Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools

Part 1:
The Role and Perspective of Charter School Authorizers

September 2020

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Ed

NATIONAL
CHARTER SCHOOL
RESOURCE CENTER

Table of Contents

Key Terms As Used in This Report

Charter school: A charter school, in this report, is a public school that operates as a school of choice as described in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Section 4310(2). Charter schools commit to obtaining specific educational objectives in return for increased autonomy. They are exempt from significant state or local regulations related to operation and management but otherwise adhere to regulations of public schools.

Charter school authorizer (authorizers): An authorized public chartering agency, as defined under Section 4310(1) of the ESEA, is a State educational agency, local educational agency, or other entity responsible for reviewing and approving or rejecting charter applications and monitoring charter school performance related to both academic and fiscal/organizational metrics as well as compliance with relevant laws. State law determines the types and number of organizations permitted to act as authorizers.

The death spiral: This is the point in a school's decline when challenges, errors, and barriers become too pervasive, systemic, and intertwined with the school's core functions to allow for easy reversal.

Early warning system: This is a process for identifying patterns and characteristics from previous events that turned out to be risky, testing those patterns in a local context to identify specific indicators and thresholds for risk, and then using the characteristics in a systemic way to identify scenarios of risk and to efficiently target interventions.

Governing board: Sometimes referred to as a school board, this group of individuals serves as a charter school's governing body. The board is ultimately responsible for a school's quality and performance and serves an integral oversight role. A charter contract to operate a school is often held between the authorizer and the charter school governing board.

Indicators of distress: These are characteristics that occur early in a school's decline suggesting a school that is struggling to achieve or maintain high levels of quality. Indicators of distress tend to be more difficult to measure and easier to influence than lagging indicators; as a *leading* indicator, they might predict future failure.

Indicators of failure: These are output data points that occur later in a school's decline to measure how a school performed. Indicators of failure are easier to measure than indicators of distress but, as a *lagging* indicator, require more substantive interventions to influence.

School leader: This term is frequently used in the singular to most often reference a principal, but depending on the school, this may be one or more individuals who take on leadership or administrative responsibilities of a particular school.

Introduction

Charter school authorizers (authorizers) that are committed to fostering high-quality charter school options for all students have an imperative to understand the nature of school distress and failure. **Authorizers and other stakeholders need to be able to identify and understand schools experiencing distress, long before a state accountability grade designates a school as "failing."**

In theory, the charter school sector relies somewhat on market forces and family choice to remove unsuccessful schools from the educational ecosystem. However, research shows only roughly 5% of academically underperforming schools are closed annually, on average.[1] When schools are allowed to decline to a point that closure becomes the only option, the disruption of school closure and student mobility often exacerbate the negative effects on students.[2]

Rather than wait until a school fails, authorizers may have the ability to identify schools in distress at a much earlier stage. Authorizers often have access to data that allows them to recognize a school in distress at a stage when successful, manageable interventions are possible and the trajectory of hundreds or thousands of students can be improved. **While policy contexts and appetites for various interventions and supports will vary for different authorizers, all authorizers can benefit from understanding the leading indicators that often precede a school's decline before decline has affected lagging performance indicators.** These early warning signs of a school in trouble provide a good starting point for flagging schools that may need guidance, supports, or simply a more thorough review.

Based on the needs of the field, the National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) sought to identify and describe characteristics observed in schools experiencing difficulty in achieving the ESEA's definition of a high-quality charter school.[3] We call these early warning signs *indicators of distress*. **This report provides the indicators of distress authorizers regularly encounter as a school's quality begins to decline.** *Indicators of failure* are defined as those school-level data points that reflect a negative impact on students directly, or which would be unto themselves reasons to categorize a school

---

WHO CAN USE THIS REPORT AND HOW

- **State Education Agencies (SEAs):** to articulate definitions of quality schools, identify supports needed for schools to improve, and evaluate quality authorizing.

- **Authorizers:** to review and identify schools in distress prior to failure, potentially creating alignment across their data collection and touch points with their authorized charter schools to ensure they are collecting pertinent information.

- **Charter Support Organizations (CSOs):** to determine what and how to address struggling schools, and what support mechanisms are currently working or not.

- **Charter management organizations (CMOs), charter school boards, and the schools themselves:** to assess the trajectory of quality and health and drive improvement for schools in distress.

---

[1] CREDO, 2017

[2] CREDO, 2017

[3] This brief is the first in a series identifying indicators that verge away from the level of high quality defined by the U.S. Department of Education under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Throughout this brief and series, we refer to schools as *high quality and high performing*. These terms could mean different things in different contexts. States may define quality slightly differently.

as failing under state policy. Table 1 details the indicators of distress identified in our research as well as indicators of failure.

Table 1. Indicators of Distress and Failure in Charter Schools

Indicators of Distress[4]	Indicators of Failure[5]
Leadership • Mismatched leadership competencies to context • Inability to sustain leadership • Lack of systemic leadership development • Lack of leadership **Governing Board** • Inability to convene the board • Board's deteriorating relationship with authorizers • Board's inability to hold school leaders accountable • Inadequate board capacity to govern **Operations** • Breakdown in compliance and reporting functions • Failure to align to market needs **Finance** • Failure to properly manage finances • Misappropriation of funds **Talent** • Hiring challenges • Increased /midyear teacher turnover • Loss of specialty staff • Decrease in teacher capacity **Culture** • Poor student/family connection • Inhospitable professional culture **Instruction** • Lack of focus on instruction • Lack of cohesion or alignment in curriculum	• Decline in student achievement • Decline in student progress • Decline in student growth • Decline in graduation rates • Decline in student safety • Decline in financial viability

We found that **authorizers tend to focus on indicators of distress related to leadership, board governance, operations, and finances** when determining whether a school is struggling. These categories of indicators of distress are nearer to the vantage points of authorizers, who frequently interact with individuals in board or school leadership positions and collect formal data related to a school's operational and financial practices. However, they are largely indirect influences on student outcomes and in many cases are difficult to measure.

METHODOLOGY

We identified nine authorizers from across policy contexts and from a variety of authorizing entities to participate in data collection. A minimum of one person from each authorizer was interviewed for a total of 20 individuals, and documents related to school performance monitoring were collected. Data were analyzed using a coding scheme derived from the literature on core charter school functions, schools in distress, and school improvement. Additional information on this report's methodology and on early warning systems as a framework can be found in Appendix A.

---

[4] The leading indicators, or indicators of distress, are derived from an extensive literature review and from authorizers' perspectives and experiences.

[5] The lagging Indicators of charter school failure are derived from a literature review and from a review of state accountability frameworks.

Authorizers also identified other indicators of distress related to a school's talent systems, culture, and instruction, but on a less-frequent basis. Talent, culture and instruction are more directly related to the indicators of failure, so they are no less important to a school's health; however, they were less relevant to the role or scope of oversight of many authorizers. In other words, when authorizers are asked to reflect on indicators of a school in distress, categories closer to a school's educational operation were less likely to emerge.

This report begins with analysis of the indicators of distress in charter schools. The subsequent section elaborates on how authorizers can reflect on the use of an early warning system of school distress in their own contexts. This section includes discussion of two key findings relevant to authorizers' evolving role in identifying and supporting schools in distress:

EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS

Early warning systems in education are most commonly used to identify students at-risk of not completing high school. We propose that an early warning system methodology can be applied to school-level indicators to identify schools in distress before the negative impacts on students are too severe to reverse.

