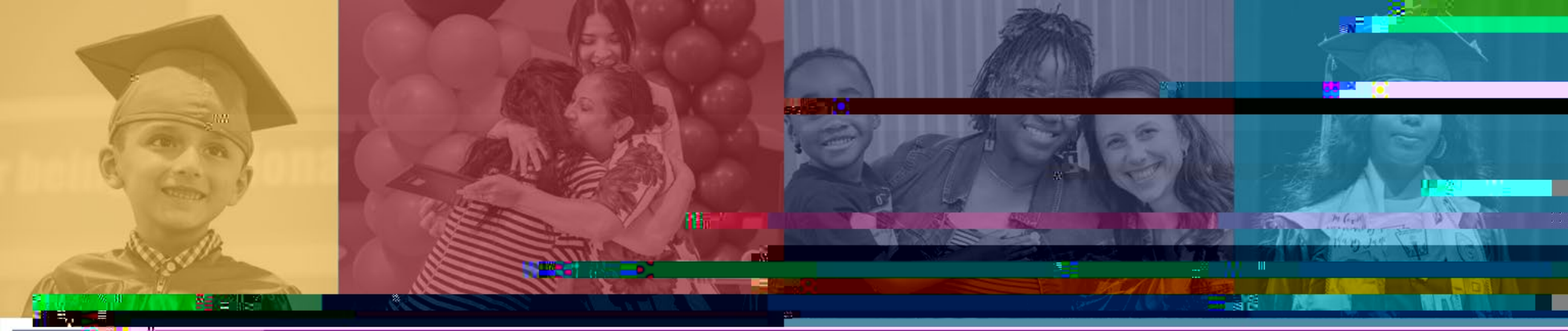


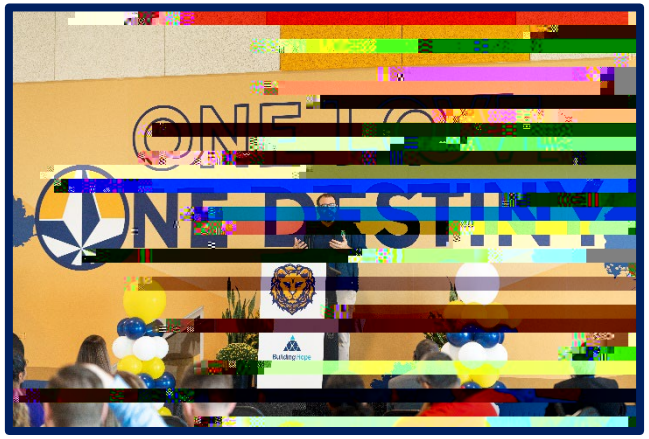
Governance & Community Engagement

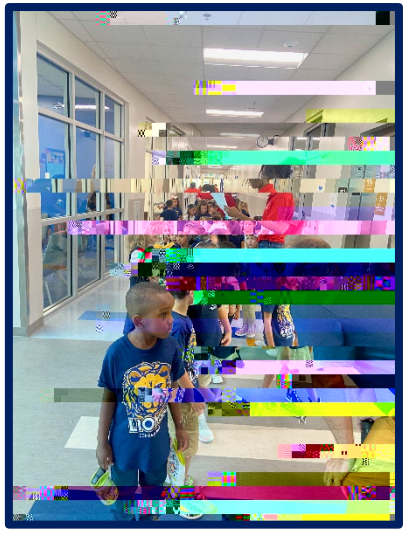
Paul Morrissey, Compass Rose Public Schools

