



Utah Best Practices Guidance Handbook

**A handbook created for charter school
leaders by charter school leaders**

Updated September 2011

The Vision and Mission of Utah Public Education

Promises to Keep is a statement of vision and mission for Utah's system of public education. The statement relies on the language of the Utah Constitution for its central premise. It is intended to provide focus to the work of the State Board of Education, the Utah State Office of Education, and all school districts, local boards of education, and charter schools within the general control and supervision of the Board.

The Vision of Public Education

Utah's Public Education System is created in the state Constitution to "secure and perpetuate" freedom. Freedom, as envisioned in the Utah Constitution, is a promise to future generations that requires:

- Citizen participation in civic and political affairs.
- Economic prosperity for the community.
- Strong moral and social values.
- Loyalty and commitment to constitutional government.

The premise of *Promises to Keep* is that there are essential core "promises" that leaders in the public education system should be clear about with citizens of Utah; that these "promises" are made as part of the civic compact at work as the citizens of Utah give into our hands resources for the public education system; that citizens should have high expectations regarding our success in the essential "promised" work of public education.

The Mission of Public Education

Utah's Public Education System keeps its constitutional promise by:

- Ensuring literacy and numeracy for all Utah children.
- Providing high quality instruction for all Utah children.
- Establishing curriculum with high standards and relevance for all Utah children.
- Requiring effective assessment to inform high quality instruction and accountability.

Foreword

Successful charter schools are more than a school with great teachers and effective curriculum. In Utah, they are also nonprofit corporations that must operate with maximum efficiency to produce strong results despite funding and facilities challenges. Charter schools are multi-million-dollar startup enterprises whose stakeholders are parents, taxpayers, and public authorities. Because they are public schools, charter schools are publicly accountable not only for academic results, but also for sound stewardship of taxpayer dollars. And, as schools of choice, charter schools must satisfy families and students to earn their re-enrollment each year.

Although charter schools in Utah are generally a success, they do sometimes struggle because of deficiencies in finance, governance, academics, and other operational practices. To this end, the State Charter School Board began working with charter school experts around the nation to identify essential indicators, measures, and metrics for Utah charter schools. Once identified, the Board created work groups consisting of charter school operators and advocates in Utah to finalize the list. This was a long and difficult task, in part because Utah charter schools serve every kind of population from college bound teens to adjudicated youth.

With gratitude to the numerous experts and practitioners who worked to create the Utah Best Practices Guidance, we hope this handbook will be a useful tool for charter schools, chartering entities, and funders to help produce high performance, by many measures, across an ever-strengthening Utah charter school sector.

Tom Morgan
Chair
Utah State Charter School Board

Definitions & Instructions

Indicators represent general dimensions of school quality, which the State Charter School Board has identified as essential. The four key academic and operational quality indicators set forth in this handbook are accompanied by measures and metrics that the State Charter School Board recommends for widespread use by charter schools to self-monitor their performance.

Measures are general instruments or means to assess performance in each area defined by an indicator. Measures require the application of specific metrics or calculation methods.

Metrics specify a quantification, calculation method or formula for a given measure.

Taking metrics a step further, **targets** are specific, quantifiable objectives that set expectations or define what will constitute success on particular measures within a certain period of time. Having well-conceived and well-defined performance targets is important to achieve and evaluate school success. *The Governing Board should set targets for each measure identified in this handbook. For new schools, their targets will be a part of their charter agreement.*

Indicator – Student Achievement Level

Measures: Proficiency levels on state assessments by subject
Proficiency level on 3rd grade reading
Proficiency level on 6th grade mathematics
Progress score on UPASS

Definitions & Instructions

UPASS (Utah Performance Assessment System for Students) is the Utah state accountability system for schools. UPASS determines the proficiency and progress for each school using multiple assessments and indicators, including Core CRTs. Schools receive assessment results for all students in the subjects of language arts, mathematics, and science. Results are reported by level. The four levels are defined: Level 1: Minimal, Level 2: Partial, Level 3: Sufficient, Level 4: Substantial. *Charter school governing boards should identify the percentage of students scoring at proficiency (Levels 3 and 4) for each Core CRT test given at the school, as well as the DIEBLS Next test for 3rd graders. In addition, they should identify the progress score for the school overall.*