This report is only the first step towards creating an early warning system for schools in distress. Future publications may support authorizers, networks, and schools in using the broader literature and research on indicators of distress to build out an early warning system tailored for each context. In some cases, this may mean using existing data in a different way. In other cases, it may require a system to think about collecting different types of data.

1. [The context and role of authorizing is evolving as the field matures, particularly as it relates to school improvement](). Authorizers are grappling with the implications of school improvement needs on their work in supporting school autonomy and accountability.

2. [Authorizers tend to focus on indicators at the upper layer or "stratosphere" of a school's functions](). Authorizers identify indicators of distress related to school leadership, school governing boards, operational, and financial elements, which may reflect additional areas of concern lying below the vantage point of authorizers in the areas of talent, culture, and instruction.

CONTEXT IS EVERYTHING

Not every charter context is the same. Not all authorizers have the capacity or policy directives to collect and examine all potential indicators of distress, and authorizers must tailor their actions to reflect their role and function as articulated by their state's legislation. Additionally, not all indicators will show up in each struggling school. **Early warning systems are great tools that work best when locally validated**. This means that a historical reflection on the characteristics of struggling schools needs to be done in each context to ensure the data being identified are the data most likely to predict further struggling schools.

Said another way, the indicators identified in this brief should be the *start* to the conversation about what schools struggling in your jurisdiction look like, rather than the conclusion of the conversation. An even more meaningful, reflective conversation would include stakeholders from varying levels of the charter sector working together to identify indicators.

Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools

The indicators of distress identified by authorizers across our sample (see Table 1) coalesced around what we call leadership, board governance, operational functions, and financial functions. This upper stratosphere of indicators may be further removed from student outcomes, but is deeply intertwined with indicators pertaining to the functions of a school that may lie just below an authorizer's purview, including talent management, instruction, and school culture. The next sections will detail the scope of indicators of distress identified by authorizers across our sample, categorized using an evidence-backed framework on the core elements of a charter school system.[6]

Leadership

Of all in-school factors, school leadership is second only to teachers in demonstrating effects on student achievement.[7] Not surprisingly given the demands and complexity of the charter school leader role, authorizers almost universally named school leaders as the foundation of a school's health.

Mismatched leadership competencies to context. Schools may be in distress when authorizers observe that the school leader is not the right fit for the school or position. For example, the leadership position is somewhat dependent on the school's position in the charter school life cycle. A founding principal may not necessarily be capable of transitioning from an entrepreneurial focus on start-up and design to the focus on instructional leadership necessary for a school to sustain high performance. For schools in distress, an otherwise qualified school leader may not have the specific skills necessary to pull the school out of decline.

> **LEADERSHIP INDICATORS**
> 1. Mismatched leadership competencies to context
> 2. Inability to sustain leadership
> 3. Lack of systemic leadership development
> 4. Lack of leadership

Inability to sustain leadership. Leadership turnover was one of the most prevalent indicators of a school experiencing distress, especially if leadership turnover occurs frequently or in the middle of a school year. Frequent leadership turnover was one of the earliest signs of distress and appeared to inhibit the schools' capacity to sustain improvement or to create a system or culture for retaining teachers.

Lack of systemic leadership development. A lack of succession planning to carry on the operations of a school after a founding principal leaves can indicate cause for concern. Authorizers described looking to see how a school leader "shared the governance burden" including how leaders ensured other staff members understood the school's long-term plan, data, and assessments. "Founder's syndrome," as described by authorizers, may not be visible for many years after a school's opening if the same leader

---

[6] In 2017, the federally funded Center on School Turnaround at WestEd developed Four Domains for Rapid School Improvement: A Systems Framework. For schools currently failing, the framework identifies four areas of focus that research and experience point to as central to rapid and significant improvement to pull a school out of failure: *turnaround leadership, talent development, instructional transformation, and culture shift*. In 2020, the seminal framework was adapted to the charter context, recognizing the operational and financial consequences unique to charter schools looking to improve. It is no surprise, then, that these same focal areas: *leadership, talent, instruction, culture, operations, and finance* emerged from the literature as also being where schools show signs of distress.

[7] Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom, 2004

remains. Until he or she departs, the absence of distributed leadership (such as collaboration between administrators and leadership teams and distribution of decision-making power) and succession plans may be the only indicator of impending distress. One authorizer described their charter sector experiencing a "generational shift" as the first founding wave of "mom and pop" and independent school leaders began to retire without succession plans in place.

Lack of leadership. Schools in distress may exhibit a lack of leadership, and the school runs as if no one is in charge. The leader is often away from the building and when present, is "absent" from major activities and decisions. This lack of leadership may exhibit as a loss of focus on the mission and vision of the school or on clear academic priorities, resulting in ineffective staff development or ineffective targeted support for struggling students. Teachers and other school staff can play critical roles in the effective leadership of a school site; however, distributed leadership does not compensate for a lack of principal leadership.[8] For example, one authorizer reflected that an early sign of distress in one school was when the school leader had to go to other staff members for information.

Governing Board

Well-functioning governing boards focus on the overall health of the school, establish financial and performance goals in alignment of the school's strategic plan, and ensure current practice is meeting established goals. At a minimum, strong governing boards have a check-in on school performance quarterly or incorporate an update into each month's meeting for consistency.[9]

Schools in distress may exhibit governing boards in distress, as weak charter school governing boards have been found to contribute to charter school dysfunction.[10] One authorizer articulated a belief that the governing board would nearly always be related to a school's success or or failure, stating, "All the schools [that have failed] – whether it's strictly academic or financial – it's really the board." The strength or weakness of a governing board to either avoid or address indicators of distress were frequently the defining factor in a school's failure or turnaround. One authorizer noted that "even though we have way more interaction with the school leaders, at the end of the day the charter agreement is with the governing board, so anytime we are having...formal communication (with school leaders) we are looping in the governing board chair, because ultimately it lies with them."

> ## GOVERNING BOARD INDICATORS
> 1. Inability to convene the governing board
> 2. Governing board's deteriorating relationship with authorizers
> 3. Governing board's inability to hold school leaders accountable
> 4. Inadequate governing board capacity to govern

Inability to convene the governing board. Governing board engagement was a key authorizer concern, such as governing boards' failing to achieve a quorum regularly, experiencing frequent turnovers and not being able to fill seats, or failing to meet regularly. Governing boards may experience high turnover, resulting in institutional memory loss and difficulty in creating and sustaining long-term plans.[11] Governing boards that do not meet often, or have members repeatedly absent from meetings,

---

[8] Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001

[9] Charter Board Partners, 2018

[10] Hill & Lake, 2006

[11] Horn & Miron, 2000

lose both the opportunity to review how the school is doing and make a plan to hear input and expertise from members.[12] These indicators were early signs of "disconnect between the board and the school." Compliance issues related to board membership and attendance raised early red flags for authorizers in some cases.

Governing board's deteriorating relationship with authorizers. Weakened relationships between the authorizer and a school's governing board, when previously characterized by a positive, problem-solving focus and open communication during good times, can signal a school in distress. Authorizers identified a decrease in communication as an indicator of distress. One authorizer described scenarios in which the governing board chair would begin avoiding calls from the authorizer, either completely shutting down communication or funneling all communication through a school leader.

