

AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION INC
Form DEF 14A
March 26, 2012

UNITED STATES
SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION
Washington, D.C. 20549

SCHEDULE 14A

(Rule 14a-101)
INFORMATION REQUIRED IN PROXY STATEMENT
SCHEDULE 14A INFORMATION
Proxy Statement Pursuant to Section 14(a) of the Securities
Exchange Act of 1934

Filed by the Registrant
Filed by a Party other than the Registrant
Check the appropriate box:

- Preliminary Proxy Statement
- Confidential, For Use of the Commission Only (as permitted by Rule 14a-6(e)(2))
- Definitive Proxy Statement
- Definitive Additional Materials
- Soliciting Material Pursuant to Section 240.14a-12

American Public Education, Inc.

(Name of Registrant as Specified In Its Charter)

(Name of Person(s) Filing Proxy Statement, if Other Than the Registrant)

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AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION INC.
111 W. Congress Street
Charles Town, West Virginia 25414

NOTICE OF ANNUAL MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS

The 2012 Annual Meeting of Stockholders will be held on May 11, 2012, at 8:00 a.m. local time, at the Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel, 202 East Pratt Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202 for the following purposes:

1. to elect seven members of the Board of Directors;
2. to hold an advisory vote on the compensation of our named executive officers as disclosed in our proxy statement for the 2012 Annual Meeting;
3. to ratify the appointment of McGladrey & Pullen, LLP as the independent registered public accounting firm for the Company for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012; and
4. to consider any other matters that properly come before the Annual Meeting or any adjournment or postponement thereof.

Each outstanding share of American Public Education, Inc. common stock (NASDAQ: APEI) entitles the holder of record at the close of business on March 16, 2012, to receive notice of and to vote at the Annual Meeting or any adjournment or postponement of the Annual Meeting.

We are pleased to take advantage of Securities and Exchange Commission rules that allow us to furnish our proxy materials and our annual report to stockholders on the Internet. We believe that posting these materials on the Internet enables us to provide stockholders with the information that they need more quickly, while lowering our costs of printing and delivery and reducing the environmental impact of our Annual Meeting.

WHETHER OR NOT YOU EXPECT TO ATTEND THE MEETING, WE URGE YOU TO VOTE YOUR SHARES BY INTERNET, TELEPHONE, OR BY SIGNING, DATING AND RETURNING THE PROXY CARD YOU WILL RECEIVE IF YOU REQUEST PRINTED MATERIALS. IF YOU CHOOSE TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL MEETING, YOU MAY STILL VOTE YOUR SHARES IN PERSON, EVEN THOUGH YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY VOTED OR RETURNED YOUR PROXY BY ANY OF THE METHODS DESCRIBED IN OUR PROXY STATEMENT. IF YOUR SHARES ARE HELD IN A BANK OR BROKERAGE ACCOUNT, PLEASE REFER TO THE MATERIALS PROVIDED BY YOUR BANK OR BROKER FOR VOTING INSTRUCTIONS.

ALL STOCKHOLDERS ARE EXTENDED A CORDIAL INVITATION TO ATTEND THE MEETING.

By Order of the Board of Directors

Dr. Wallace E. Boston, Jr.
President and Chief Executive Officer
March 26, 2012

AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION INC.
111 W. Congress Street
Charles Town, West Virginia 25414
PROXY STATEMENT FOR ANNUAL MEETING OF STOCKHOLDERS
To Be Held On May 11, 2012

This Proxy Statement (the “Proxy Statement”) and the accompanying proxy are furnished to the stockholders of American Public Education, Inc. (hereinafter, “we,” “us,” “American Public Education” and the “Company”) in connection with the solicitation of proxies by the Board of Directors (the “Board”), to be voted at the Annual Meeting of Stockholders (the “Annual Meeting”) and at any adjournment or postponement of the Annual Meeting, which will be held at 8:00 a.m. local time on May 11, 2012, at the Renaissance Baltimore Harborplace Hotel, 202 East Pratt Street, Baltimore, Maryland 21202, for the purposes set forth in the accompanying Notice of Annual Meeting of Stockholders. The Board has made this Proxy Statement and the accompanying Notice of Annual Meeting available on the Internet. The Company mailed a Notice of Internet Availability of Proxy Materials to each of the Company’s stockholders entitled to vote at the Annual Meeting on or about March 26, 2012.