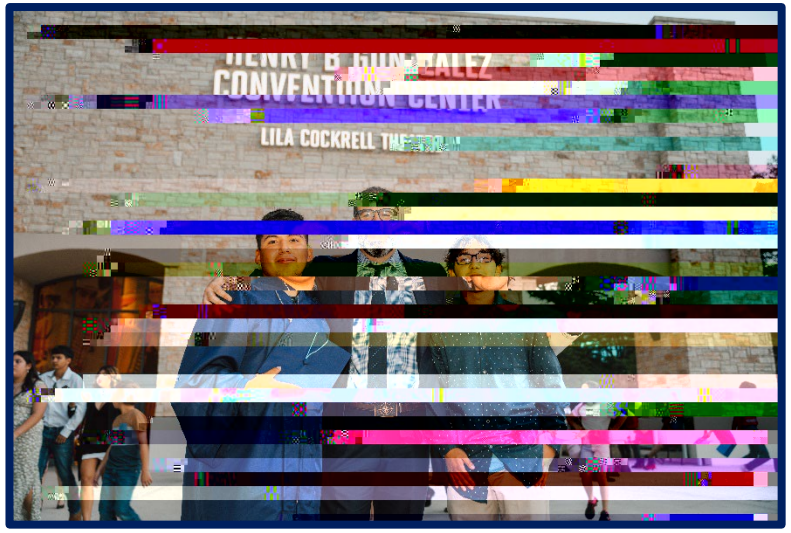
August 9, 2023

Introduction

Who Am I?