Governing board's inability to hold school leaders accountable. Governing boards must balance individual relationships with school leaders to maintain open, supportive communication with the necessary professional distance to allow for accountability. Governing boards of schools in distress with founding leaders still at the helm may have an increased difficulty changing course, as founding leaders tend not to "divest... their influential powers and privileges" (Block & Rosenberg, 2002, p. 354). Governing boards with acting founder-leaders have "difficulty not only to say no to any plan of the founder, but even to subject it to rigorous scrutiny" (Carver, 1992, p. 14). Authorizers described instances when "some boards are completely in the pocket of the school leader," such as when the founding governing board and principal all emerged from a shared social network. At times these relationships inhibited the governing boards from conducting proper oversight when a school began exhibiting indicators of distress – one authorizer described a governing board that "chose the leader over the school" resulting in letting the school close rather than replace the school leader.

EQUITY REFLECTION: CAPACITY VERSUS ACCESS

Individual and organizational capacity in schools are important influences on the quality of education students receive. An individual teacher's content expertise, a principal's instructional leadership skills, or a school's organizational adaptability are all important factors in school success. However, we caution authorizers to think critically about how they assess any individual or organization's **capacity** versus **access**. Not all individuals and not all schools have equitable access to resources, funding, and networks. *As you consider these indicators, reflect on how your assessment of an individual or a school is influenced by potential inequities in resource access in your ecosystem.*

Inadequate board capacity to govern. Governing boards can struggle when they either do not have the correct capacity among members, or fail to deploy it appropriately. When it comes to making real change, evidence indicates that a "board's stance on school... reform is an important constraint or enabler of...action" (Mclaughlin & Talbert, 2003, p. 24). Governing board capacity and competencies are needed on the board in areas such as finance, real estate, pedagogy, human resources, community relations and stakeholder engagement. Well-functioning governing boards not only establish plans for the future, such as setting long-range financial and performance goals in alignment of the school's strategic plan, but ensure current practice is meeting established goals as well. Boards often establish and monitor school operational, financial, and academic performance goals and hold school leadership accountable to these goals.

Governing boards must strike a delicate balance between autonomy and accountability, providing necessary oversight and governance without overstepping into the direct management of a school.

---

[12] Block & Rosenberg, 2002

Governing boards act to both monitor and support the school leader without micromanaging the school. Multiple authorizers described boards that struggled with that balance, either erring on the side of autonomy and not interfering even when a school was in need of support, or trying to manage a school directly instead of setting up the appropriate school leadership structures. Inadequate governing boards may also be in denial that the school is struggling. As one authorizer said, "the board wasn't really willing to look itself in the mirror." One authorizer recalled a school where the governing board had a deep psychological commitment to the school yet required external expert intervention to grapple with the "cold reality" of financial shortfalls before they could admit that the school had issues to resolve.

Operational Capacity

While a strong educational plan and team is imperative for a successful school, the operational processes and structures are integral in ensuring the educational plan is implemented. These structures – staffing, budget, schedule, vendors, and data decisions – are most efficient and effective when their support functions are aligned, working coherently with school and student needs.[13] Authorizers echoed this point, observing that operational issues reflected on a school's capacity to perform other functions, such as those related to academics. As one authorizer described it, "If you have (poor) operations, nothing else will follow."

OPERATIONAL INDICATORS

1. Breakdown in compliance and reporting functions

2. Failure to be responsive to market needs

Breakdown in compliance and reporting functions. A lack of understanding about compliance is often the first indication that a school lacks appropriate organizational structures.[14] Compliance breakdowns as potential indicators of distress include failure to conduct safety requirements such as background checks or fingerprinting, failure to comply with legal requirements such as registering board members appropriately and adapting to new state policy and legal requirements, or failure to adhere to reporting requirements or timelines. While these indicators may only be indirectly related to student achievement outcomes, authorizers described barriers to compliance as raising serious questions about a school's capacity to safely and effectively provide students with a high-quality education. As one authorizer described it, "We're finding when they're missing those simple operational things, there are usually grander operational issues that are in existence."

Failure to be responsive to market needs. Authorizers frequently named a school's disconnect from the needs of its community as a sign of distress, which most frequently became evident when enrollment declined. Declining enrollment at times reflected overall trends in population shifts, changing communities, or of a charter school's failure to adapt to changes within the community or maintain positive community relations. A school's capacity to predict enrollment, including the nature of student need, provided authorizers with insight into the school's capacity for planning. One authorizer described tracking reported projected enrollment against actual enrollment as a potential predictor of financial concerns. Other authorizers similarly described a school overestimating their enrollment as an indicator of future challenges. Authorizers also noted that declining enrollment can be the first quantitative indicator of other factors such as poor school culture or weak leadership that are more difficult to detect in normal reporting functions. Declining enrollment and financial challenges were indicators that often

---

[13] Ouchi, 2009; Zavadsky, 2016
[14] Ameel, 2016

appeared alongside each other as a school experienced decline. Another authorizer put it more succinctly: "Enrollment numbers generate dollars. If you don't have the dollars, you don't have a school. It doesn't matter how much you love kids if you don't have the dollars."

Financial Management

As part of the public school system, charter schools receive public funding based on student enrollment, which, in most cases, comes from a combination of local and state funds. Per-pupil funding formulas and state and local funding amounts vary by state. Besides poor instructional practices, inadequate resources and financial management processes are the most common reasons charter schools fail.[15]

FINANCIAL INDICATORS

1. Failure to properly manage finances
2. Misappropriation of funds

In contrast, sufficient budgetary planning, stable enrollment, and facilities are the three largest causes of financial stability of charter schools.[16] Effective financial management requires schools to budget, manage monthly income and expenditures, plan and execute funding and enrollment strategies and targets, and manage grants as required.

Failure to properly manage finances. Indicators of distress related to finances can include a school operating over budget, missing payments to vendors, maintaining low cash on hand, receiving audit findings, or lacking funding to provide sufficient staffing and facilities upkeep.[17] One authorizer described a specific charter school that quickly exhibited facility-related challenges as the first indicator of distress and noted that failure to secure an appropriate building early in the process could have inhibited other important processes, like teacher hiring. A school experiencing financial struggles, such as failing to keep a certain number of days' operating expenses in cash, might point to a school leader who was not providing oversight for finances. One authorizer noted that when a school leader is "not marshaling resources correctly, [it] means that you're getting close to kind of circling the drain."

THE DEATH SPIRAL: HIGH WINDS OR HURRICANE?

Authorizers need to carefully weigh whether indicators of distress are identifying schools experiencing temporary challenges or setbacks versus patterns of indicators that could mean a school is in distress. When a school was flagged as challenged or struggling by an authorizer, it was frequently described as a series of related indicators of distress, with leadership, governance, operations, and finance signaling deeper issues throughout the school. As one authorizer described the experience:

"It's kind of like a death spiral frankly. You got a struggling academic program, you lose kids, you've got less resources, you aren't able to attract teachers ...now we've got the teacher shortage over the last five years... And so all of those things go together ... it usually isn't a single reason for declined performance. It's typically a combination of factors that come to play."