ABOUT THE ANNUAL MEETING

Purpose of the Annual Meeting

The purpose of the Annual Meeting is for our stockholders to consider and act upon the proposals described in this Proxy Statement and any other matters that properly come before the Annual Meeting or any adjournment or postponement thereof. Management is presently aware of no other business to come before the Annual Meeting. In addition, management will report on the performance of American Public Education and respond to questions from stockholders.

Proposals to be Voted Upon at the Annual Meeting

At the Annual Meeting, our stockholders will be asked to consider and vote upon the following three proposals:

Proposal No. 1: To elect seven directors to the Board, each of whom will hold office until the next annual meeting of stockholders and until his or her successor is elected and qualified or until his or her earlier death, resignation or removal.

Proposal No. 2: To approve, by advisory vote, the compensation of our named executive officers as disclosed in these proxy materials.

Proposal No. 3: To ratify the selection of McGladrey & Pullen, LLP (“McGladrey & Pullen”) as American Public Education’s independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012.

In addition, any other matters that properly come before the Annual Meeting or any adjournment or postponement thereof will be considered. Management is presently aware of no other business to come before the Annual Meeting.

Recommendation of the Board

The Board recommends that you vote FOR each of the nominees to the Board (Proposal 1); FOR the approval of the compensation of our named executive officers (Proposal 2); and FOR the ratification of the appointment of McGladrey & Pullen as our independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012 (Proposal 3).

Important Notice Regarding the Availability of Proxy Materials for the Stockholder Meeting To Be Held on May 11, 2012

Pursuant to the “notice and access” rules adopted by the Securities and Exchange Commission (the “SEC”), we have elected to provide stockholders access to our proxy materials over the Internet. Accordingly, we sent a Notice of Internet Availability of Proxy Materials (the “Notice”) on March 26, 2012 to all of our stockholders as of the close of business on March 16, 2012 (the “Record Date”). The Notice includes instructions on how to access our proxy materials over the Internet and how to request a printed copy of these materials. In addition, by following the instructions in the Notice, stockholders may request to receive proxy materials in printed form by mail or electronically by e-mail on an ongoing basis.

Choosing to receive your future proxy materials by e-mail will save the Company the cost of printing and mailing documents to you and will reduce the impact of the Company’s annual meetings on the environment. If you choose to receive future proxy materials by e-mail, you will receive an e-mail next year with instructions containing a link to those materials and a link to the proxy voting site. Your election to receive proxy materials by e-mail will remain in effect until you terminate it.

Our Annual Report to Stockholders and this Proxy Statement are available at <http://www.amstock.com/ProxyServices/ViewMaterials.asp?CoNumber=15611>.

Voting at the Annual Meeting

Stockholders will be entitled to vote at the Annual Meeting on the basis of each share held of record at the close of business on the Record Date.

If on the Record Date you hold shares of our common stock that are represented by stock certificates or registered directly in your name with our transfer agent, American Stock Transfer & Trust Company (“AST”), you are considered the stockholder of record with respect to those shares, and AST is sending these proxy materials directly to you on our behalf. As a stockholder of record, you may vote in person at the meeting or by proxy. Whether or not you plan to attend the Annual Meeting in person, you may vote by Internet by following the instructions on the Notice. If you request printed copies of the proxy materials by mail, you may also vote by signing and submitting your proxy card or by submitting your vote by telephone. Whether or not you plan to attend the Annual Meeting, we urge you to vote by way of the Internet, by telephone, or by filling out and returning the proxy card you will receive upon request of printed materials. If you submit a proxy but do not give voting instructions as to how your shares should be voted on a particular proposal at the Annual Meeting, your shares will be voted in accordance with the recommendations of our Board stated in this Proxy Statement. Any proxy given pursuant to this solicitation may be revoked by the person giving it at any time before its use by (1) delivering a written notice of revocation addressed to American Public Education, Inc., Attn: Corporate Secretary, 111 W. Congress Street, Charles Town, West Virginia 25414, (2) a duly executed proxy bearing a later date, (3) voting again by Internet or by telephone, or (4) attending the Annual Meeting and voting in person. Your last vote or proxy will be the vote or proxy that is counted. Attendance at the Annual Meeting will not cause your previously granted proxy to be revoked unless you specifically so request.

