



NATIONAL  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
RESOURCE CENTER

# Identifying Distress in Charter Schools:

*A Workshop for Authorizers and State Departments of Education*

June 17, 2021 | Virtual

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

## 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 (MSG) in partnership with WestEd.





# Cameras Off/Cameras On Icebreaker

# Speakers



**Aimee Evan, Ph.D**

National Charter School  
Resource Center



**Hannah Sullivan**

National Charter  
School Resource  
Center



**Rebecca Feiden**

Nevada State Public  
Charter School  
Authority



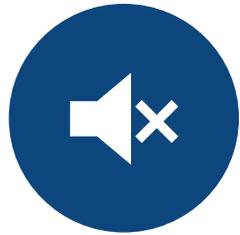
**Michael Dang**

Nevada State  
Public Charter  
School Authority

# And... YOU!



# Norms



Remember to  
mute yourself



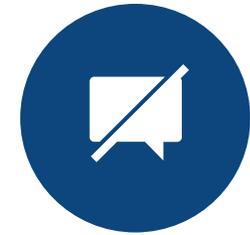
Utilize the chat for  
questions and  
comments



Actively participate  
in discussions



Respond to the  
survey



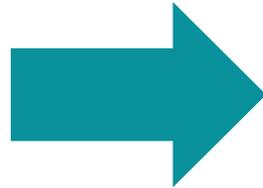
Observe the Vegas  
Rule



*The main session is being recorded. By participating, you are consenting to be recorded. Breakout room discussions will not be recorded.*

## AGENDA

- Review of the indicators of distress in charter schools
- Overview of *Integrating the Indicators of Distress into Your Data Collection*
- Breakout rooms: self-assessment and discussion with peers
- Group discussion
- Putting it into perspective: A closer look at the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority's data collection
- Action planning



## OBJECTIVES

- Guide attendees in using the tools from *Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools* to review and reflect upon the data they collect from charter schools and how these data may be applied to uncover early signs of distress in schools
- Discuss long-term distress vs. short-term COVID-19 related distress
- Provide attendees with at least one practical action step to take related to integrating the indicators of distress into their current data collection and review mechanisms

## Workshop Pre-Work



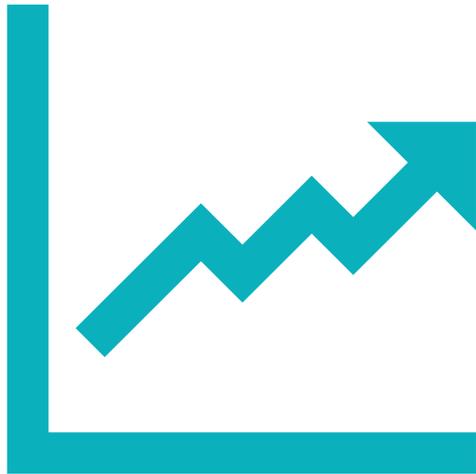
1. Take note of and consider your own data collection sources.
2. Review *Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools Part 1: The Role and Perspective of Charter School Authorizers*.
3. Engage in initial thinking about how you might apply the data you currently collect to detect early signs of distress in your portfolio.

# Today's Big Questions



- What indicators of distress do charter schools exhibit *in your portfolio* prior to full school failure?
- What data can be used by charter school authorizers in identifying schools exhibiting these indicators?

## Why Integrating Indicators of Distress Will Improve Your Portfolio



School closure as an improvement strategy bore out mixed short- and long-term effects for displaced students.

High cost and low track record of success of comprehensive school improvement efforts meant students were in low-performing schools for too long.

Identifying struggling schools early and addressing issues before they fester, increases the odds that:

- Resources, such as time, effort, and funds, are used efficiently
- Schools are closed as a last resort
- Students have equitable access to high-quality options



# What are Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools?

## Indicators of Distress

Data signaling that a school's performance is declining in a number of areas.