NCLB is the federal accountability system for schools. NCLB includes accountability for multiple titles within the NCLB law. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the school accountability for Title I. Annual Measureable Achievement Objectives (AMAOs) is the LEA (Local Education Agency) accountability for Title III. *Charter school governing boards should review [‘A guide to AYP determinations’](#) and [‘A guide to AMAO determinations’](#) prior to setting entity identified proficiency goals.*

A **rigorous** curriculum is an inclusive set of intentionally aligned components—clear learning outcomes with matching assessments, engaging learning experiences, and instructional strategies—organized into sequenced units of study that serve as both the detailed road map and the high-quality delivery system for ensuring that all students achieve the desired end: high expectations for student achievement at each grade level. All students are expected to attain proficiency regardless of their background. Students learn content that prepares them for postsecondary education even if they choose not to pursue this option. Teachers instruct for understanding and not just memorization.

An **aligned** curriculum is one that addresses all of the state content standards at each grade level. Aligned curriculum specifies in student friendly language what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and how they must demonstrate their knowledge and skills (assessments). Content that corresponds to state standards is just one aspect of an aligned curriculum. According to some researchers, curriculum alignment is the alignment between curriculum and state standards, standardized tests, curriculum-embedded tests, student assignments, lesson plans, textbooks, and instruction.

Facilitation means assisting and guiding the teachers in the process of curriculum articulation. Under the principal's direction, the faculty actively engages with and takes ownership of the curriculum.

Articulation means translating the curriculum into learning goals and objectives based on state standards and school priorities, sequencing and organizing curricular objectives into units or lessons, constructing timelines or pacing guides, and identifying materials, resources and instructional strategies.

A **key transition point** is a moment within a progressive system when the participant experiences a significant change. In the K-16 education system, transitions from preschool to elementary school, from elementary school to middle school, from middle to high school, and from high school to career or postsecondary education present emotional and intellectual challenges.

Curriculum articulation ensures smooth transitions and continuity by coordinating academic expectations between sending and receiving schools. By ensuring students are prepared for the next step in the K-16 education process before they enter it, schools maximize resources and minimize student frustration.

Classroom assessments are tools to measure what students have learned. Like classroom instruction, assessments should be aligned with state standards. A rigorous assessment is one that reflects high expectations for performance and evaluates students understanding and attainment of knowledge and skills. There are two primary assessment approaches: 1) formal assessments that objectively measure skills and knowledge and provide information for screening, progress monitoring, diagnosis, and evaluation; and 2) informal assessments based on observations and inferences of student abilities in different contexts.

Teacher collaboration brings together teachers within grade levels, between grade levels or even between schools to collectively design and select assessments. Teachers discuss standards, instructional techniques, and assessments to determine their alignment. They adopt or adapt these assessments or design customized assessments that best measure student mastery of the content.

Tasks are the projects, questions, problems, applications, and exercises through which students show what they know and can do with the content knowledge and skills. Good assessment tasks provide useful diagnostic information and a learning experience for students.

Academic expectations reflect the knowledge and skills students are expected to learn as proscribed by the Utah Common Core Curriculum. Students should understand the learning objectives, their own level of attainment, and specific steps to improve.

Proficiency is the performance level students need to demonstrate mastery of the content. It indicates what students must know and be able to do for that grade level.

The **achievement gap** in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students. It is often used to describe performance gaps between ethnicities or gaps between students of different socio-economic levels. Achievement gaps may be reflected in grades,

standardized test scores, course selections, dropout rates, and secondary and postsecondary education completion rates.

A **curricular gap** exists when there is limited or no alignment between the opportunities to learn, course offerings, standards, requirements, instructional materials, and learner needs. In many instances, the curriculum gap can be narrowed by systematically linking expectations, opportunities and needs.

Feedback is the information teachers give students about what they are doing correctly and what they still need to learn. Feedback should be provided in a timely manner continuously throughout the learning process.

Multiple assessments are the various ways teachers assess the knowledge and skills of students including response/short answer, essay, performance assessments, and oral communication. Multiple assessments give students the opportunity to show what they know and can do in a variety of situations.

Performance standards specify what students must know and be able to do to be considered proficient. The standards usually define the evidence required to demonstrate attainment (e.g., holding a debate on a current event topic to show understanding of interacting social factors) and levels of proficiency such as basic, proficient, and advanced. Performance standards set a floor (minimum acceptable achievement) not a ceiling, and should not limit the performance of high-achieving students. Using performance standards for assessment in the form of rubrics enables teachers to remain objective in grading.

