



NATIONAL  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
RESOURCE CENTER

# A Strategic Approach to School Improvement Using the Four Domains

[Even in a Pandemic]

*A Webinar for Charter Management Organizations and Independent Charter Schools*

June 30, 2020 • 1 p.m. ET/10 a.m. PT | Virtual Presentation

[charterschoolcenter.ed.gov](https://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov)

# Icebreaker

In the chat, please share your name, organization, state, and...

*The one thing your organization has done in the past three months that you are most proud of?*



## Norms for Today's Call

- Update your name to your full name and organization.
- Mute yourself when not speaking.
- Show your video to enhance dialogue and interaction.
- Be open to other opinions and courteous to your peers.

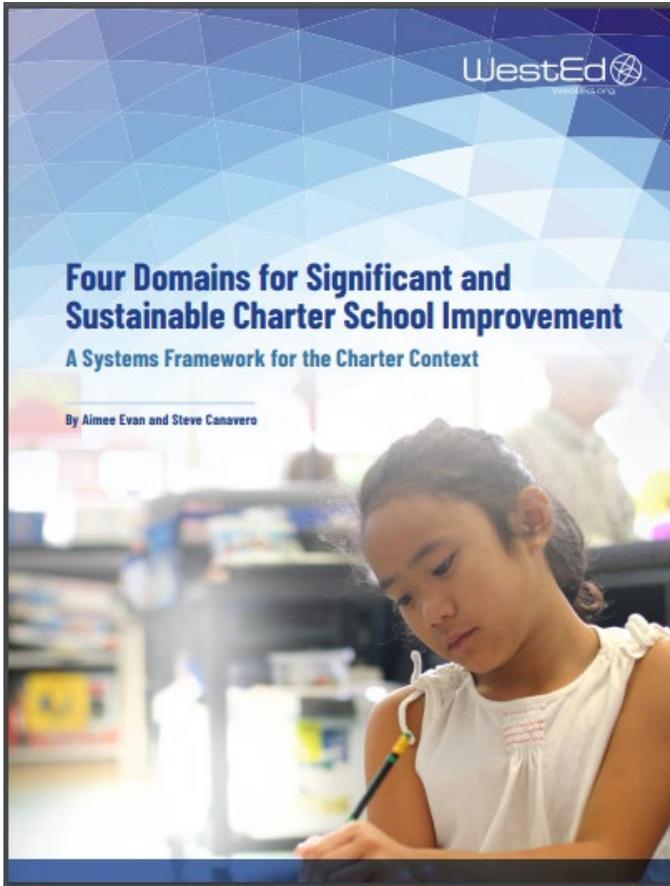


# About the NCSRC

The National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) provides technical assistance to federal grantees and resources supporting charter sector stakeholders. NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education (ED) and managed by Manhattan Strategy Group in partnership with WestEd.



## Building Upon Prior Work...



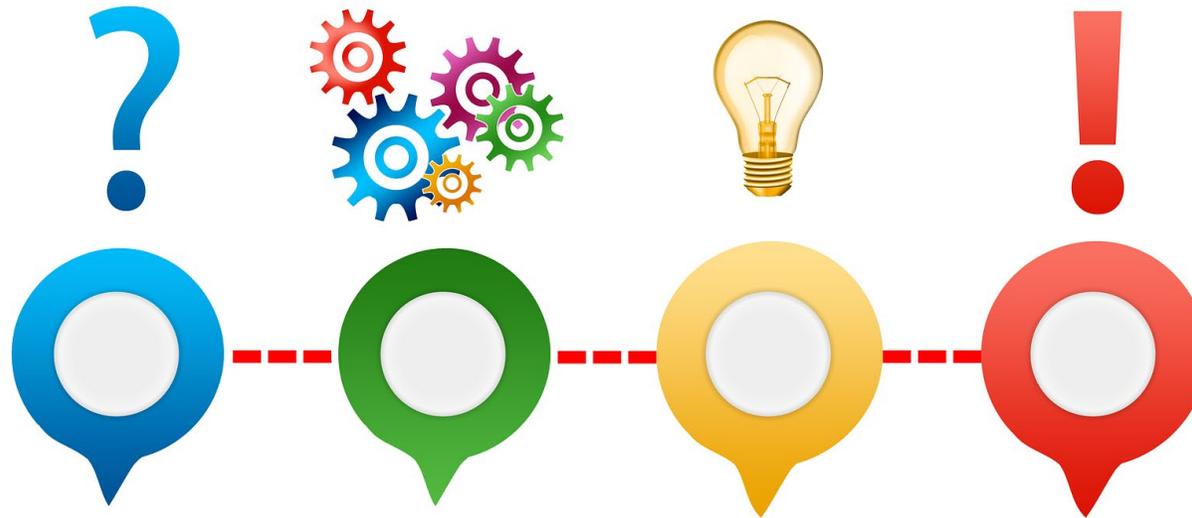
- Report released by WestEd earlier this year
- Workshop at the 2020 CSP Project Directors' Meeting
- Webinar for State Entity grantees, State Education Agencies, and Independent Chartering Boards
- Future work planned to bring content to various stakeholders across the charter sector