Misappropriation of funds. Frequently, the first sign of distress cited by authorizers was the authorizer learning of resource mismanagement by "bad actors" holding leadership positions. One authorizer noted that a series of short-term cash flow problems was the first sign of distress in a school that ultimately fell under criminal investigation. These challenges often became known to the authorizer through background reviews early in the charter school's application process or through reports from other in-school stakeholders alerting the authorizer to potential mismanagement.

---

[15] CER, 2011; David & Helsa, 2018

[16] Ameel, 2016

[17] Hayes & Keller, 2009

Talent, Culture, & Instruction: Indicators Within the Lower Stratosphere

Indicators of distress identified in the following sections are closer to a school's core work of teaching and learning, but further from the authorizer's actions and jurisdiction. This does not mean these indicators are any less important in identifying schools in distress, but rather that they frequently fell just outside an authorizer's purview and role. In fact, we heard from many authorizers that indicators of distress in leadership, governance, finance, or operations were frequently tied to concerns related to talent, culture, and instruction but yet these latter categories of concerns fell outside of the authorizer's most frequent means of data collection, and more importantly, jurisdiction of roles. This differentiation underscores the importance of viewing school distress as a systemic state that is the responsibility of multiple stakeholders. While authorizers may see the indicators at the upper stratosphere of school functions, more may lurk beneath. This observation is explored in more depth in the Discussion section, but additional research is necessary to learn how observers closer to these components describe schools in distress.

Talent

Strategic talent development requires that charter school leaders understand the short- and long-term talent needs, and recruit, select, support, promote, and retain accordingly. An effective talent system will identify teachers who are excelling, plateauing, or struggling, provide the top performers with opportunities to influence their peers and reach more students, and give teachers the ability to advance while remaining in the classroom. Authorizers' perspectives on talent reflected their understanding of the importance of strong teachers, and especially on the important role that teacher retention and development play in student achievement and school success. However, authorizers often had less direct interaction with a school's instructional staff than with school leadership or a school's board. In addition, authorizers interpret their authority over issues related to talent to be minimal, as their interest is in preserving school-level autonomy over hiring.

◖ **Hiring challenges.** Schools in distress may exhibit ineffective human resources practices, such as limited or late recruitment, limited or no screening of applicants, and "hasty" hiring. Indicators of distress might include failure to hire a full teaching staff before the start of the school year. One authorizer noted a red flag if

a school "couldn't afford to put teachers in the classroom" which points to additional financial concerns.

◖ **High teacher turnover.** Multiple authorizers described high teacher turnover as an indicator of a school in distress, potentially tied to school leadership and to the school's overall culture. Teacher turnover can be a crucial impediment to a school attempting to make improvements or escape from the death spiral.

◖ **Loss of specialized staff.** Multiple authorizers described high turnover in special education teachers as a red flag. One authorizer noted that licensed special education teachers are difficult to replace, especially midyear.

◖ **Decreasing teacher capacity.** Schools in distress, especially schools experiencing declining student enrollment and therefore less funding, may curtail the hiring of qualified personnel and instead rely on new teachers, or untrained paraprofessionals or "volunteers."[18] For multiple authorizers, a general sense of teacher capacity and the quality of instruction and classroom management was identified as an indicator of distress during school visits.

---

[18] Fryer, 2012

Culture

High performing schools establish trust, overcome language and cultural barriers, increase the quality and quantity of school-family interactions, and equip families with strategies they can use to support student learning at home.[19] Family engagement is important, particularly in charter schools, as schools often need to actively recruit families by understanding and meeting their needs.

Digging into staff culture, beyond basic data on teacher retention, was often seen as outside the scope of authorizers' work. Authorizers had minimal consensus around what constituted a culture-related indicator of distress and rarely pointed to indicators of distress related to culture, beyond high-level indicators such as enrollment or absenteeism. Only one authorizer mentioned analyzing school discipline trends by student subgroup. Assessing and intervening in school culture was beyond the authorizers' interpretations of their roles. The indicators referenced by multiple authorizers and backed by research are below.

◖ **Poor student and family connection to school.** Multiple authorizers described student re-enrollment, absenteeism, and attendance as the most accessible indicators of school culture

EQUITY REFLECTION: AN ABSENT INDICATOR?

The capacity of charter schools to provide high-quality education to students from historically disadvantaged and underserved communities is a key interest to all stakeholders. It is notable that throughout data collection, a school's capacity to serve at-risk students, or students from historically disadvantaged and underserved communities was absent. While many charter schools certainly aim to close the opportunity gaps that exist among subgroups, there is little evidence that authorizers consider failure to do so as an indicator of distress. *As you consider these indicators, reflect on how your assessment is holding schools accountable for serving **all** students.*

and of students and families' connection to the school. One authorizer called these data "the low hanging fruit."

◖ **Inhospitable professional culture.** Some authorizers described receiving direct complaints about poor culture or staff harassment, which would trigger further investigations – although not all authorizers had formal authority to act on these complaints.

Instruction

Research has vastly improved our understanding of what high-quality effective instruction looks like; however, the translation of this research into practical implementation varies greatly. Teachers need the capacity and support to be able

to identify student learning needs and base their instruction around them,[20] identify and build effective scaffolding into their instruction to support students based on their needs,[21] and understand

---

[19] Paredes, 2011

[20] Anderson et al., 2010; Lachat & Smith, 2005

[21] Hamilton et al., 2009; Lachat & Smith, 2005; Love et al., 2008

how to use student assessment results to adapt their instructional plans as needed.[22] Effective data use also allows schools and authorizers to track issues of student equity and drive professional learning initiatives for teachers.[23] Schools in distress may lack the alignment and coherence among the curriculum, instruction, and assessment as well as teacher capacity to analyze student assessment data to pick up on clues of this misalignment.[24]

Whether or not it is the purview of authorizers to evaluate a school's instruction beyond their student assessment outcomes is an open question. Authorizers only occasionally named instruction and curricular elements as indicators of distress in charter schools, potentially due to the level of involvement required to identify these issues within schools.

◖ **Poor or declining assessment outcomes**. Most authorizers named state-reported assessment data as the nearest indicator of instructional quality that could signal a school in distress.

◖ **Lack of focus on instruction**. One authorizer reflected that they should have recognized a red flag in one school that focused all improvement efforts on structural issues instead of questions of instruction and how to ensure their model was reaching all students.

◖ **Lack of cohesion or alignment in curriculum**. Some authorizers reviewed schools' curricula against state standards, or against a school's overall mission and instructional design to assess the alignment among these pieces.

---

[22] Hamilton et al., 2009; Love et al., 2008

[23] Shannon & Bylsma, 2007

[24] Duke, 2008, pg. 669

Discussion of the Authorizer's Role: Starting the Conversation about Struggling Schools in Your Context

This report should **not** be interpreted as a call for universal increase in data collection by authorizers. The process of identifying schools in distress does not require vast reams of data or an increase in demands on schools to spend staff time creating reports for authorizers. For many authorizers, employing an early warning system based on indicators of distress **simply means looking at existing data differently**. The authorizers interviewed did not require costly data systems to identify nuanced patterns. Instead, they relied on data already being collected and professional judgment honed by decades of collective experience. **Creating an early warning system for schools in distress provides a structure for authorizers and other stakeholders in the ecosystem reviewing data, likely data they are already collecting, in a longitudinal fashion with an eye toward decline.**

However, collecting and reviewing data is just the first step. To act on the findings, authorizers must have the capacity and relationships to work with schools or other stakeholders in their network to identify the indicators of distress and, depending on the nature of their role, support schools in diagnosing core challenges and identifying evidence-backed interventions. In this section, we discuss several implications authorizers considered when identifying schools in distress and the actions to take once they've been identified. We focus on how authorizers can reflect on their role in supporting schools in distress while maintaining school-level autonomy.