**Leadership**

**Governing Board**

**Operations**

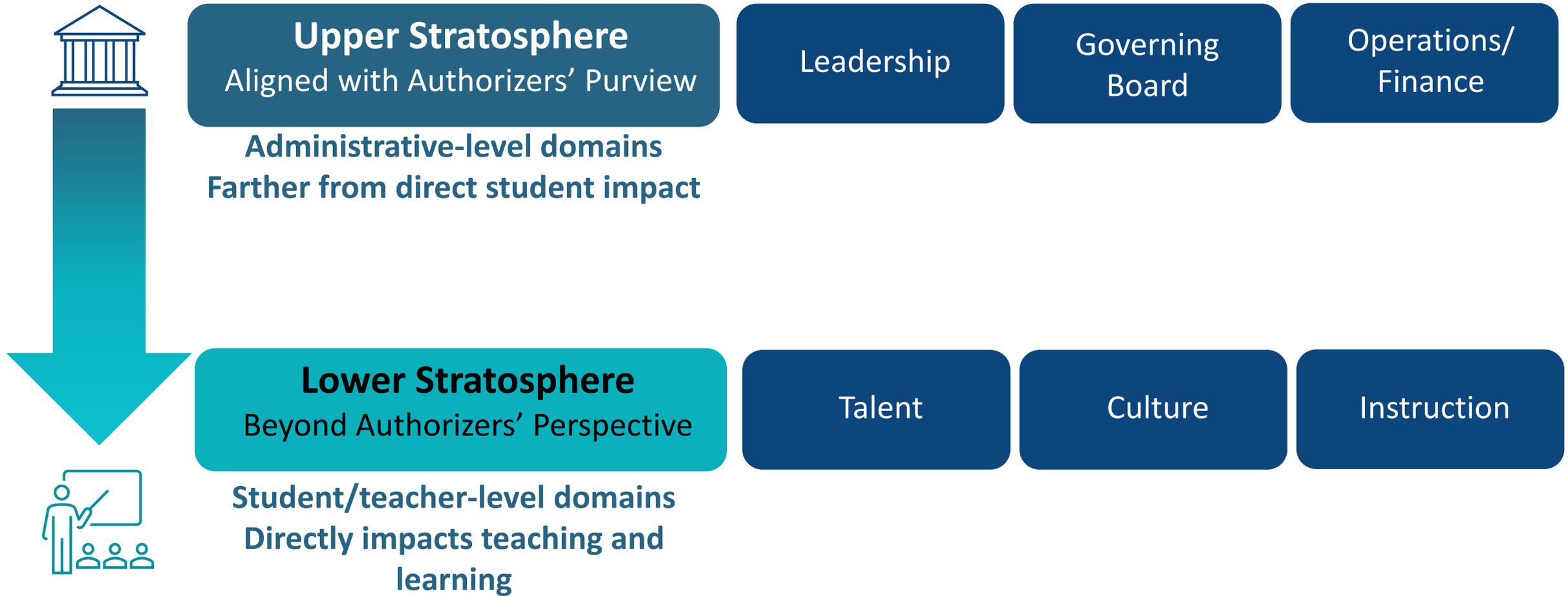
**Finance**

**Talent**

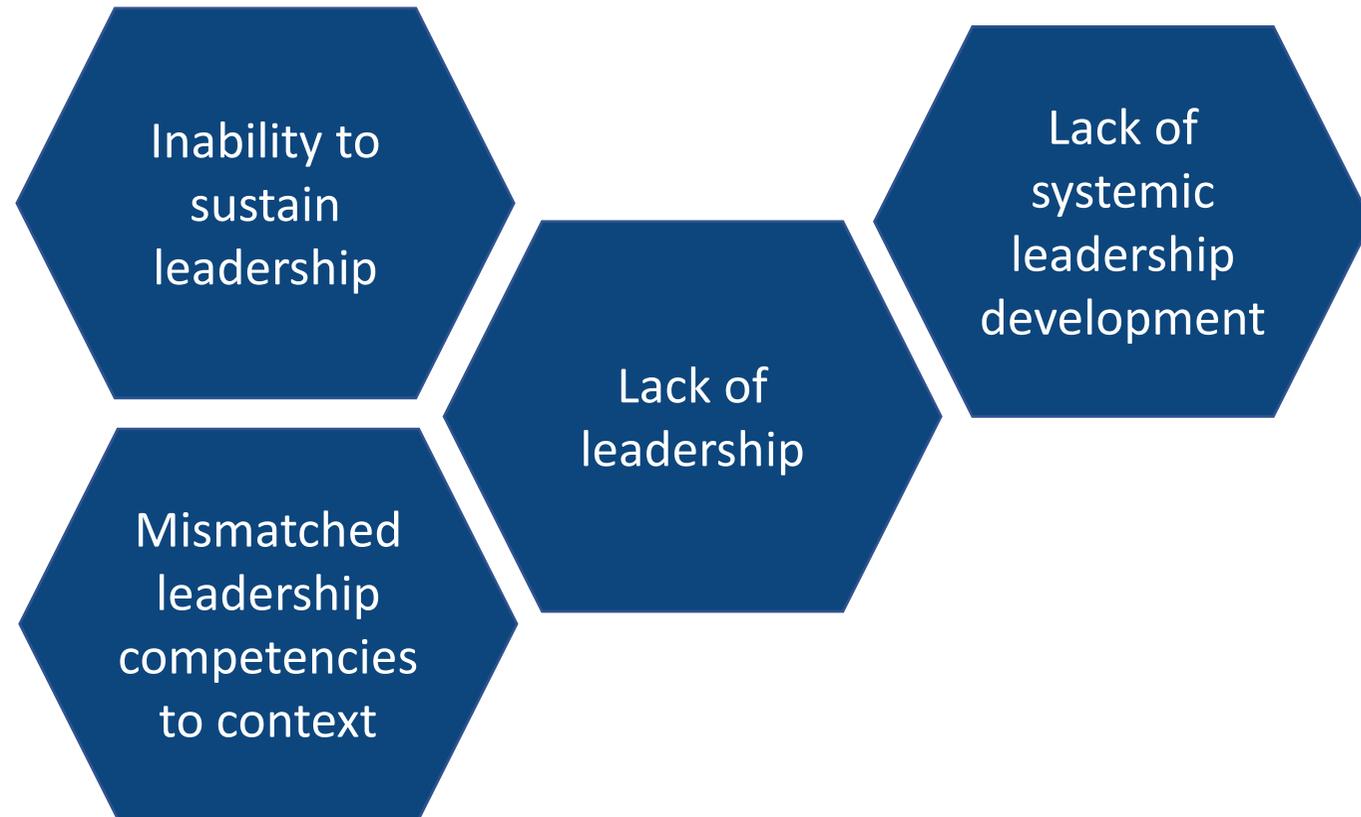
**Culture**

**Instruction**

# Stratosphere: What Can Authorizers See?



# Leadership Indicators

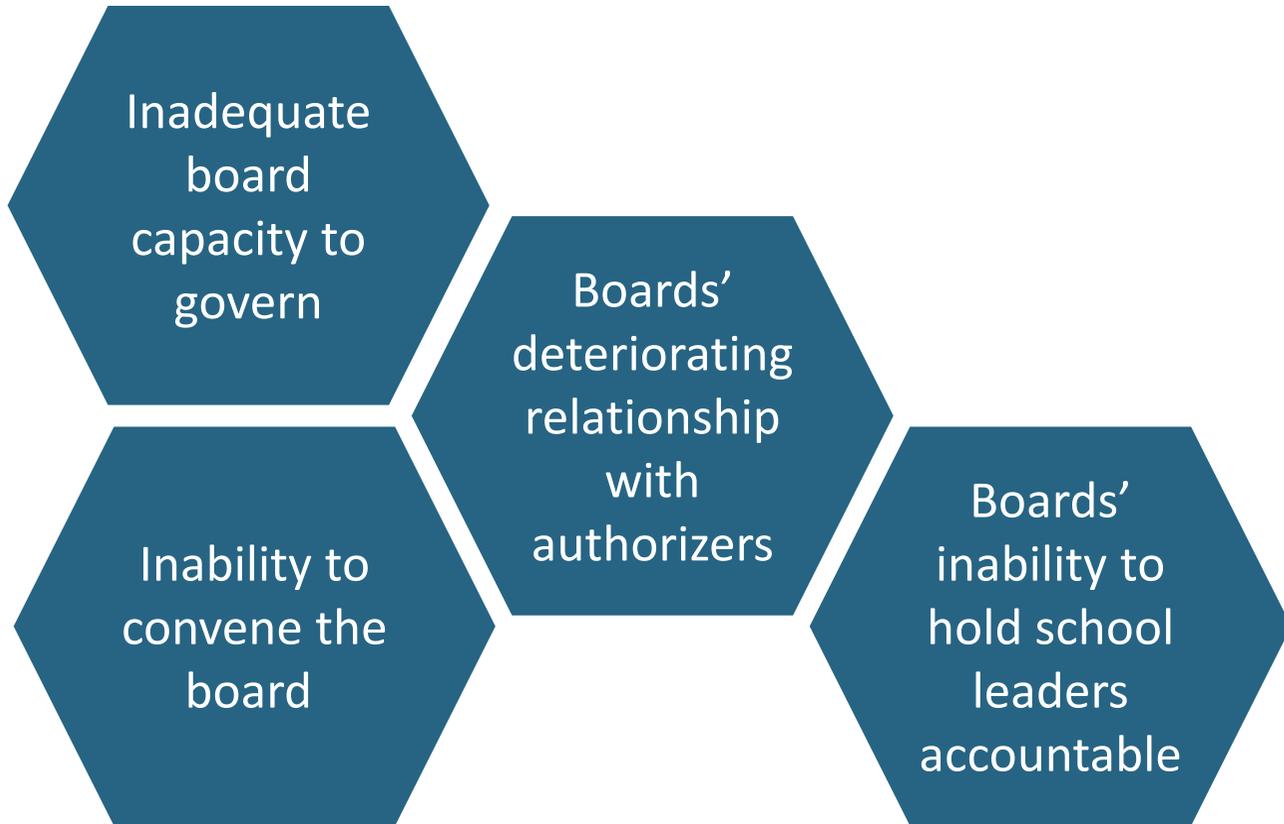


## What might this look like?

### **Systematic Leadership Development**

“Founder’s syndrome,” as described by authorizers, may not be visible for many years after a school’s opening if the same leader remains. Until he or she departs, the absence of distributed succession plans may be the only indicator of impending distress.

# Governance Indicators



## What might this look like?

**Inability to Hold School Leaders Accountable**  
Authorizers described instances when “some boards are completely in the pocket of the school leader,” such as when the founding board and principal all emerged from a shared social network. One authorizer described a board that “chose the leader over the school” resulting in letting the school close rather than replace the school leader.