## On the Webinar Today

- Courtney Leigh Beisel, National Charter School Resource Center
- Aimee Evan, National Charter School Resource Center
- Janelle Veith, Principal, Quest Academy, Las Vegas, NV
- Alexandra Pardo, Ed.D., TenSquare, LLC
- David Singer, Founder and Executive Director, University Prep, Denver, CO

# Our Big Question for the Day...

In what ways does the pandemic affect school improvement efforts that are already underway?



# Session Objectives

## Understand

Understand how to use the Four Domains framework in your context

## Plan

Strategically plan how to initiate or adjust school improvement actions in the:

- Immediate (within next three months)
- Short-term (startup of 20-21 SY)
- Long-term (20-21 SY and beyond)

## Learn

Learn from your peers' school improvement plans prior to, and in response to, COVID-19



## During Today's Call We Will...

1. Discuss what we can anticipate for tomorrow
2. Share why a comprehensive framework for improvement is needed now
3. Learn about school improvement plans in practice
4. Apply what we have learned to school improvement strategies



What can we anticipate for tomorrow?



## What Can We *Anticipate*: Learning Loss

- National meta-analysis studies from summer loss show:
  - Approximately 25% (45 days) out of school
  - Students lose approximately one month on a grade equivalent scale
  - Math losses are greater
  - Economically disadvantaged students lose more ground
- Hurricane Katrina and Harvey delayed the opening of schools and displaced students:
  - Missed 8% (15-25 days) out of school
  - Lower math growth; reading results were mixed
  - Increased behavioral issues and dropouts

# What Can We *Anticipate*: Financial

- Lessons from the Great Recession & American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)

Help	Hurt
States built reserves over subsequent decade to protect against a future recession	Sharp declines in state revenue for high-need districts <b><i>exacerbated funding inequities</i></b>
Accelerated common reform agenda focused on standards, data, teacher effectiveness, and low-performing schools <b><i>showing some impact</i></b>	<b><i>Did not... spur cross-agency collaboration</i></b> for child-serving agencies (e.g., K-12 and early childhood)

- *Increased competition* for state revenue as a result of increased spending on unemployment insurance (0.5-1%) as well as health and human services (1-4%)
- *State reserve* build-up will provide some cushion to this revenue decline for a limited amount of time (6-12 months)

## Your Turn!

1. What is your top school improvement concern?
2. Do you anticipate budget cuts? If so, by how much?



# Finding Opportunity in a Crisis

- Existing underperforming schools
  - In or almost in intervention
- COVID-19 closures
  - Dis-continuity of learning
  - Fiscal pressures
- In best of times – daunting challenge to improve schools
- Questions > Answers



- Paused accountability systems
- Focus placed on conditions, immediate student needs
- Unprecedented policy/funding flexibility

# Comprehensive Approach to School Improvement

*Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement*



# Four Domains for Significant and Sustainable Charter School Improvement

IF....

the overarching goal is to create a unified, comprehensive approach to school improvement across my charter sector,

THEN...

we all will need to...



## The Framework Includes:

Strategic improvement components to lay the groundwork needed to ensure successful improvement

The *aligned* roles of the state, authorizer, school board, and charter school – each entity is pivotal to school improvement

The critical practices – identified by research and practice – of successful school improvement in each of the Four Domains

Examples (not a recipe) of how practices can be put into action

## Strategic Improvement Components

- **Improvement Planning:** Start with a **needs assessment** to gauge strengths and challenges in each domain
- **Focus on Student's Performance:** Determine what is needed for students, individually and collectively
- **Alignment of Operations:** Coordinate fiscal and human resources based on student need
- **Fiscal Sustainability:** Project potential budget implications and plan accordingly