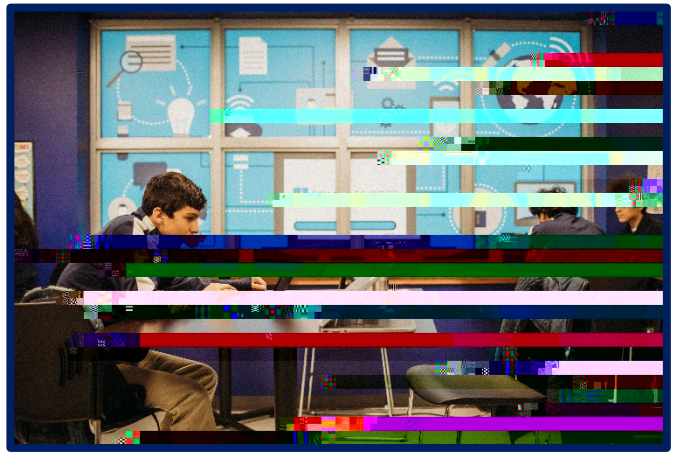


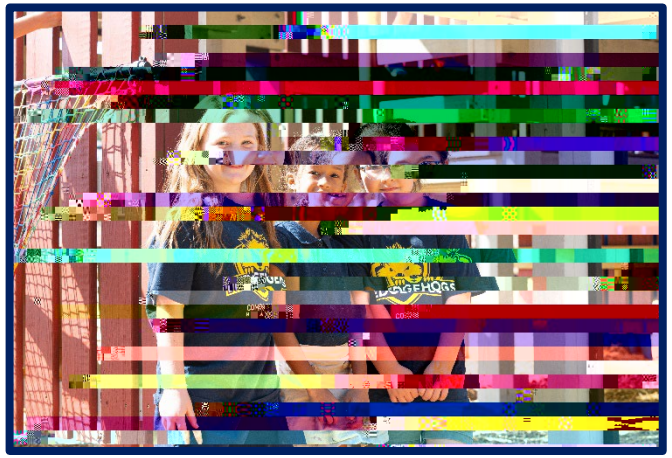




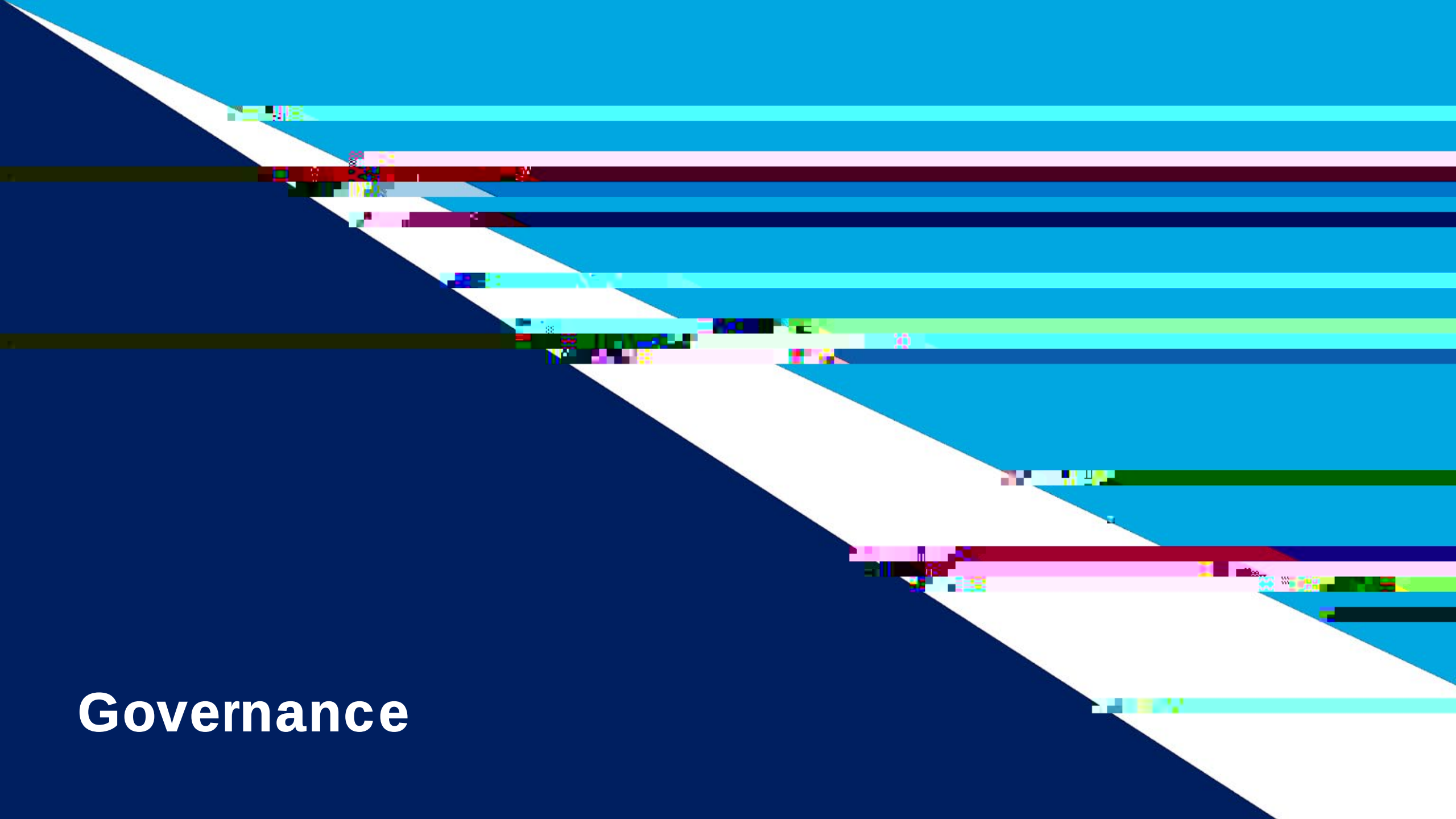
- Founder & CEO of Compass Rose Public Schools
- Sixteen years in education: English teacher, college counselor, assistant principal, principal, network growth, etc.
- Originally from Massachusetts but have been in TX for almost ten years
- Building Excellent Schools Fellow in 2015
- Husband to Nicole and father to three little Texans: Harlan (6), Noa (4), and Sawyer (18 mo.)
- Favorite Food:
  - What I tell people when I want to sound classy – **Sushi**
  - But in real life – **Cheeseburgers**

The Compass Rose Story





- Generation 21 Charter School
- Opened in August 2017 with 90 students grades 6-7 and nine staff
- 350 students in March 2020
- ~4,000 PK-12 students and 400+ staff across eight campuses in San Antonio and the greater Austin area
- Campuses in San Antonio, Windcrest, Manor, & Bastrop
- ~$50M annual operating budget in 2023-24 *(matters for board discussion)*
- Graduated our first class this past May



Governance

So, you want to build a strong board…

Three essential domains to keep in mind:

REPRESENTATION

- Reflective of community demographics
- Diverse in all areas: race/ethnicity, sex/gender, age/experience, etc.
- Demonstrated commitment to target community (not just city)