If on the Record Date you hold shares of our common stock in an account with a brokerage firm, bank, or other nominee, then you are a beneficial owner of the shares and hold such shares in street name, and these proxy materials will be forwarded to you by that organization. As a beneficial owner, you have the right to direct your broker, bank, or other nominee on how to vote the shares held in their account, and the nominee has enclosed or provided voting instructions for you to use in directing it how to vote your shares. The nominee that holds your shares, however, is considered the stockholder of record for purposes of voting at the Annual Meeting. Because you are not the stockholder of record, you may not vote your shares in person at the Annual Meeting unless you bring a letter from your broker, bank or other nominee confirming your beneficial ownership of the shares to the Annual Meeting. Whether or not you plan to attend the Annual Meeting, we urge you to vote by following the voting instructions provided to you to ensure that your vote is counted.

If you are a beneficial owner and do not vote, and your broker, bank or other nominee does not have discretionary power to vote your shares, your shares may constitute “broker non-votes”. Shares that constitute broker non-votes will be counted for the purpose of establishing a quorum at the Annual Meeting. Voting results will be tabulated and certified by the inspector of elections appointed for the Annual Meeting. If you receive more than one Notice, it is because your shares are registered in more than one name or are registered in different accounts. Please follow the instructions on each Notice received to ensure that all of your shares are voted.

A list of stockholders of record as of the Record Date will be available for inspection during ordinary business hours at our offices located at 111 W. Congress Street, Charles Town, West Virginia 25414, from April 30, 2012 to the date of our Annual Meeting. The list will also be available for inspection at the Annual Meeting.

Quorum Requirement for the Annual Meeting

The presence at the Annual Meeting, whether in person or by valid proxy, of the persons holding a majority of shares of common stock outstanding on the Record Date will constitute a quorum, permitting us to conduct our business at the Annual Meeting. On the Record Date, there were 17,886,107 shares of common stock outstanding, held by 494 stockholders of record. Abstentions (i.e., if you or your broker mark “ABSTAIN” on a proxy) and “broker non-votes” will be considered to be shares present at the meeting for purposes of a quorum. Broker non-votes occur when shares held by a broker for a beneficial owner are not voted with respect to a particular proposal and generally occur because the broker (1) does not receive voting instructions from the beneficial owner and (2) lacks discretionary authority to vote the shares. Brokers and other nominees have discretionary authority to vote on ratification of our independent public accounting firm for clients who have not provided voting instructions. However, without voting instructions from their clients, they cannot vote on “non-routine” proposals, including the election of directors, the authorization of equity compensation plans, and matters related to executive compensation.

Required Votes

Election of Directors. Each director will be elected by the vote of the majority of the votes cast with respect to that director’s election. For purposes of electing directors, a majority of the votes cast means that the number of shares voted “FOR” a director’s election exceeds the number of the votes cast against that director’s election. Abstentions and broker non-votes are not taken into account in determining the outcome of the election of directors.

The ratification of our independent public accounting firm and the advisory vote on executive compensation. Approval of the proposal to ratify the audit committee’s appointment of McGladrey & Pullen as our independent registered public accounting firm for the fiscal year ending December 31, 2012, and the advisory vote on compensation of our named executive officers, requires the affirmative vote of the holders of at least a majority of the shares of common stock present in person or represented by proxy at the Annual Meeting and entitled to vote. Broker non-votes are not taken into account in determining the outcome of these proposals, and abstentions will have the effect of a vote against these proposals.

Solicitation of Proxies

We will bear the cost of solicitation of proxies. This includes the charges and expenses of brokerage firms and others for forwarding solicitation material to beneficial owners of our outstanding common stock. We may solicit proxies by mail, personal interview, telephone or via the Internet through our officers, directors and other management employees, who will receive no additional compensation for their services.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE STANDARDS AND DIRECTOR INDEPENDENCE

The Board has adopted Corporate Governance Guidelines (the “Guidelines”), a Code of Business Conduct and Ethics (the “Code of Ethics”), and a Policy for Related Person Transactions as part of our corporate governance practices and in accordance with rules of the SEC and the listing standards of The NASDAQ Stock Market (“NASDAQ”).

Corporate Governance Matters

The Guidelines set forth a framework to assist the Board in the exercise of its responsibilities. The Guidelines cover, among other things, the composition and certain functions of the Board, director independence, stock ownership by our non-employee directors, management succession and review, Board committees, the selection of new directors, and director expectations.