*Janelle Veith, Principal  
Alexandra Pardo, TenSquare*

# Introduction to Quest Academy

- Independent charter school opened in 2008 serving 500 students in K-8<sup>th</sup> grade in Las Vegas.
- **Racially diverse student body.** Quest is one of five schools serving 90% or more students of color
- **Economically diverse student body.** 70% of students free and reduced lunch; doubled since SY15-16; more than double the charter sector average in NV



# Quest Academy – From Receivership to Turnaround

- **SY15-16** – Under receivership due to ongoing legal and financial improprieties
- **SY16-17** – Completed needs assessment
- **SY17-18** – Begin school turnaround with TenSquare to focus on academic improvements; comprehensive model including finance, operations, and academics



## A Closer Look at the Needs Assessment

- Bottom 5% of schools statewide
- Accountability systems were something that was “done” to the school
- No school control, understanding, or ownership for outcomes
- No use of assessment systems
- One out of four students new to Quest each year
- More than 50% of teachers on substitute licenses; high staff turnover; underpaying teachers
- Strong student attendance



# Quest Academy – Results with Turnaround



- Significant improvement on Nevada Report Card with shifting student population:
  - SY16-17: Bottom 5% in Nevada
  - SY17-18 and SY18-19: 2-STAR elementary; 3-STAR middle campus
- **Student growth (ELA, Math, and ELL) primary driver of improvement**
- Attained fiscal stability, resolved all legal matters, secured new facility, raised teacher pay scale, decreased staff turnover, consolidated three campuses into one



# Lessons Learned from Turnaround to Pandemic

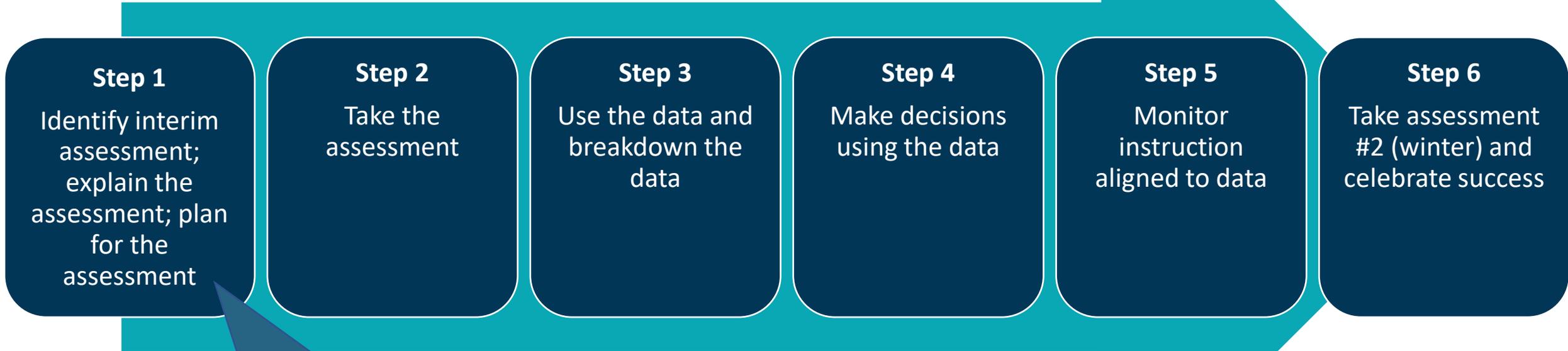
1. Use of data
2. Every child matters
3. Fear of the “unknown”
4. Sharing decisions with the school community



# Lessons Learned: Use of Data

Reflection	Need	Action/Questions
Where are we? Where do we need to go?	Data walk	Who are our students in the fall of 2020? What do we know about our students?
	Understanding the accountability tool	Defining our own accountability
Understanding instruction, teaching, and learning	Setting up observation tools for quick, immediate feedback and instructional leader action and planning	Redefining observation and evaluation tools for distance learning and in-person instruction
	What is happening in the classroom – What are the kids doing? What are the teachers doing?	Redefining teacher expectations for teaching and planning; walk-throughs; reviewing student work
Student Growth and Assessment	Focus on student growth	Evaluate students in the fall and set goals for growth for students and teachers
	Assessing students is an ongoing process that does not start and end in May with SBAC	Plan your assessments NOW and systems for distance assessments

# Assessment Process



(Student groups, testing protocols, technology) – *assessment drives calendar*



## Use of Data in Pandemic

1. Summer academic enrichment opportunities
2. Assessing in late summer and assessing from a distance
3. Shifting to quick, frequent assessments of learning