<i>Indicator - Student achievement level</i>		
Measure	Metric	Best Practice Guideline
Proficiency levels on state assessments by subject	Percentage of students scoring at proficiency	TBD
Proficiency levels on reading	Proficiency score on DIEBELS Next (3 rd grade)	81%
Proficiency levels on math	Percentage of students scoring minimum math proficiency (6 th grade)	71.6%
Progress score on UPASS	Attainment of minimum status composite score (school wide) on UPASS	200

Sample step-by-step process for aligning curriculum

- 1. Prepare for the process.** Create an action plan for conducting the curriculum alignment project. Decide on a process to use. Since many are available online, consult research and visit other schools to see how they have aligned their curriculum. Determine who will be engaged in the process and ensure they have the skills and knowledge to undertake the alignment. Create a timeline and set aside time and funds needed to complete the task.
- 2. Create a curriculum map.** To determine whether a school's curriculum is aligned to state standards, it is helpful to create a curriculum map. The map attempts to capture the content, skills, and assessments taught or administered by every teacher within a school building and organize this information into an easily accessed visual that presents a timeline of instruction by teacher and course. The map enables teachers and administrators to know whether the school is meeting all of the standards.
- 3. Engage in the alignment process.** Begin by creating a preliminary map. List the standards and benchmarks for each content area (e.g., reading, language arts, mathematics, science) by grade level. Note the curriculum and instructional practices currently used to teach each standard.
- 4. Review the curriculum map.** Teachers and administrators should examine the map together to ensure accuracy, identify gaps and redundancies, and determine what changes are needed to better align the curriculum to the standards. The group should consider what and when it is taught to ensure proper sequencing and spiraling. The group should also discuss what skills and knowledge should receive greater emphasis, as evidenced by assessments indicating areas where students are struggling. Teachers can find additional gaps by engaging in vertical (between grade levels) and horizontal (between subjects) discussions and by examining patterns in assessment data.
- 5. Implement an action plan.** Make necessary instructional, scheduling, and resource changes to align curriculum to the standards. Engage in professional development as needed.

Helpful Resources

Edvantia at

<http://www.edvantia.org/products/searchresults.cfm?&t=products&c=search&topic=cialigned>

National Educators Association. *Curriculum Mapping Resources*. Retrieved from

<http://www.nea.org/tools/12959.htm>

Rubicon International. *Atlas curriculum mapping*. Retrieved from

www.rubiconatlas.com/AtlasCurriculumMapping.html

Hale, J. *Curriculum Mapping 101*. Retrieved from www.curriculummapping101.com

Sample step-by-step process for articulating curriculum

- 1. Determine the approach.** Administrators and teachers should decide whether to approach subjects primarily through single content areas or through integrated instruction. Many schools choose to integrate some content areas and conduct single subject lessons in others.
- 2. Develop and prioritize learning goals.** Determine what students need to know and be able to do by examining the Utah Common Core standards for each content area at each grade level. Determine which learning goals have priority.
- 3. Sequence and organize the curriculum.** With the principal's help, the teachers at each grade level should decide what will be taught and when. Adjacent grade level teams should compare their sequencing to fill gaps and ensure continuous student growth (vertical alignment).
- 4. Develop lesson plans.** Plans should state learning objectives, the state standard to which they correspond, needed resources, instructional and remediation strategies, practice activities, and associated assessments.
- 5. Arrange activities on a calendar.** Daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly activities should be added to a calendar to guide instructional planning and to ensure that resources are available. The calendars can be used by teachers and principals for monitoring, pacing, and planning of supplemental activities such as field trips.
- 6. Ensure coherence and depth of each content area.** Teams can have other teams review their curriculum articulation to make sure that the lessons or units reflect appropriate expectations for student learning and that there is coherence within and across grade levels.
- 7. Revisit annually to ensure that it is effective.** Principals should facilitate discussions about effectiveness of curriculum articulation and delivery and help teachers modify units or lessons as needed.

Helpful Resources

Love, N. (2002). *Using data/getting results*. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Reeves, D. (2000). *Accountability in action: A blueprint for learning organizations*. Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Centers.