The Code of Ethics covers, among other things, compliance with laws, rules and regulations, conflicts of interest, corporate opportunities, confidentiality, protection and proper use of company assets, and the reporting process for any illegal or unethical conduct. The Code of Ethics is applicable to all of our officers, directors and employees, including our Chief Executive Officer and our Chief Financial Officer. The Code of Ethics includes provisions that are specifically applicable to our Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer and other Principal Officers (as defined in the Code of Ethics).

Any waiver of the Code of Ethics for our directors, executive officers or Principal Officers may be made only by our Board and will be promptly disclosed as may be required by law, regulation or rule of the SEC or NASDAQ listing standards. If we amend our Code of Ethics or waive the Code of Ethics with respect to our Chief Executive Officer, Chief Financial Officer or other Principal Officer, we will post the amendment or waiver on our corporate website.

The Guidelines and Code of Ethics are each available in the Governance section of our corporate website, which is located at www.americanpubliceducation.com. The Guidelines, Code of Ethics, and Policy for Related Person Transactions are reviewed periodically by our nominating and corporate governance committee, and changes are recommended to our Board for approval as appropriate.

Certain Relationships and Related Person Transactions

Policies and Procedures for Related Person Transactions

Our Board adopted the Code of Ethics, pursuant to which our executive officers, directors and principal stockholders, including their immediate family members and affiliates, are not permitted to enter into a related person transaction with us without the prior consent of our nominating and corporate governance committee, or other independent committee of our Board. Any request for us to enter into a related person transaction with an executive officer, director, principal stockholder or any of such persons’ immediate family members or affiliates must first be presented to our nominating and corporate governance committee for review, consideration and approval. A related person transaction is a transaction in which the Company is or will be a participant and in which a related person has or will have a direct or indirect material interest, other than (i) a transaction involving \$120,000 or less when aggregated with all related transactions, (ii) a transaction involving compensation to an executive officer that is approved by the Board or the compensation committee, (iii) a transaction involving compensation to a director or director nominee that is approved by the Board, the compensation committee or the nominating and corporate governance committee, and (iv) any other transaction that is not required to be reported pursuant to Item 404(a) of Regulation S-K under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. All of our directors, executive officers and employees are required to report to our nominating and corporate governance committee any such related person transaction. In approving or rejecting the proposed agreement, our nominating and corporate governance committee shall consider the facts and circumstances available

and deemed relevant to the nominating and corporate governance committee, including, but not limited to the risks, costs and benefits to us, the terms of the transaction, the availability of other sources for comparable services or products, and, if applicable, the impact on a director's independence. Our nominating and corporate governance committee shall approve only those agreements that, in light of known circumstances, are in, or are not inconsistent with, our best interests, as our nominating and corporate governance committee determines in the good faith exercise of its discretion. Under the policy, if we should discover related person transactions that have not been approved, the nominating and corporate governance committee will be notified and will determine the appropriate action, including ratification, rescission or amendment of the transaction.

Related Person Transactions

There were no related person transactions in 2011.

Stock Ownership Guidelines

To further align the interest of our executive officers and directors with the interest of our stockholders, and after evaluation of best practices and consultation by the compensation committee with Towers Watson, its independent consultant, our Board implemented stock ownership guidelines applicable to our executive officers and directors. Each executive officer is expected to hold shares of common stock with an aggregate value greater than or equal to a multiple of the executive officer's base salary as set forth below:

1. The Company's Chief Executive Officer – six times base salary;
2. The Company's Executive Vice Presidents – two times base salary; and
3. The Company's Senior Vice Presidents – one times base salary.

Each of the Company's non-employee directors is expected to hold shares of Common Stock with an aggregate value greater than or equal to at least three times the amount of the annual retainer paid to non-employee directors for service on the Board, excluding additional committee retainers, if any.

Under the stock ownership guidelines, common stock held directly, including shares of common stock held in a separate brokerage account or in a 401(k) account, and common stock held indirectly (e.g., by a spouse, minor dependent, or a trust for the benefit of the executive or director, or the executive's or director's spouse or minor dependent), count toward satisfaction of the levels set forth in the guidelines. For purposes of the guidelines, the "value" of the common stock is based on the closing price of the common stock on the day on which a determination under the guidelines is being made. The determination of compliance with the guidelines will be measured annually on the last business day of each year.