# Lessons Learned: Every Child Matters

Reflection	Need	Action/Questions
Recognize shifting student demographics	COVID will change your population; how will you prepare to gather this data?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Becoming a Title I</li> <li>• Identifying and investing in the ELL population academic needs</li> <li>• MKV/homeless families and students</li> </ul>
Identifying where students are academically and tracking progress	All in assessment; viewing student work in “real time”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing interim assessment system – MAP (3x/year)</li> <li>• Implementing interim assessment with SBAC – can’t hide from the data when you read and evaluate the responses</li> <li>• Implementing a robust RTI system with student support team</li> </ul>



# Every Child Matters in Pandemic

1. Process for identifying shifts in demographics
2. Individual calls to every family; Screening for student well-being/needs



## Fear of the Unknown

*Empathize with the challenges of the adults while implementing student focused decisions*

Fear of the “unknown” served as a hindrance to change



# Overcoming the Unknown

- Staffing changes focused on student needs first
  - *Redefining teaching roles and strengths*
- Implementing departmentalized grade 3-5 ELA and Math
  - *Repositioning teacher strengths for students and redefining teaching norms*
- Re-assessing facility needs and usage
  - *One classroom all day per cohort; implementing breaks; start/end times; refining common spaces*



## Fear of the Unknown in the Pandemic

1. Training during pre-service and July – teaching from a distance
2. Redefining instructional “walk-throughs;” lesson planning; assessment in a distance modality
3. Operations, budgets, finance, tech – what needs to be new, different, refined, and how to connect
4. Prescriptive, formulaic systems and process for Fall may not be enough; need to respond to community and flexibility



# Lessons Learned: Sharing Decisions with the School Community

Reflection	Need	Action/Questions
Need for transparency	Clear, transparent, written goals aligned to state report card and authorizer goals shared with families and staff which guides all decisions and work	Redefining accountability; setting clear goals for academic outcomes; and teaching/learning expectations
Improved operations	Operational changes to improve academic outcomes	Connecting operations, academics, and finances <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unpacking systems and processes that are misaligned</li> <li>• Campus closures and consolidations and refining space</li> <li>• Class schedules</li> </ul>
Shifting student culture and adult mindset	Ensuring we teach; kids learn; and focus is on how we can succeed not what's missing (tech, WiFi, time, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching and planning beyond the scripted curriculum</li> <li>• Understanding the rigor of expectations in CCSS and assessment</li> <li>• Engaging parents monthly in exploring academic expectations for the student and Quest</li> <li>• Rethinking behavior supports and removing exclusionary practices</li> </ul>

# Sharing Decisions with the School Community in Pandemic

1. Re-opening committee
2. Defining clear accountability NOW



# Final Thoughts

## ***Empathy and sympathy can not lead to academic apathy***

- **COVID is the catalyst for all to refine school**
  - Change management
  - Academic benchmarking and expectations
- **Classroom doors are open for all - public accountability**
  - How to get teachers and students to interact and collaborate
  - Teaching content not independent assignments
  - Establishing and infusing classroom culture and norms from a distance
  - Resisting the urge of direct teaching
  - Engaging students with each other through tech (i.e., breakout rooms and chats)
  - Grading and timelines become an “open book”



UNIVERSITYPREP  
COLLEGE STARTS IN KINDERGARTEN

David Singer, Founder & Executive Director



NATIONAL  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
RESOURCE CENTER



# KEEPING OUR PROMISE

UNIVERSITY PREP'S APPROACH TO "PANDEMIC PROOFING" THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN



UNIVERSITYPREP  
COLLEGE STARTS IN KINDERGARTEN

“A DECLARATION OR ASSURANCE  
THAT ONE WILL DO A PARTICULAR  
THING OR THAT A PARTICULAR  
THING WILL HAPPEN.”