Each of the remaining sections of this report include reflection questions to help authorizers, and other charter school supporters, consider their own contexts and capacities related to charter schools in distress and our collective responsibility to supporting all students in receiving a high-quality education. Appendix C provides the list of questions posed.

The context and role of authorizing is evolving as the field matures, particularly as they relate to school improvement.

The context of authorizing has continued to evolve as the field matures, particularly as it relates to school improvement. The overall context of charter school authorizing, including supports available for school improvement and the nature of school closure in relation to politics and public opinion, has changed since the early days of charter school legislation. Experienced authorizers noted that the modern charter sector has deepened its understanding of school needs – in other words, professionals working within and near schools know more about how to improve a struggling school than we did 10 or 20 years ago. In regard to struggling schools that ultimately require closure, some authorizers pointed out that market forces alone have not fully eliminated low-quality schools from the ecosystem. As one authorizer described it:

"In 2010, the whole national landscape around authorizing was very different than it is today. At that time, we were dealing with the consequences of letting 1,000 flowers bloom… opening charters just for the sake of innovation with very little accountability…They just felt like market-driven approaches would change things and that's not always the case."

The charter sector in 2020 faces slower growth in new school openings, which further complicates the role of authorizers as it relates to low-performing schools.[25] Authorizers are once again revisiting their frameworks and strategies to ensure a balance of autonomy and accountability in their practice of ensuring a high-quality charter sector. Whereas 10 years ago authorizers struggled with how to create formal performance frameworks for accountability, today many authorizers have moved on to how to engage in school improvement, what strategies to employ, and how to operationalize them into practice:

"I think it's a maturity aspect for the authorizing [sector]…to think about what does intervention look like and how do you operationalize it. I think authorizers are really struggling with putting someone on probation, having an action plan, revisiting that action plan. I think that's something we're still trying to figure out as a charter sector."

For readers interested in exploring this topic further, please see the Reflection Questions in Appendix C.

The Delicate Balance of Autonomy and Accountability in Authorizer Practices

During interviews, authorizers articulated explicit, thoughtful beliefs about their roles in supporting quality at the school level. The underlying tension of autonomy and accountability shape how different authorizers design and interpret their roles and responsibilities related to schools in need of improvement, as depicted in Figure 1 below. In addition to the policy and legislative environments unique to each state and locality, authorizers have varying abilities – dictated both by policy and philosophy – for the work of identifying and supporting schools in distress.

Figure 1. Authorizers' Balance of Accountability and Autonomy

Prioritizing accountability: Designing and providing direct trainings focused on authorizer-school relationships and charter school regulation to support schools in meeting accountability standards.

Prioritizing Accountability

Balancing Accountability and Autonomy Priorities Equally

Prioritizing Autonomy

Prioritizing autonomy: Direct supports not seen as the role of the authorizer. Creating an environment of high standards to encourage charter schools to rise to the high standards and build the capacity to meet those standards independently.

---

[25] David & Hesla, 2018; Lake, 2017

For example, one authorizer described direct supports, such as governance board training, as categorically not the role of the authorizer:

> "Our value proposition is to make sure that our accountability is high enough that it requires boards to raise themselves to that level…We can connect them with people who can help them do that, and be a really good thought partner…but it's truly not our responsibility to require, or to hand walk boards through these different things…That wouldn't be right. Part of the bargain is they need to be autonomous and they need to be able to handle this stuff themselves."

On the other hand, authorizers also described designing and providing direct trainings to charter school leaders, which often focused on the authorizer-school relationship or specifics of regulations related to charter schools. One authorizer described recognizing this need: "Our office has really taken a turn toward being more proactive on educating our charters than we used to. That's a new piece for us…previously you got your charter, you opened, and good luck. Now we have a training that all charters attend after approval and prior to opening to alleviate that a bit." Universally, authorizers focused on helping schools locate other sources for support, including other schools, charter school support organizations, state education agency supports, or external trainings.

Even when authorizers provided direct supports to schools or reflected on providing any sort of guidance, these interactions were almost always couched as suggestions versus mandates and focusing heavily on the metrics the school would be expected to uphold rather than the specifics of how they achieved them. One authorizer described this careful balance: "We can throw out suggestions, but then it's up to them to listen to us. [We'll say] 'Okay, here's my measurement. Down the road, I'm going to have my team measure you and see if [the changes implemented made a difference]."

Authorizers interpret their role of ensuring schools are of high quality as a crucial element of ensuring autonomy within the charter space. As one authorizer described their role, "We believe that we can help and support in a lot higher level than just the compliance piece. We don't own and operate the school, so there's a fine line there. But ultimately, we want to have quality education, so we look for ways to help support to ensure that's happening in our schools." Similarly, other authorizers described the value-add of an authorizer as providing a mechanism to guide an operator to "exit the space" if their application or performance demonstrated that the school was not providing a high-quality option for the students in that community.

When working with schools in distress, one authorizer described their challenge to "balance trust and accountability…**If you're an authorizer that doesn't have a trusting relationship with a school, you're probably not going to be able to get that school leader out of crisis mode**." The same authorizer noted that "difficult conversations" were often a component of that trusting relationship. In other words, these authorizers interpreted the trusting relationships they developed with schools' boards and leaders as key to their understanding what schools were in distress and how to support the professionals in those schools to their work to serve students.

Authorizers consider their own value to be far beyond compliance or oversight; however, they also think critically about how to balance autonomy and accountability in the case of a school in decline. Authorizers described the dilemma of negotiating their roles when a school in distress exhibits behaviors or decisions

for interventions that lack an evidence-base or appear to fail to meet the needs of the challenge or context. **As authorizers' role in both monitoring and supporting schools evolves, authorizers are acknowledging the difficulty in knowing how far to allow a struggling school to go in the name of autonomy.** For readers interested in exploring this topic further, please see the Reflection Questions in Appendix C.

Authorizers tend to focus on indicators at the upper layer of the stratosphere of a school's functions.

Authorizers identified indicators of distress related to school leadership, school governing boards, and operational/financial management elements. These indicators are certainly crucial ones related to charter schools' failure or likelihood of improvement. However, they also tend to be less directly related to student outcomes than other indicators. For example, the quality of the school leader is only indirectly related to student achievement outcomes, whereas the quality of a specific teacher would be expected to correlate to student achievement more directly.
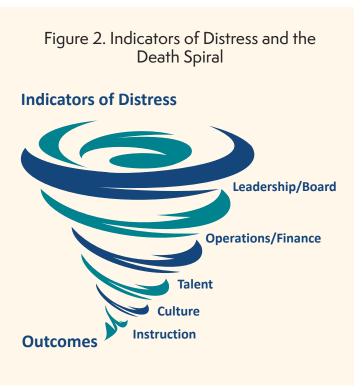
The reason for this focus at what we call "the upper stratosphere" of school functions is likely related to authorizers' vantage point and area by which an authorizer can influence decisions based on the agreement and balance of autonomy for accountability. Authorizers described the systemic nature of school distress that often lurked just below the surface of individual indicators. For example, many authorizers described developing deep understandings of governing board capacities and functions since this is the entity the authorizer interacts most with, issues the charter to, and in some cases has an articulated authority or inclination to provide supports in this area.