Our executives and non-employee directors are expected to comply these guidelines within five years of the later of March 2, 2011 (the date of adoption of the guidelines) and the date the person first became an executive or non-employee director, as applicable. If an executive officer has not achieved the stock ownership level as outlined above by that date, the executive officer will be required to retain fifty percent (50%) of the net shares of common stock acquired pursuant to restricted stock or option awards made after the adoption of these guidelines until such levels are achieved. "Net shares" are those shares that remain after shares are sold or withheld to pay withholding taxes and/or the exercise price of stock options (if applicable).

The stock ownership guidelines superseded the existing policy applicable to our non-employee directors. That policy provided that directors were expected to hold a number of shares of our common stock equivalent to one-half of all shares of restricted stock they receive.

Restrictions on “Hedging”

We have adopted a policy prohibiting our directors, officers and employees from engaging in short sales, transactions in derivative securities (including put and call options), or other forms of hedging and monetization transactions, such as zero-cost collars, equity swaps, exchange funds and forward sale contracts, that allow the holder to limit or eliminate the risk of a decrease in the value of our securities. We adopted this prohibition in order to further align the interests and objectives of our directors, officers and employees with our stockholders.

Board Independence and Leadership Structure

Our Board believes, and our Guidelines require, that a majority of its members should be independent directors. In addition, the respective charters of the audit, compensation and nominating and corporate governance committees, currently require that each member of such committees be independent directors. Consistent with NASDAQ’s independence criteria, the Board has affirmatively determined that all of our directors are independent of American Public Education and our management, with the exception of Dr. Boston, who is our President and Chief Executive Officer. NASDAQ’s independence criteria includes a series of objective tests, such as that the director is not an employee of American Public Education and has not engaged in various types of business dealings with us. In addition, as further required by NASDAQ rules, the Board has made a subjective determination as to each independent director that no relationship exists that, in the opinion of the Board, would interfere with the exercise of independent judgment in carrying out the responsibilities of a director. In making these determinations, the Board reviewed and discussed information provided by the directors and management with regard to each director’s business and personal activities as they may relate to us and our management.

In accordance with our Guidelines, the independent members of our Board will hold at least two “executive session” meetings each year. If the chairperson of the Board is not an independent director, a chairperson will be selected for each executive session. In general, these meetings are intended to be used as a forum to discuss the annual evaluation of the Chief Executive Officer’s performance, the annual review of the Chief Executive Officer’s plan for management succession and such other topics as the independent directors deem necessary or appropriate.

Our Corporate Governance Guidelines specify that the Board shall select its chairperson based on the Board’s determination of what is then in the best interests of the Company. Historically, the Company has split the positions of the Chairperson of the Board and Chief Executive Officer because we believe that this structure is appropriate given the differences between the two roles in our current management structure. Our Chief Executive Officer, among other duties, is responsible for setting the strategic direction for the Company and the day to day leadership and performance of the Company, while the Chairperson of the Board, among other responsibilities, provides guidance to the Chief Executive Officer, and presides over meetings of the full Board.

Board’s Role in Risk Oversight

Our management is responsible for managing risks in our business, including by developing processes to monitor and control risks. The Board views its role as one of oversight and of responsibility for setting a tone that risk management should be properly integrated with our strategy and culture. The Board focuses on understanding management’s risk management processes, the effectiveness of those processes and the way in which management proactively manages risks. The Board carries out its oversight of risks primarily through its committees. In this regard, each of the charters of the Board’s committees specifically address issues of risk.

The audit committee reviews and assesses the qualitative aspects of financial reporting, our processes to manage financial and financial reporting risk, and compliance with significant applicable legal, ethical and regulatory requirements. The audit committee discusses our major financial and other financial reporting risk exposures and the

steps that management has taken to monitor and control such exposures, including our risk assessment and risk management policies. The audit committee regularly reports its findings to the Board.

The nominating and corporate governance committee assists the Board in understanding and overseeing management’s processes for the assessment and management of our non–financial risks and the steps that management has taken to monitor and control exposure to such risks. The nominating and corporate governance committee regularly meets with our management, particularly our Chief Operations Officer, as well as our Chief Executive Officer and other executives, to receive updates on how management is assessing and managing risk in particular functional areas of our business. The nominating and corporate governance committee and the Board also request and receive regular reports from management on particular areas of risk. The nominating and corporate governance committee regularly reports its findings to the Board and may, from time to time, bring specific items, or recommendations, to the full Board regarding risk oversight.