**WHAT IS A “PROMISE”?**

## *Core Idea*



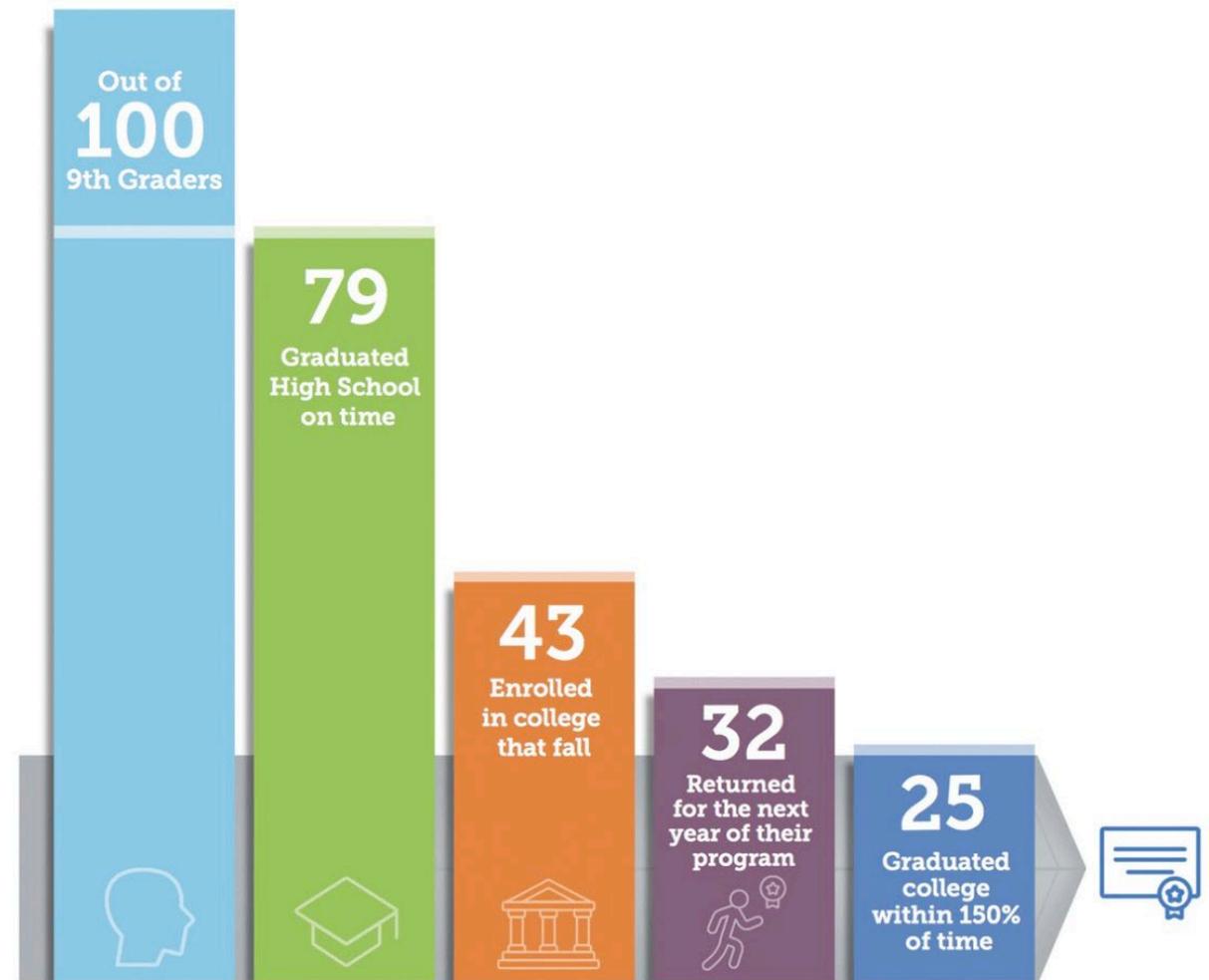
**We will keep our promise.**

“Building a foundation of skills, knowledge and character, University Prep educates every child for a four-year college degree and a life of opportunity.”

# K-12 THROUGH COLLEGE TALENT PIPELINE IN COLORADO

74% OF JOBS IN OUR STATE REQUIRE A POST-SECONDARY DEGREE AND **ONLY 25 OUT OF EVERY 100** 9<sup>TH</sup> GRADERS IN COLORADO ARE CURRENTLY GOING ON TO EARN A DEGREE.

AT U PREP, OUR EXPECTATION IS THAT **100 OUT OF EVERY 100 CHILDREN** WILL GO ON TO EARN THEIR DEGREE AND PURSUE THEIR DREAMS.



Source: Colorado Department of Higher Education. Numbers are approximate based on available data.

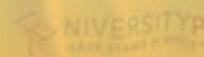
# *Agenda*

- 1) Where have we been?
- 2) Then & Now: What's the same about our approach and what's different?



SECTION 1

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?