As another example, multiple authorizers described frequently identifying enrollment declines as an indicator of distress. Declining enrollment on its own would be an important data point, but declining enrollment could also be related to poor relationships with families, decreased quality of instruction, or eroding school culture. Simultaneously, that change in enrollment could lead to financial struggles as overall per pupil funding declined in proportion.

The Critical Importance of the Authorizer-School Leader Relationship

While the existence of indicators of distress at the governing board and leadership level may signal additional indicators below the stratosphere, authorizers universally pointed to the capacity, or lack thereof of board and school leadership's ability to hear and act on difficult information as the deciding factor in a school's trajectory to continued failure or reversal. Authorizers painted the picture of schools in distress as engulfed in what they dubbed the "death spiral" wherein leaders exhibit a downward "spinning" trajectory of distrust, lack of openness, and proactive actions.

The Death Spiral is a strong force that clouds individual professionals' decision-making and ability to look beyond immediate crises to the long-term effects.

Figure 2. Indicators of Distress and the Death Spiral

Indicators of Distress

Leadership/Board

Operations/Finance

Talent

Culture

Instruction

Outcomes

Authorizers noted that school leaders' behaviors often changed noticeably when a school began experiencing distress, signaling they had entered "the death spiral." One authorizer described school leaders becoming visibly "hostile" when confronted with objective data, as though "they don't want to hear the facts or see the facts." The same authorizer noted that once a school was in the death spiral the leader would regress into "a crisis mentality, and it is catastrophic…they're not helping themselves. It would be really valuable for them to just take a pause, take a deep breath, and try to solve problems. But they get into this chaos crisis mode and they can never get out of it…they compound the problem."

Another authorizer named the concerning behavior as "cagey…if I am getting spin and not straight talk. You're in survival mode. You're trying to protect what you have and that becomes your orientation. It becomes less student-centric and more about are we preserving the institution." As one authorizer noted, "if you're not being clear with me about those problems then I know things are not going well."

For readers interested in exploring this topic further, please see the Reflection Questions in Appendix C.

Conclusion

When schools begin to exhibit indicators of distress, an authorizer may be the first external stakeholder to encounter concerning data or behavior. Authorizers are frequently the first stakeholders beyond the school itself with the capacity to recommend, provide, or mandate (depending on a variety of factors) supports or corrective actions. Yet, authorizers must balance this unique opportunity and vantage point with the structural imperative of maintaining school-level autonomy, even as the need for school improvement in some contexts becomes increasingly central to conversations of policy and practice.

For Further Reading

For Part 2 of the Indicators of Distress series, the NCSRC will release a toolkit including more detailed descriptions of indicators of distress, including specific data points relevant to each category of indicator and examples of data collection instruments and reflection tools used by authorizers around the country. This toolkit will also include action steps for authorizers interested in building out an early warning system for schools in distress within their portfolios. Additional research is planned to further explore indicators of distress and build out a complete depiction of charter schools in distress, in order to better support all actors in the charter school system in identifying and supporting these schools and the students they serve.

Appendix A: Methodology

This report was prompted by a need to better understand authorizers' experiences with schools in distress, and by an intention to improve knowledge of the supports provided to or available for struggling charter schools. A brief review of literature and of the needs analysis conducted of Charter School Programs (CSP) grantees in Fall 2019 revealed a gap in research on high-quality authorizing practices and on charter schools in distress. This research did not intend to identify best practices or successful strategies, but rather focused on providing a description of authorizers' observations, grounded in a rich analysis of evidence and corresponding documentation of authorizer processes. Three research questions guided design, data collection, analysis, and the presentation of findings:

1. What "indicators of distress" do authorizers observe in charter schools prior to designation as a "failing school"?

2. How do authorizers of varying capacities identify schools in distress?

3. How and under what circumstances do authorizers of varying capacities respond to schools in distress, either with internal processes or interventions to reverse declines?

Theoretical Framework: Early Warning Systems

By combining the use of an early warning system for identifying at-risk scenarios before a crisis, and the systemic nature of distress characterized by "the death spiral" of organizational failure, we constructed a framework that considers an early warning system approach to identify charter schools in distress prior to their entering the death spiral of school failure.

An early warning system begins by identifying patterns and characteristics from previous events that turned out to be risky, testing those patterns in a local context to identify specific indicators and thresholds for risk, and then using the characteristics in a systemic way to identify scenarios of risk and to efficiently target interventions. We apply a methodology parallel to an early warning system to identify at-risk schools by collecting data on authorizers' observations of schools in distress and identifying characteristics they observed in schools that eventually closed, with the intention that the resulting findings could inform later empirical testing of these indicators within a local context. Using an early warning system can allow authorizers and other stakeholders to identify schools before they enter a stage of distress or failure that is too deep, systemic, or extensive to recover.

Early warning systems in education are most commonly used to identify students at-risk of not completing high school. The most common use of an early warning system in education is to prevent students from dropping out of high school, by identifying students as early as possible who may be at risk of doing so.[26] These systems are based on broad empirical data, but validated within each local context to determine exactly which indicators of distress can be collected and analyzed to identify students who are not being served well by the current system. Specific patterns of data such as attendance records, course completion, student mobility, and course grades might indicate a student in distress at a stage early enough for

---

[26] Allensworth & Easton, 2005; Allensworth & Easton, 2007; Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Neild & Balfanz, 2006; Silver, Saunders, & Zarate, 2008

targeted interventions to have a positive impact.[27] Just as a student's decision to drop out of school is a gradual process that starts well before high school, schools that fail to meet their renewal targets also exhibit clear signs ("early warnings") in the years prior, that enable states, authorizers, charter support organizations, and governing board members to identify which schools are at greatest risk of not meeting renewal criteria. Using an early warning system for schools can also provide a roadmap about what schools need to improve their achievement.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection occurred from December 2019-February 2020. Interviews were the primary mode of data collection and were informed by an extensive document review that evolved to form an independent data set informing findings. Table 1 provides additional detail on the sample and data collection. Authorizers were chosen based on the state standing on authorizer practices from Center for Education Reform. The authorizers were sorted by various characteristics the researchers felt should be represented in the overall pool of authorizers to be included in the guide. These "pool" characteristics included:

- Types of authorizers, including local school boards, institutions of higher education, nonprofit organizations, state-level boards and agencies, and local government agencies

- Capacity of the authorizer, as defined by size of authorizers' portfolios, policy environment, length of history of authorizing work and number of staff dedicated to authorizing

- Diversity by authorizing approaches

This research began with a literature review examining the existing research about efficient and effective charter schools and authorizer practice, including theories and essays as well as reviews of empirical research and major research studies. This review identified indicators that the research suggests contribute most to effective charter schools, and when available, indicators of when a school began to decline or was declining, and showing signs of distress. This set of indicators were organized into a framework that served as the basis for the interviews and document review of authorizers practice. The data collection and analysis processes were framed by early warning system methodology.