While the audit committee and the nominating and corporate governance committee have primary responsibility for assisting the Board with its risk oversight responsibilities, the compensation committee also assists the Board with risk oversight. When establishing executive compensation and director compensation and in its role in implementing incentive compensation plans, the compensation committee considers whether compensation practices properly take into account an appropriate risk-reward relationship or encourage unnecessary and excessive risks that threaten the value of the Company.

Meetings of the Board of Directors and its Committees

Information concerning the Board and its three standing committees is set forth below. Each Board committee currently consists only of directors who are not employees of American Public Education and who are “independent” as defined in NASDAQ’s rules.

The Board and its committees meet regularly throughout the year, and also hold special meetings and act by written consent from time to time. The Board held a total of four (4) meetings during the fiscal year ended December 31, 2011. During this time all of our directors attended at least 75% of the aggregate number of meetings held by the Board and all committees of the Board on which such director served (during the period that such director served). The Board does not have a formal policy with respect to Board member attendance at annual meetings of stockholders. Our 2011 annual meeting of stockholders was attended by all of our directors who were then serving.

The Board has three standing committees: the nominating and corporate governance committee; the compensation committee; and the audit committee. The charters for the nominating and corporate governance, compensation, and audit committees can be accessed electronically on the Committees page of our corporate website at www.americanpubliceducation.com.

The Board conducts, and the nominating and corporate governance committee oversees, an annual evaluation of the Board’s operations and performance in order to enhance its effectiveness. Recommendations resulting from this evaluation are made by the nominating and corporate governance committee to the full Board for its consideration.

BOARD COMMITTEES AND THEIR FUNCTIONS

The following table describes which directors serve on each of the Board’s standing committees.

Name	Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee	Compensation Committee	Audit Committee
Wallace E. Boston, Jr.			
J. Christopher Everett(2)	X	X(1)	

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Barbara G. Fast	X	X	
F. David Fowler		X	X
Jean C. Halle			X(1)
Timothy J. Landon	X		X
Timothy T. Weglicki(3)	X(1)		X

- (1) Chair of the committee.
- (2) Chairperson of the Board.
- (3) Vice-Chairperson of the Board.

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Audit Committee

The Board has established a separately designated standing audit committee in accordance with Section 3(a)(58)(A) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, which met five (5) times during 2011. The audit committee is responsible, among its other duties and responsibilities, for overseeing our accounting and financial reporting processes, the audits of our financial statements, the qualifications of our independent registered public accounting firm, and the performance of our internal audit function and independent registered public accounting firm. The audit committee reviews and assesses the qualitative aspects of our financial reporting, our processes to manage business and financial risk, and our compliance with significant applicable legal, ethical and regulatory requirements. The audit committee is directly responsible for the appointment, compensation, retention and oversight of our independent registered public accounting firm. The members of our audit committee are Ms. Halle, who serves as chair of the committee, Mr. Fowler, Mr. Landon, and Mr. Weglicki. Our Board has determined that Mr. Fowler is an “audit committee financial expert,” as that term is defined under the SEC rules implementing Section 407 of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002. Our Board has determined that each member of our audit committee is independent under NASDAQ’s listing standards and each member of our audit committee is independent pursuant to Rule 10A-3 of the Securities Exchange Act.

Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee

The nominating and corporate governance committee is responsible for recommending candidates for election to the Board. The committee met five (5) times during 2011. The committee is also responsible, among its other duties and responsibilities, for making recommendations to the Board or otherwise acting with respect to corporate governance policies and practices, including board size and membership qualifications, recommendations with respect to director resignations tendered in the event a director fails to achieve a majority of votes cast in favor of his or her election, new director orientation, committee structure and membership, succession planning for our Chief Executive Officer and other key executive officers, and communications with stockholders. In addition, the nominating and corporate governance committee assists the Board in understanding and overseeing management’s processes for the assessment and management of non-financial risks of the Company and the steps that management has taken to monitor and control exposure to such risks. The members of our nominating and corporate governance committee are Mr. Weglicki, who serves as chair of the committee, Mr. Everett, MG (Ret) Fast, and Mr. Landon. Our Board has determined that the composition of our nominating and corporate governance committee meets NASDAQ’s independence requirements for director nominations.