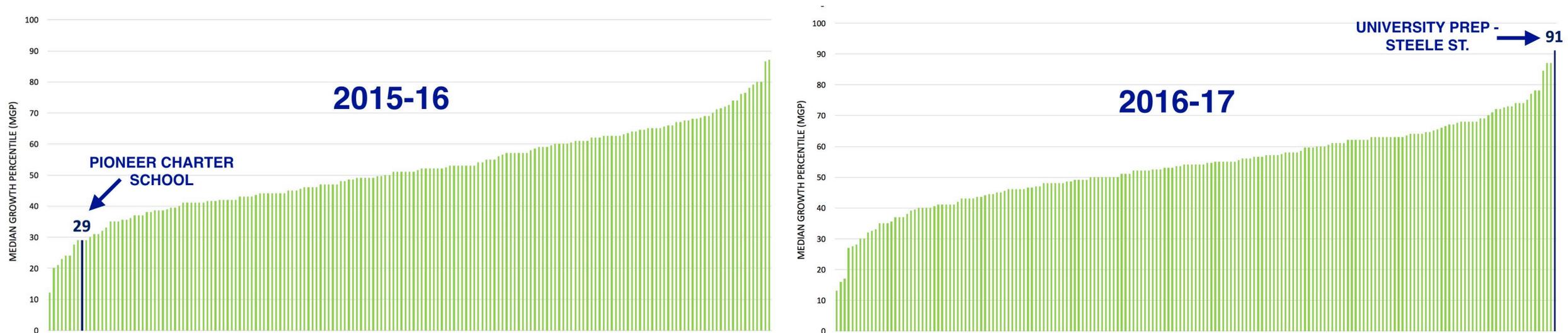
# U PREP - STEELE ST.

- Full K – 5 restart (charter to charter turnaround)
- Launched in 2016–17
- After one year, highest growth school in the state of CO (#1 growth in Math and # 8 in ELA)
- Increased proficiency by 30 – 35% in one year
- Went from lowest rated school in the city to 92<sup>nd</sup> percentile

# Our Results – Turnaround is Possible

Our K – 5 restart of Pioneer Charter School in 2016–17 illustrates how capable our children are given the right learning environment with the right supports and highly committed families. In one year, the school went from **Red** to **Blue** on the Denver Public Schools’ School Performance Framework.

## CHANGE IN MEDIAN GROWTH PERCENTILE FROM 2015–16 TO 2016–17



# BEYOND ACADEMIC OUTCOMES...

## - THE FAMILY EXPERIENCE

**95%** - School leadership emphasizes high academic expectations for all students.

**94%** - How satisfied are you with parent-teacher conferences that provide information that is clear, usable, and linked to my child's learning?

**86%** - How well does your child's school develop two-way channels for communications from home to school and from school to home?

**90%** - How satisfied are you with your child's school's ability to provide academic support needed to meet your child's needs?

**95%** - My child's school is a safe place to learn.

**94%** - The teachers care about his/her success.



SECTION 2

THEN & NOW...

# THEN AND NOW...

## OUR WORLD IN 2016–17 IN COMPARISON TO OUR WORLD TODAY

- **Family Partnerships**

- “Home is an extension of school and school is an extension of home”  
(blending worlds)

- **Clarity on a Vision of Excellence**

- Whether it’s remote or in-person, everyone has to be crystal clear on what excellent, live instruction is, and the preparation necessary to deliver on it.

- **Content is King**

- Know your stuff (and make sure “knowing your stuff” is manageable)

# THEN AND NOW...

## OUR WORLD IN 2016–17 IN COMPARISON TO OUR WORLD TODAY (CON'T)

- **Coaching is Coaching**

- You deserve the love, support, and “constant, gentle pressure,” to continue improving your practice (over Zoom or in the classroom).

- **Operating with Urgency**

- If minutes mattered then... how much do they matter now?
- If analyzing and responding to data matter then... how much does it matter now?

- **Empathy and Outcomes**

- I love you, I see you, I hear you, and I’m listening to you... And, we will master grade level content.

DARE TO *Dream*



Sonia  
2 Non-EL  
AEA

UNIVERSITY  
PREP

UNIVERSITY PREP

Lehnae  
1:21

# THANK YOU



UNIVERSITYPREP  
COLLEGE STARTS IN KINDERGARTEN

# Reflection Questions

What does curriculum planning and pacing look like in the fall?

What does the measurement of student learning look like in the fall?

What does instructional feedback look like in the fall? How will teacher feedback occur?