For the review, a team of three researchers from NCSRC reviewed and analyzed evidence about authorizer practices from each participating authorizer. The review process consisted of two parts: a document review and an authorizer interview. Document review focused on publicly available authorizer documentation related to applications for operation, review, and expansion and replication reviews. The document review informed the analysis of indicators of distress collected by authorizers through formal review processes and provided foundational content to customize interview protocols. Interviews were conducted with volunteers from each authorizer, targeting leadership staff and staff involved with reviewing and supporting schools. Interviews were conducted individually when possible and with teams of staff when the authorizer preferred. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded using a coding scheme derived from the literature review and document analysis. An iterative coding process evolved to incorporate additional themes that emerged from interview analysis. A description of the data collection by authorizer is in Table 2.

---

27 Halverson, Prichett, & Watson, 2007; Herman & Gribbons, 2001; Huffman & Kalnin, 2003; Fiarman, 2007

Table 2: Data collection across authorizing agencies

Authorizer (State)	Participants interviewed	Document review: policies and procedures for monitoring and renewal	Document review: performance frameworks (Academic, Organizational, Financial)	Document review: examples of school annual reports and renewal reports	Document review: charter school intervention process
Arizona (AZ)	2	X	X		X
Ball State University (IN)	2	X	X		X
Central Michigan University (MI)	3	X		X	X
Daleville Community Schools (IN)	1	X	X		
Delaware Department of Education (DE)	2	X	X	X	
Indianapolis Mayor's Office (IN)	6	X	X	X	
Metro Nashville Public Schools (TN)	1	X	X		X
Shelby County Public Schools (TN)	1	X	X	X	
Tennessee State Board of Education	2	X	X		X

To facilitate robust data collection and to ensure participant protections, all interview participants were provided with the opportunity to make all or portions of their interview off the record or anonymous. Participants who are quoted or referenced in examples in this report were given the opportunity to review quotes and statements for accuracy. This report summarizes the aggregate results from the reviews and makes recommendations for authorizers, state education agencies, CSOs, schools boards, and schools to consider within their own contexts and objectives. The final report benefitted from the following review processes:

◖ Internal reviews by charter school experts including those with backgrounds as: charter school leaders, charter school data and reporting analysts, researchers

◖ External review by representatives from charter management organizations and authorizers

◖ External reviews by partner organizations

◖ Periodic reviews for the application of diversity equity and inclusion standards (see Appendix B)

◖ Review by representatives of the U.S. Department of Education Office of Charter School Programs

Appendix B: Diversity Equity and Inclusion Standards for Education

NCSRC employs a protocol for ensuring diversity, equity, and inclusion standards are considered within any major research effort.[28] While not all research will completely align with these standards, the standards provide a framework for review and articulate the goal for all publications. NCSRC strives to improve our capacity to incorporate these standards into research and practice and the authors welcome conversations and feedback.

The protocol requires review at the following stages of research:

- Literature review/background context
- Research questions
- Data collection and sampling
- Data analysis
- Sense-making
- Dissemination

The following standards are a selection of those that guide the review protocol:

- The extent to which the research incorporates the perspectives of diverse populations
- The extent to which the research incorporates the impact or potential impact of proposed interventions on diverse populations
- The incorporation of a plan for bias-awareness and bias-reduction
- The avoidance of a deficit model for describing inequities in educational outcomes
- The incorporation of culturally responsive policy, school operations, and instruction
- The usefulness of resulting publications for a variety of audiences

---

[28] These standards are informed largely by the University of Northern Colorado's College of Education and Behavioral Sciences Diversity and Equity Framework and the American Economic Association's Best Practices in Conducting Research tool.

Appendix C: Reflection Questions From This Report

Authorizers maintain some of the most important data records on individual schools and have capacities for identifying schools in distress well before closure. While charter school authorizers may not always have the capacity or authority to intervene in a struggling school, authorizers do identify as having an imperative to maintain high quality in schools within their portfolios to ensure all students have access to high quality options.

1. *As an authorizer, how are your authorizing practices continuing to evolve to determine if schools are struggling before students are negatively affected?*

2. *How can your authorizing capacity or resources be better aligned to identify and support schools in distress?*

3. *How can your authorizing process better ensure equity of outcomes of all students?*

Authorizers consider their own value to be far beyond compliance or oversight, however they also think critically about how to balance autonomy and accountability in the case of a school in decline. Authorizers described the dilemma of negotiating their roles when a school in distress exhibits behaviors or decisions for interventions that lack an evidence-base or appear to fail to meet the needs of the challenge or context. As authorizers' role in both monitoring and supporting schools evolves, authorizers are acknowledging the difficulty in knowing how far to allow a struggling school to go in the name of autonomy.

4. *Where does a school's autonomy end and an authorizer's responsibility for accountability begin? Does this balance change in underperforming schools?*

5. *Does your current relationship with schools support problem-solving collaboration? Are you able to have difficult and transparent conversations with school boards and leaders, for example around equitable outcomes or community responsiveness?*

6. *At what point and in what ways would you or could you provide support? How would you balance these supports with school-level autonomy?*

Authorizers collect extensive amounts of information about their schools' capacity, programming, functioning that can be used as a way to determine whether schools are struggling, but likely will not contain all the data needed.

7. *How can you develop and improve partnerships with other stakeholders in your ecosystem to gain a full perspective on the indicators of distress?*

8. *What other stakeholders in your ecosystem may benefit from having these indicators of distress?*

9. *What systems are currently in place that could be leveraged to identify and supports struggling schools before student are negatively impacted?*

10. *How do schools in your portfolio seek support if they are showing signs of distress? What supports do they have access to? Do all schools have access to the same supports? What needs are not being served by the current options for support?*

School leaders and boards who were able to reverse the death spiral were willing to hear where they were falling short and were also capable of acting on it. The conversations that we hope to prompt with this research will not be easy or finite. But only by having these ongoing critical conversations across the sector can we continue to improve outcomes for all students.

11. *How do you establish norms for relationship building with schools from the early stages and maintain an open line for suggesting and providing supports and resources?*

12. *How is the information collected, analyzed and shared with the school board and/or school itself?*

Last, how can you consider whether an early warning system would work in your context? To start, begin a conversation within your team and other stakeholders within your ecosystem about indicators of distress in your sector:

13. *Reflecting on a recent school(s) that was underperforming, or you've had to close, were there flags earlier that the school was struggling? What were they?*

14. *At what point do certain red flags or a combination of red flags signal it's time to take a more active role? What is your role at that point?*

Appendix D: References

Allensworth, E.M. and Easton, J.Q. (2005). The On-track indicator as a predictor of high school graduation. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Allensworth, E.M., & Easton, J.Q. (2007). What matters for staying on-track and graduating in Chicago public high schools: A Close look at course grades, failures, and attendance in the freshman year. research report. Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Almond, M. (2013). The great migration: Charter school satisfaction among African American parents. LUX: A Journal of Transdisciplinary Writing and Research from Claremont Graduate University, 2(1), 1–14.

Ameel, M.H. (2016). An analysis of successful charter school operations. Master's Theses and Doctoral Dissertations. 693. Retrieved from https://commons.emich.edu/theses/693

Anderson, S., Leithwood, K., & Strauss, T. (2010). Leading data use in schools: Organizational conditions and practices at the school and district levels. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, *9*(3), 293–327.