# Operations Indicators



Breakdown in compliance and reporting functions



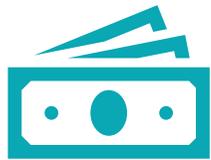
Failure to align to market needs

## What might this look like?

### Breakdown in Compliance and Reporting Functions

As one authorizer described it, “We’re finding that when they’re missing those simple operational things, there are usually bigger operational issues that are in existence.”

# Finance Indicators



Failure to properly manage finances



Misappropriation of funds

## Indicator Deep Dive

### **Failure to Properly Manage Finances**

Finance-related indicators of distress 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.”

## Indicators Below the Stratosphere



### Talent

- Hiring challenges, turnover
- Teacher capacity decline



### Culture

- Lack of connection with students, families
- Inhospitable professional culture



### Instruction

- Lack of focus on instruction
- Cohesion/alignment issues in curriculum, standards, assessments

# Integrating Indicators of Distress in Your Data Collection



# How to Integrate Indicators of Distress into Data Collection

Tool 1  
**Identifying**

Helps authorizers determine how indicators may appear in data and in practice, reflect on these, and identify indicators in their own portfolio

Tool 2  
**Auditing**

Supports authorizers in reviewing their data collection methods to determine where they are already collecting data on these indicators

Tool 3  
**Assessing**

Provides an easy-to-use assessment to determine how schools fare on each of the indicators and the extent to which schools are showing signs of distress



# Breakout Room Discussion

# Breakout Discussion: Identifying Indicators of Distress in Your Portfolio

- Use the workbook to guide you through using the tools to identify indicators of distress in your portfolio (Tool #1), the data used to collect these indicators (Tool #2) and discuss the findings with your peers.