# *Getting Started:* Strategic Improvement



# Questions to Guide Strategic Improvement

Improvement Components	Guiding Questions
<b>Improvement Planning</b>	<p>How will we successfully drive improvement to meet the needs of all students?</p> <p>How will we be intentional about school improvement efforts given the need to plan for the long term while addressing immediate needs?</p>
<b>Performance/Equity Focus</b>	<p>What can we plan to do now to be ready to identify students, skills, and content that need additional support?</p> <p>How will we address student learning gaps?</p>
<b>Aligned Operations</b>	<p>How will we build a coalition of support for systemic change: (state, authorizer, CMO/EMO, CSO, boards, and schools) to align resources to need?</p>
<b>Fiscal Sustainability</b>	<p>How will we prepare for funding shortfalls?</p>

# Strategy Approach via the Four Domains

Improvement Components	Immediate (0-3 months)	Short Term (2-8 months)	Long Term (6-12 months)
<b>Improvement Planning</b>	Conduct needs assessments, surveys, strategic improvement planning processes, restructure student schedules.	Shore up ongoing and frequent progress monitoring.	Plan for and execute resource investments in activities that would support learning recovery lost over the spring and summer, 2020.
<b>Performance/Equity Focus</b>	<p>Ensure student needs are still being met in lieu of “formal accountability”</p> <p>Implement 4-6 weeks of additional summer instruction for at-risk, English Learners and students with special needs.</p>	<p>Establish data collection mechanisms to understand emergent patterns of need in your communities.</p> <p>Mobilize student support services (counselors, partner agencies) to engage students.</p>	Identify and assess “hardest hit” communities; use traditional measures of equity (e.g., at-risk, WiFi access), and other measures of equity to assess (e.g., essential service workers, single parent homes).

# Strategy Approach via the Four Domains (cont'd)

Improvement Components	Immediate (0-3 months)	Short Term (2-8 months)	Long Term (6-12 months)
<b>Aligned Operations</b>	Support leaders to resolve equity gaps exacerbated by distance learning through increased time allocation of classroom/intervention staff, mental health supports, and helping families navigate available public services.	<p>Anticipate and strategize about increases in compensatory supports needed for at-risk students and those receiving special education services, including innovative approaches for using those resources effectively.</p> <p>Leverage cross-agency collaboration to increase availability of supports.</p>	Engage stakeholders to set priorities for resource allocation based on the needs of students and their families for the short-, mid-, and longer-term.
<b>Fiscal Sustainability</b>	<p>Use Federal Funding opportunities, flexibility, and funding reserve changes to apply carry-over funds towards student's arrival back into alternative learning schedules/environments.</p> <p>Seek, identify, and apply for additional funding if needed.</p>	<p>Anticipate a likely revision to the state budget in the fall and seek support from the state and authorizer to prepare.</p> <p>Strategically plan how to allocate resources using one-time CARES Act vs. ongoing expense/funding decisions. Understand how funds can be blended/braided and the flexibility that's available to assist in resource allocation.</p>	Establish a prioritization list to prepare for anticipated FY22 budget reductions.

# Strategic Improvement Triage Tool



Priority

What are you trying to achieve?



Timeframe

What is the timeframe for achieving goals?

What are the milestones?



Continue

What will you continue?

What modifications are needed to continue?



Pause

What will you pause and restart at a later date?



Stop

What will you stop doing?



Emerging

What is a new or emerging priority that needs to be addressed through your work?