Balfanz, R., Herzog, L., & Mac Iver, D.J. (2007). Preventing student disengagement and keeping students on the graduation path in urban middle-grades schools: Early identification and effective interventions. *Educational Psychologist*, *42*(4), 223–235.

Block, S. & Rosenberg, S. (2003). Toward an Understanding of Founder's Syndrome: An Assessment of Power and Privilege Among Founders of Nonprofit Organizations. Nonprofit Management and Leadership. 12(4) 353–368.

Butler, E., Smith, J., & Wohlstetter, P. (2008). Creating and sustaining high-quality charter school governing boards.

Campbell, C. (2010). Missed opportunity: Improving charter school governing boards. In R. J. Lake (Ed.), *Hopes, fears, and reality: A balanced look at charter schools in 2009* (pp. 59–68). Bothell, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington.

Carver, J. (1992). The Founding Parent Syndrome: Governing in the CEO's Shadow. *Nonprofit World,* 1992, 10 (5), 14–16.

Center for Education Reform. (2011). *The state of charter schools: What we know—and what we do not—about performance and accountability*. Washington, DC: Center for Education Reform.

Center on School Turnaround. (2017). *Four domains for rapid school improvement: A systems framework* [Center on School Turnaround at WestEd]. WestEd. https://csti.wested.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CST_Four-Domains-Framework-Final.pdf

Charter Board Partners. (2018). Charter school governing board composition: A toolkit for board members. National Charter School Resource Center. Retrieved from https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov/sites/default/files/files/field_publication_attachment/NCSRC%20Board%20Governance%20Toolkit%20-%20Board%20Composition.pdf

CREDO (2017). *Lights Off: Practice and impact of closing low-performing schools (Volume I)*. Center for Research on Education Outcomes. https://credo.stanford.edu/sites/g/files/sbiybj6481/f/closure_final_volume_i.pdf

David, R., & Hesla, K. (2018) Estimated public charter school enrollment, 2017–18. Washington, DC: National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.

Duke, D.L. (2008). Diagnosing school decline. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *89*(9), 667–671.

Evan, A., & Canavero, S. (2020). *Four domains for significant and sustainable charter school improvement: A systems framework for the charter context*. WestEd.

Fiarman, S.E. (2007). Planning to assess progress: Mason Elementary School refines an instructional strategy. *Data wise in action: Stories of schools using data to improve teaching and learning*, 125–.

Fryer, R., Jr. (2012). *Learning from the successes and failures of charter schools* Washington, D.C.: The Hamilton Project. Retrieved from http://scholar.harvard.edu/files/fryer/files/hamilton_project_paper_2012.pdf

Gross, B., & Pochop, K. (2007). *Leadership to date, leadership tomorrow: A review of data on charter school directors*. Bothell, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington. Retrieved from http://www.crpe.org/sites/default/files/wp_ncsrp2_ics_jun07_0.pdf

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R.H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. *School Leadership & Management, 30*(2), 95–110.

Halverson, R., Prichett, R.B., & Watson, J.G. (2007). Formative feedback systems and the new instructional leadership. *Wisconsin Center for Education Research (NJ1)*.

Hamilton, L., Halverson, R., Jackson, S., Mandinach, E., Supovitz, J., & Wayman, J. (2009). *Using student achievement data to support instructional decision making* (NCEE 2009-4067). National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Hayes, C.D. & Keller, E. (2009). A cost estimation tool for charter schools. The National Resource Center on Charter School Finance and Governance. The Center on Educational Governance at the University of Southern California, The Finance Project and WestEd.

Herman, J.L., & Gribbons, B. (2001). *Lessons learned in using data to support school inquiry and continuous improvement: Final report to the Stuart Foundation*. Center for the Study of Evaluation, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, University of California, Los Angeles.

Hill, P.T., & Lake, R.J. (2006). Charter school governance. Presented at the National Conference on Charter School Research, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN.

Horn, J., & Miron, G. (2000). An evaluation of the Michigan charter school initiative: Performance, accountability, and impact. Kalamazoo, MI: Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University. Retrieved from http://www.wmich.edu/evalctr/charter/michigan/

Huffman, D., & Kalnin, J. (2003). Collaborative inquiry to make data-based decisions in schools. *Teaching and teacher education*, *19*(6), 569–580.

Karanzha, Z. (2013). When the 'dream' turns into a nightmare: life and death of Voyager Charter School. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. 49 (4) 576–609.

Lachat, M.A., & Smith, S. (2005). Practices that support data use in urban high schools. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *10*(3), 333–339.

Lake, R. (2017). Is charter growth flat-lining. *Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education. Retrieved on August*, *2*, 2018.

Leithwood, L., Seashore Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. The Wallace Foundation.

Love, N., Stiles, K.E., Mundry, S., & DiRanna, K. (2008). *The data coach's guide to improving learning for all students*. Corwin Press.

Loveless, T., & Jasin, C. (1998). Starting from scratch: political and organizational challenges facing charter schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 34(1), 9–30.

McLaughlin, M., & Talbert, J. (2003). Reforming districts: How districts support school reform. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.

Mead, S. (2012). New demands shape a field in transition. Chicago, IL: National Association of Charter School Authorizers. Retrieved from https://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Monograph_NewDemandsShape.pdf

Miron, G., & Nelson, C. (2000). Autonomy in exchange for accountability: An initial study of Pennsylvania charter schools. Kalamazoo, MI: The Evaluation Center, Western Michigan University.

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (2009). A framework for operational quality. http://www.publiccharters.org/data/files/Publication_docs/A_Framework_for_Operational_Quality_May_2009_20110402T222338.pdf

National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (2018). Leadership, commitment, judgment: Elements of successful charter school authorizing. Findings from the Quality Practice Project. Chicago, IL: National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

Neild, R.C., & Balfanz, R. (2006). Unfulfilled Promise: The Dimensions and Characteristics of Philadelphia's Dropout Crisis, 2000–2005. *Philadelphia Youth Network*.

Ouchi, W. (2009). *The Secret of TSL, The Revolutionary Discovery That Raises School Performance*. Simon & Schuster.

Paredes, M. (2011). *Parent involvement as an instructional strategy: Academic parent-teacher teams* [Doctoral dissertation, Arizona State University]. ASU Library Digital Repository. https://repository.asu.edu/attachments/56346/content/Paredes_asu_0010E_10305.pdf

Robinson, V.M.J., Lloyd, C.A., & Rowe, K.J. (2008). The impact of leadership on student outcomes: An analysis of the differential effects of leadership types. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(5): 635–674.

Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J.(2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement, *American Educational Research Journal, 50*(1) 4–36.

Sarason, S.B. (1972). *The creation of settings and the future societies (1st ed)*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Shannon, G.S., & Bylsma, P. (2007). *The nine characteristics of high-performing schools: A research-based resource for schools and districts to assist with improving student learning* (2nd Ed.). Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Silver, D., Saunders, M., & Zarate, E. (2008). What factors predict high school graduation in the Los Angeles Unified School District. California Dropout Research Project.

Spillane, J.P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J.B. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. *Educational Researcher*, 30(3), 23–28.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Innovation and Improvement. (2004). Innovations in education: Successful charter schools. Washington, DC. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/admins/comm/choice/charter/report.pdf

Zavadsky, H. (2016). *Scaling turnaround: A district-improvement approach*. American Enterprise Institute.