Designate a speaker to share out highlights of your discussion with the full group.

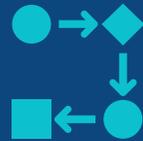
Indicator of Distress	Evidence of Indicator in Practice	Schools in My Portfolio Have Exhibited Evidence of This Indicator (check all that apply)	Additional Indicators, Evidence, and Notes
Mismatched leadership competencies to context	Leader's inability to share decision-making authority	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader's inability to gain respect/trust of staff or families	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader's inability to respect/trust staff	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader's failure to demonstrate instructional leadership as necessary; for example, by taking minimal interest or time in classroom instruction	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader's failure to manage time efficiently and appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Core school operational or instructional tasks drop in quality	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader is failing in operational leadership; for example, by delegating all business functions to the extent that they cannot answer questions about core school operations	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader does not demonstrate the ability to make changes, handle complaints/concerns, leverage board and staff skills and time appropriately	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Leader is unable to create or maintain effective teams	<input type="checkbox"/>	

# Self-Reflection Part 1

Spend **10 minutes** reflecting upon the following steps, leveraging Tool #1 in your workbook.



**Step 1:** Think back to a school that recently experienced distress or a school that experienced an improvement effort. When did you notice that it started to struggle? What examples of distress did you identify?



**Step 2:** Think more about what happened in the early stages. Looking through the documents of that school, what were the first signs that the school was struggling? Were there any signs of early distress in the school's finances, leadership, governing board, teachers and staff, instruction, or culture?



**Step 3:** Using Tool #1, check the boxes showing what these signs looked like at this school for each category of distress. Add other examples of related data/indicators you observed in that school that do not appear in the table.

## Self-Reflection Part 2

Spend **five minutes** reflecting upon the following questions, leveraging Tool #2 for Step 5.



**Step 4:** From Tool #1, identify two key indicators of distress you would like to focus.



**Step 5:** Review Tool #2 and identify if and how you are collecting data on these indicators from the struggling school you had in mind. Are you already collecting data on these indicators? Could you reform your data review processes to identify these indicators earlier for schools?



**Step 6:** Think about your overall data collection processes. Are there gaps in your processes in collecting data on a prominent indicator in your portfolio? How could you add to your data collection/review processes to better identify this indicator?

## Breakout Discussion (15 Minutes)

- What were the key indicators you identified?
- How are you already collecting data on these indicators?
- How could you reform your data collection/review processes to better identify them?