Compensation Committee

The compensation committee is responsible, among its other duties and responsibilities, for establishing the compensation and benefits of our Chief Executive Officer and other executive officers, monitoring compensation arrangements applicable to our Chief Executive Officer and other executive officers in light of their performance, effectiveness and other relevant considerations and administering our equity incentive plans. The committee met ten (10) times during 2011. The members of our compensation committee are Mr. Everett, who serves as chair of the committee, MG (Ret) Fast and Mr. Fowler. Our Board has determined that the composition of our compensation committee meets NASDAQ’s independence requirements for approval of the compensation of our Chief Executive Officer and other executive officers.

The compensation committee has the sole authority to retain and terminate any compensation consultant to be used to assist in evaluating executive officer compensation. In 2011, the compensation committee retained Towers Watson & Co. (“Towers Watson”) directly as an outside compensation consultant to assist in evaluating our compensation programs as they have since 2007. The compensation committee used information provided to it by Towers Watson in connection with making 2011 compensation determinations. Towers Watson also advised the compensation committee on the use of a peer group for comparative purposes. The consultant’s role in recommending the amount or

form of executive compensation paid to the Company's named executive officers during 2011 is described in the "Compensation Discussion and Analysis — Philosophy and Objectives of our Compensation Programs — Review of Compensation and Peer Group Review" section below. Towers Watson does no work for the Company other than work that is authorized by the compensation committee or its chairperson.

The compensation committee works closely with our Chief Executive Officer, Dr. Boston, on compensation decisions and has delegated certain aspects of the annual incentive plans for the other executive officers, including the named executive officers, to Dr. Boston. For a discussion of Dr. Boston's role in determining or recommending the executive compensation paid to the Company's named executive officers during 2011, see the "Compensation Discussion and Analysis — Role of Executives in Executive Compensation Decisions" section below.

DIRECTOR NOMINATIONS AND COMMUNICATION WITH DIRECTORS

Director Nomination Process

The nominating and corporate governance committee recommends, and the Board nominates, candidates to stand for election as directors. Stockholders may also nominate persons to be elected as directors. If a stockholder wishes to nominate a person for election as director, he or she must follow the procedures contained in our bylaws and satisfy the requirements of Regulation 14A of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. To nominate a person to stand for election as a director at the annual meeting of stockholders for 2013, our Corporate Secretary must receive such nominations at our principal executive offices not more than 120 days, and not less than 90 days, before the anniversary date of the preceding annual meeting, except that if the annual meeting is set for a date that is not within 30 days before or 60 days after such anniversary, the nomination must be received no later than the close of business on the tenth day following the notice or public disclosure of the meeting. Each submission must include the following information:

- the name and address of the stockholder who intends to make the nomination and the name and address of the person or persons to be nominated;
- a representation that the stockholder is a holder of record of Company capital stock entitled to vote at such meeting and intends to appear in person or by proxy at the meeting to nominate the person or persons;
- if applicable, a description of all arrangements or understandings between the stockholder and each nominee and any other person or persons, naming such person or persons, pursuant to which the nomination is to be made by the stockholder;
- such other information regarding each nominee to be proposed by such stockholder as would be required to be included in a proxy statement filed under the SEC's proxy rules if the nominee had been nominated, or intended to be nominated, by the Board;
- if applicable, the consent of each nominee to serve as a director if elected;
- a statement whether each nominee, if elected, intends to tender an irrevocable resignation in the form required by an incumbent directors under the Bylaws; and
- such other information that the Board may request in its discretion.

The Board may require any proposed nominee to furnish such other information as it may reasonably require to determine the eligibility of such proposed nominee to serve as one of its directors.

Each director will be elected by the vote of the majority of the votes cast with respect to that director's election, provided that if, as of the tenth (10th) day preceding the date we first mail notice of the meeting for such meeting to our stockholders, the number of nominees exceeds the number of directors to be elected, which we refer to as a "Contested Election", the directors shall be elected by the vote of a plurality of the votes cast. Our Bylaws require that the Board or a committee of the Board shall not nominate any incumbent director who, as a condition to such nomination, does not submit a conditional and, in the case of an uncontested election, irrevocable letter of resignation to the Chairperson of the Board. If an incumbent nominee is not elected in an uncontested election, the Nominating Committee will promptly consider such director's conditional resignation and make a recommendation to the Board regarding the resignation. Each person nominated for election to the Board at the Annual Meeting as described below under Proposal 1 below has submitted the conditional letter of resignation as required by our Bylaws.