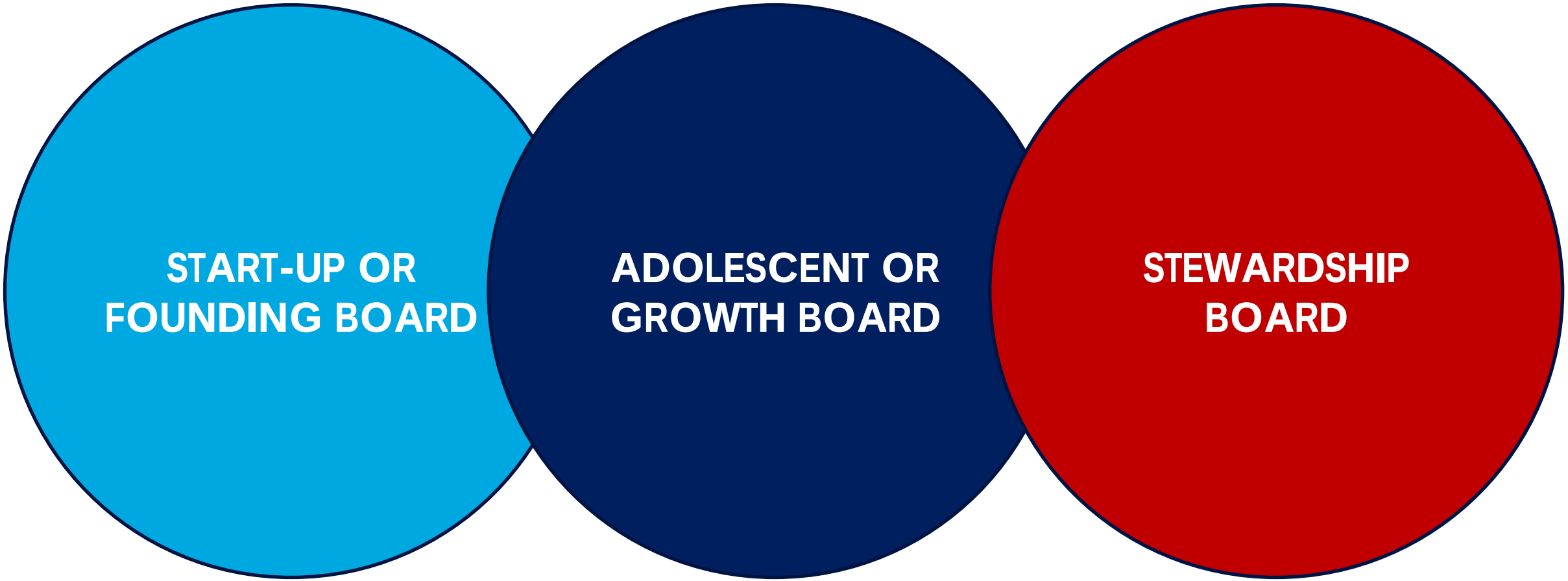
EXPERTISE

- Must be up to task of governing a school
- Finance, real estate, non-profit mgt., law, education, fundraising, etc.
- Executives must be reflective about their own gaps & limitations

INVESTMENT

- The Three T's: Time, Talent, & Treasure
- Needs are different at various stages of org growth
- In startup, you likely want on-the-ground support, not benefactors or oversight from afar

Three Phases of a Charter School Board



Three Phases of a Charter School Board

FOUNDING

- This is the team who will help you get the school off the ground
- They will co-write, review, and edit your application, help you build the financial model, scout property with you, block-walk to get the word out among the community, etc.
- They will oversee the early days of operation, ensuring you remain true to the vision you set in your application.
- They set the vision for excellence with you.
- Could include a healthy mix of community-centered leaders and career climbers

GROWTH

- This is the phase of the board where they become more technical advisors and supporters.
- They lend their professional skills to areas where the org lacks expertise.
- They are typically not showing up to every community event, but they are your trusted advisors when you face unexpected challenges.
- They help set and reset the vision for excellence.
- Usually includes professionals who have grown into leadership roles (chiefs, VPs, etc.).

STEWARD -SHIP

- This is where the board's role moves to stewardship of the mission, which includes a heavier emphasis on fundraising
- This board connects you with community and business leaders who can help you advance the mission of the organization through targeted support (philanthropic or technical).
- Often the organization becomes their primary way to "give back"
- This board may not work the cash register at the school bake sale, but they will help ensure the coffers are full.

Beware the Pitfalls!

Common missteps to avoid when building a charter board:

REPRESENTATION

Mistaking investment in the city (or state) for investment in the neighborhood or community. Every board should have at least one member who is deeply and demonstrably committed to the target community.

EXPERTISE

Populating the board with too many educators and not enough finance experts. Educators are necessary but serve a very specific purpose; you can never have enough finance expertise on the fiduciary board.

INVESTMENT

Mismatching board investment and growth of the org. A startup board that is not willing to roll up their sleeves to do work and a stewardship board that is not capable of doing any more than that are equally challenging.