



NATIONAL  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
RESOURCE CENTER

# Assessing Schools in Distress

## *Identifying Early Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools*

*A Supplemental Workbook for Reflection During the Workshop*

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

## Introduction & Instructions

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This tool provides an opportunity to assess how an individual school is performing across a variety of school functions.

The intention of this tool is to help schools take a nuanced look into areas of strength and weakness to identify potential indicators of distress or opportunities to leverage success.

For each of the following indicators, rank your school on the scales provided. Once you have identified where your school falls on the scales, assess how your school scored in each area. For indicators in which your school scored higher, how can you leverage these successes? Assess the areas where your school scored lower or fell in the middle of the spectrum. What steps could you take to improve? What resources do you need to do so?

Please refer to [\*Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools Part 1: The Role and Perspective of Charter School Authorizers\*](#) to help guide your completion of this assessment.

## The leadership in my school...

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Makes timely and appropriate decisions.

Struggles to make decisions.



Puts feedback from staff, parents, authorizers, board to use.

Ignores feedback.



## The governing board in my school...

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Convenes regularly.

Convenes irregularly.



Shows most members attend board meetings consistently.

Shows that quorum is rarely met.



Has been able to recruit all its members.

Has ongoing open board seats.



Is knowledgeable of the strengths and weaknesses of the school.

Is not able to discern the strengths and weaknesses of the school.



Is capable to lead the school in the work it needs to do.

Is not capable to lead the work the school needs to do.



Board Chair is in regular communication with the authorizer.

Board Chair refuses to meet with the authorizer.



Responds timely to requests from the authorizer.

Does not respond to requests from the authorizer.



Deliberates openly on decisions.

Does not deliberate on decisions; either ignores them or just accepts what the leader wants to do.



Comprehensively evaluates the school leader on a regular basis (at least annually).

Does not evaluate the school leader.



Stays true to its role of governance by focusing on vision and strategic leadership.

Often manages the school by focusing on the day-to-day decisions.



Regularly engages with school staff and community.

Hardly ever engages with school staff and community.



## Operations

There is a process and procedure for operational decision making that is clear and followed by staff.

There are no processes and procedures or staff are not following it to make operational decisions.



There is a process wherein all operational decisions are checked by another staff member with authority to supersede the decision.

There is only one person making operational decisions at the school.



The school is in compliance of federal, state and local laws, rules, and regulations.

The school is not in compliance of federal, state and local laws, rules, and regulations.



All annual audit reports show sound operations.

One or more audit reports show findings.



There are few or no errors in submitted reports; data are consistent across reports.

There are many errors in submitted reports; data are inconsistent.



Reports are submitted on time.

Reports are often late and/or missing.



Student enrollment is consistently close to budgeted amounts.

Actual student enrollment numbers are consistently below budgeted amounts.



The school has a clear and consistent student recruitment process.

The school does not have a student recruitment process.



The school regularly and positively engages with the community.

The school does not engage with the community or does so in a negative manner.



## Finance

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There is a process and procedure for developing the budget that is clear and followed by staff.

There are no clear processes or procedures, or staff are not following them to develop the budget.



The school is not in debt default.

The school has recently defaulted on loan payments.



The school's near-term viability is healthy.

The school's near-term viability is declining.



The school's debt to asset ratio is stable.

The school's cash flow will not sustain.



All financial decisions are made with board and/or leadership approval and deliberation.

Financial decisions are made by one person at the school or without board or leadership approval.



Financial decisions are made in the best interest of students.

Financial decisions do not align with what is in the best interest of students at the school.



## Talent

Staff are teaching in their certified area.

Staff are not certified to teach their current assignments.



Staff to student ratios are appropriate to students' needs.

Staff to student ratios are increasing to higher-than-normal levels.



Staff qualifications match students' needs.

Key personnel to meet students' needs are lacking.





Staff are stable; turnover is minimal.

Staff turnover is increasing; personnel leave in middle of the school year.



Staff are regularly and comprehensively evaluated.

Staff are only evaluated once a year or not at all.



Staff are engaged in ongoing PD to meet their needs and the needs of students.

Staff do not receive PD or the PD topics are irrelevant to the needs of students and staff.



## Culture

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Student attendance is stable and high; chronic absence is low and addressed.

Student attendance is declining; chronic absence is increasing and not addressed.



Student attendance is stable and high across student subgroups.

Student attendance is declining or uneven across student subgroups.



Student behavior infractions are minimal or decreasing.

Student behavior infractions are increasing.



Disciplinary actions are minimal or decreasing.

Disciplinary actions are increasing.



There is no evidence of disproportionality in disciplinary actions across student subgroups.

There is evidence of disproportionality in disciplinary actions across various student subgroups.



Staff culture is positive: welcoming, respectful, and supportive among teachers.

Staff culture is diminutive: cliquish and cutthroat among teachers.



## Instruction

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The school is clear in its learning expectations of its students; the expectations are high but appropriate.

The school is not clear in its learning expectations of its students; the expectations are low.



The school's curriculum and assessments are high quality and aligned to grade level standards.

The school's curriculum and assessments lack rigor and are not aligned to grade level standards.



Students are engaged in their learning.

Students are not engaged in their learning.



Students are making noted progress on school's mission-specific goals.

Students are not making progress on school's mission-specific goals.



Students receive targeted support based on their needs.

Students do not receive differentiated assistance.



Students are thriving and showing growth across student subgroups.

Students are not thriving or showing growth across student subgroups.



## Additional Measures

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Are there additional measures that might help you determine if your school is showing initial signs of distress? Record them here.



# Putting the Indicators into Practice

Take a moment to evaluate your school(s). What surprised you in your assessment? Which areas scored high? Which areas need improvement?

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For indicators in which your school scored higher, how can you leverage these successes?

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Assess the areas where your school scored lower or fell in the middle of the spectrum. What are steps you can take to improve these?

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What resources do you need to address areas of weakness?

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Which stakeholders do you need to convene and collaborate with to address areas of weakness?

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How will you hold yourself, and others, accountable to addressing areas of weakness?

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