In the event an incumbent director fails to receive a majority of the votes cast in an election that is not a Contested Election, the nominating and governance committee, or such other committee designated by the Board pursuant to our Bylaws, shall make a recommendation to the Board as to whether to accept or reject the resignation of such incumbent director, or whether other action should be taken. The Board shall act on the resignation, taking into account the committee's recommendation, and publicly disclose (by a press release and filing an appropriate disclosure with the SEC its decision regarding the resignation and, if such resignation is rejected, the rationale behind the decision within ninety (90) days following certification of the election results. The committee in making its recommendation and the Board in making its decision each may consider any factors and other information that they consider appropriate and relevant.

Additional information regarding requirements for stockholder nominations for next year's annual meeting is described in this proxy statement under "General Matters — Stockholder Proposals and Nominations."

Contacting the Board of Directors

Stockholders wishing to communicate with our Board may do so by writing to the Board, Chairperson of the Board, or the non-employee members of the Board as a group, at:

American Public Education, Inc.
111 W. Congress Street
Charles Town, West Virginia 25414
Attn: Corporate Secretary

Complaints or concerns relating to our accounting, internal accounting controls or auditing matters will be referred to members of the audit committee. Other correspondence will be referred to the relevant individual or group. All correspondence is required to prominently display the legend "Board Communication" in order to indicate to the Corporate Secretary that it is communication subject to our policy and will be received and processed by the Corporate Secretary's office. Each communication received by the Corporate Secretary will be copied for our files and will be promptly forwarded to the addressee. The Board has requested that certain items not related to the Board's duties and responsibilities be excluded from its communication policy. In addition, the Corporate Secretary is not required to forward any communication that the Corporate Secretary, in good faith, determines to be frivolous, unduly hostile, threatening, illegal or similarly unsuitable. However, the Corporate Secretary will maintain a list of each communication subject to this policy that is not forwarded, and on a quarterly basis, will deliver the list to the Chairperson of the Board. In addition, each communication subject to this policy that is not forwarded because it was determined by the Corporate Secretary to be frivolous shall nevertheless be retained in our files and made available at the request of any member of the Board to whom such communication was addressed.

PROPOSAL NO. 1 — ELECTION OF DIRECTORS

Our Board is currently comprised of seven members. Our nominees for the election of directors at the Annual Meeting include six independent non-employee directors and our Chief Executive Officer. Each director is elected to serve a one-year term, with all directors subject to annual election. At the recommendation of the nominating and corporate governance committee, the Board has nominated the following persons to serve as directors for the term beginning at the Annual Meeting on May 11, 2012: Wallace E. Boston, Jr., J. Christopher Everett, Barbara G. Fast, F. David Fowler, Jean C. Halle, Timothy J. Landon, and Timothy T. Weglicki. All nominees are currently serving on the Board.

It is intended by the persons named as proxies that proxies received in response to this solicitation will be voted FOR the election of each nominee named in this section unless otherwise stated in the proxy or in the case of a broker

non-vote with respect to the proposal. Proxies submitted for the Annual Meeting can only be voted for those nominees named in this Proxy Statement. If, however, any director nominee is unable or unwilling to serve as a nominee at the time of the Annual Meeting, the persons named as proxies may vote for a substitute nominee designated by the Board, or the Board may reduce the size of the Board. Each nominee has consented to serve as a director if elected, and the Board does not believe that any nominee will be unwilling or unable to serve. Each director will hold office until his or her successor is duly elected and is qualified or until his or her earlier death, resignation or removal.

Criteria for Evaluating Director Nominees

The Board provides strategic direction to the Company and oversees the performance of the Company's business and management. The nominating and corporate governance committee periodically identifies and reviews with the Board desired skills and attributes of both individual Board members and the Board overall within the context of current and future needs. The nominating and corporate governance committee is responsible for developing the general criteria, subject to approval by the full Board, for use in identifying, evaluating and selecting qualified candidates for election or re-election to the Board. The nominating and corporate governance committee reviews the appropriate skills and characteristics required of directors in the context of the current composition of the Board, our operating requirements and the long-term interests of our stockholders. It may use outside consultants to assist in identifying candidates. Among the characteristics the committee may consider are the collective knowledge and diversity of professional skills and background, experience in relevant industries, age and geographic background in addition to the qualities of integrity, judgment, acumen, and the time and ability to work professionally and effectively with other Board members and management and make a constructive contribution to the Board. The committee considers candidates submitted by directors and management, as well as candidates recommended by stockholders