*What surprised you with this exercise?*

*What did you learn?*



# Full Group Discussion

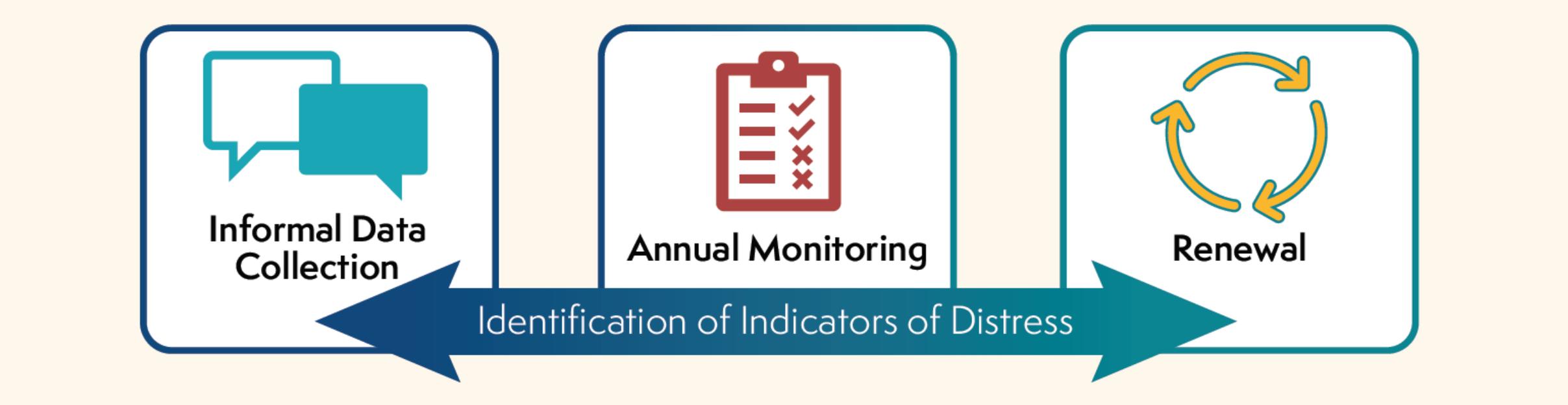
## Group Discussion Share Out



- What were some similarities in the key indicators that your group members identified? How were they different?
- How is your group already collecting data on their key indicators?

# Examples of “Filling in the Gaps”

## Authorizers’ System of Data Collection



## Group Discussion: Where to Go Next?



What were some gaps identified in your group or ways to reform the data collection and review processes?



Are there ways—formally or informally—that you can focus on key indicators of distress in your data collection and review processes without adding unnecessary or additional burden on schools?

# Group Discussion: The New Normal



In thinking about focusing your data collection and review processes, how does COVID-19 play into the identification of school distress if many or most schools are struggling right now?



What are the indicators most schools are currently struggling with? Were they listed in the workbook or are they different indicators?



How can you focus on reviewing indicators that identify schools struggling beyond the temporary effects of the pandemic?

# Putting this into Perspective



**Rebecca Feiden**  
Nevada State Public  
Charter School  
Authority



**Michael Dang**  
Nevada State  
Public Charter  
School Authority

# Navigating the Early Indicators of Distress in Nevada

1

What has been the benefit that you've seen to identifying schools earlier for potential areas of distress?

2

How are your data collection efforts organized to be able to capture schools that are struggling?

3

Are there ways—formally or informally—that you focus on key indicators to identify schools that are struggling?

4

In what ways does your data collection change (if at all) for schools that are struggling?

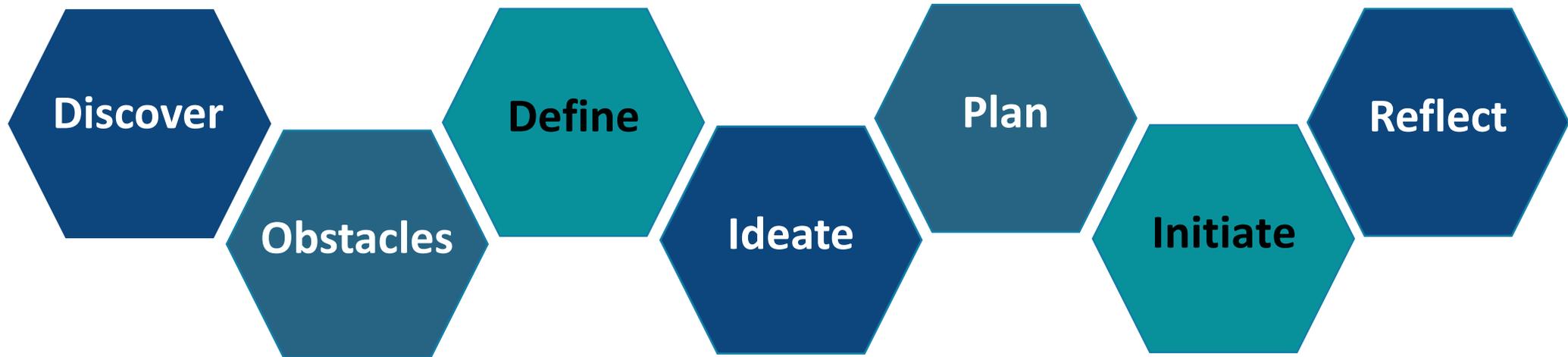
5

What does it look like to follow up on these indicators?



Questions?

# Action Planning Template: Next Steps



# What's Next for Indicators of Distress Research?



What's  
Next?

Indicators of Distress Part II:  
The School Leader and Board  
Member Perspective

## Upcoming NCSRC Resources



*How Charter Schools Can Leverage Community Assets  
through Partnerships*

How did we do?



## How can you contact NCSRC?



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



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



THANK  
YOU!