Unknown

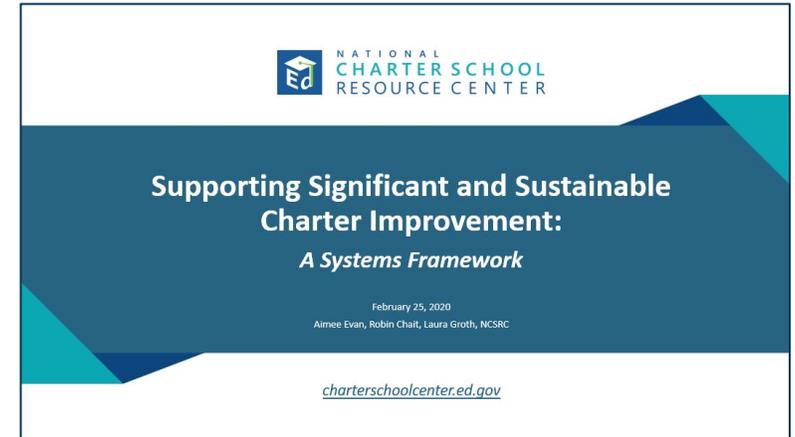
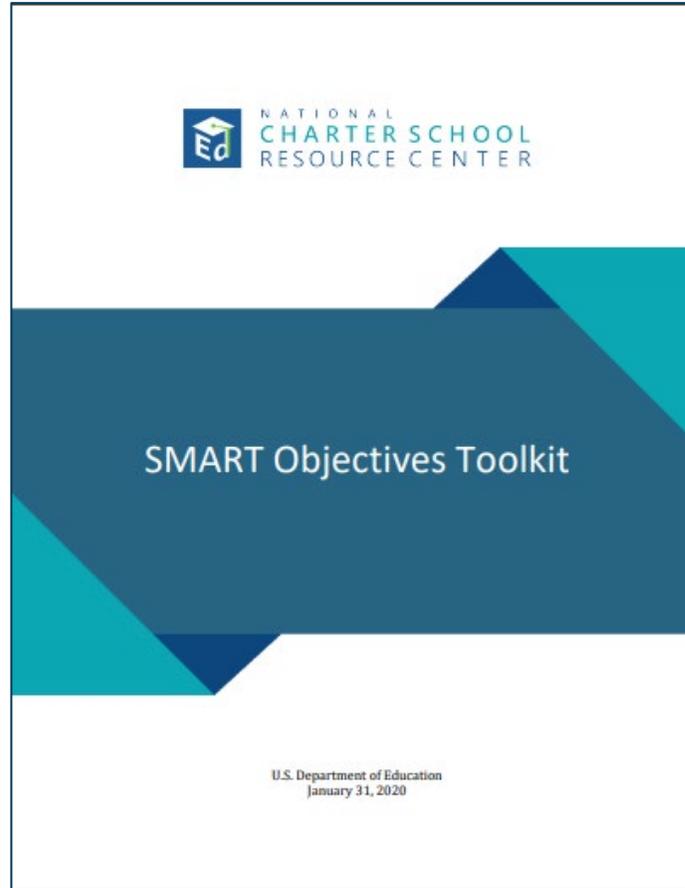
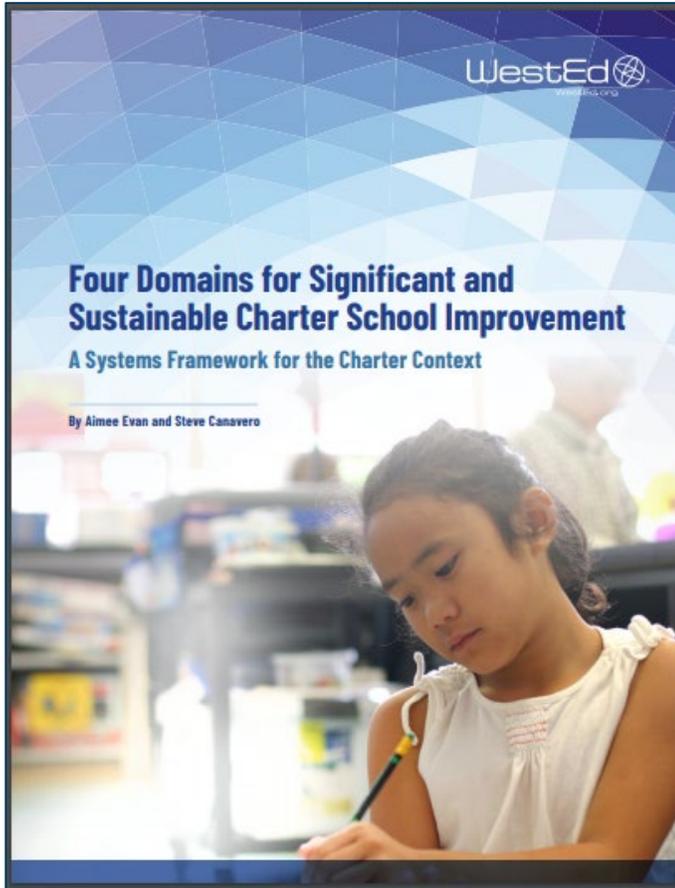
What is unknown? What is in too much flux to make a decision about now?

Source: Author Adaptation of Strategy Lift 2020

# Q&A



# Additional Resources



# Keep an Eye Out for Upcoming NCSRC Virtual Events & Resources

- EL Instruction Learning Module
- Leading in the Unknown Self-Guided Master Class
- Grantee Profiles



## How can you contact us?



[charterschoolcenter.ed.gov](http://charterschoolcenter.ed.gov)



[contact-us@charterschoolcenter.org](mailto:contact-us@charterschoolcenter.org)

## Response requested, please!

Please respond to the pop-up polling questions to let us know how we did on this event.