Sample step-by-step process for transition alignment

- 1. Prepare for the process.** Decide which of the available transition alignment processes will best meet the school's needs and budget and time constraints.
- 2. Identify stakeholders.** Clearly communicate the roles of and the benefits to all participants in the alignment process. Participants should include stakeholders on both sides of the transition point. Support broader integration of goals, services, and practices between the two sides of the transition point.
- 3. Hold regular meetings.** Typically, articulation discussion groups meet monthly during the school year. Share an agenda before each meeting and minutes afterward.
- 4. Consider student experiences.** This includes carefully examining documents related to curriculum at both levels as well as soliciting student input through interviews, focus groups, or surveys.
- 5. Identify policies.** At higher levels of the education system, policies that may affect the alignment process or its outcomes often involve receipt of articulated credit for particular coursework.
- 6. Align all content areas.** Choose an appropriate curriculum alignment process and work on one content area at a time. Be sure to establish whether alignment is course-to-course, course-to-courses, or courses-to-course.
- 7. Remove barriers.** For students to successfully transition through the system, each must be adequately prepared for the next step and be able to schedule necessary classes.
- 8. Review alignment regularly.** Since programs change, establish a review process and schedule to maintain the alignment of all transition elements.
- 9. Evaluate the articulation.** Collect student level data to be used for evaluating the outcomes of the articulation project.

Helpful Resources

Indiana NCA CASI Membership. (2002). *The transitions endorsement process*. Retrieved from <http://baby.indstate.edu/IndianaNCA/mbership/transitn/transit2.htm>

Western States Benchmarking Consortium. (2003, February). *Student learning* (Rev ed.). Retrieved from www.wsbenchmark.org/Student_Learning.pdf

Sample step-by-step process for aligning assessments to standards

- 1. Define what students are expected to learn.** Use the curriculum map and articulation procedures to identify achievement expectations for units and lesson plans. Translate the expectations into student friendly terms to share with students.
- 2. Translate expectations into assessments.** Develop a variety of age appropriate, challenging assessments including selected responses, essays, performances, visualizations, interviews, and other assessment forms. Include questions that assess higher order thinking skills as well as information attainment. Teachers may create or adapt assessment tools in collaboration with other teachers.
- 3. Give students clear and timely feedback.** By grading assessments soon after they are completed, a teacher can assess students' strengths and weaknesses, make instructional changes, and provide the student with clear direction in his or her learning.

Helpful Resources

Black, P., & William, D. (1998). Inside the black box: Raising standards through classroom assessment. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 80 (2), 139-144.

Crooks, T. J. (1988). The impact of classroom evaluation practices on students. *Review of Educational Research*, 58 (4), 438-481.

Meisels, S. J., Atkins-Burnett, S., Xue, Y., Nicholson, J. Bickel, D.D. & Son, S-H. (2003, February) Creating a system of accountability: The impact of instructional assessment on elementary children's achievement test scores. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11(9). Retrieved from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n9>

Pallegrino, J. W., Chudowsky, N., & Glaser, R. (Eds.). (2001) *Knowing what students know: The science and design of educational assessment*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Popham, W. J. (1995). *Classroom assessment: What teachers need to know*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Stiggins, R. J. (1994). *Student-centered classroom assessment*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Sample step-by-step process for articulating academic expectations and proficiency

- 1. Communicate the learning target.** Share the learning targets in a clear and understandable manner before beginning instruction so student can know what they are responsible for mastering and at what level.
- 2. Consider providing a scoring guide.** A student friendly scoring guide that defines quality work helps students know if they have reached proficiency. Scoring guidelines are particularly useful for performance assessments.
- 3. Provide students with examples.** Students are more likely to understand feedback and evaluations when they are shown examples of strong and poor work that translate the proficiency standards into specific, concrete, and understandable terms.
- 4. Teach students to self-assess.** Ongoing descriptive feedback on student performance teaches students how to assess their own work. As students develop this skill, provide them an opportunity to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their work before offering feedback. Students' self- assessments help them understand the material and internalize expectations. Peer assessment should focus on improvement not grading.

Helpful Resources

Stiggins, R., Arter, J., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis, S (2004). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right – using it well*. Portland, OR: Assessment Training Institute.

Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2003). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Sample step-by-step process for identifying achievement gaps

- 1. Prior to looking at the data.** Engage appropriate stakeholder groups (e.g., staff, parents, school boards, students, administrators) in a dialogue about attitudes, achievement, and the curriculum. To help in this dialogue, use questions to help reveal assumptions, expectations, and predictions.
- 2. Analyze the data.** Examine student assessment data to look for trends and patterns. Sort and summarize the data using colored markers or special software. Look for common themes or trends. Note what appears to be surprising or unexpected.
- 3. Identify possible explanations.** Data can be used to verify assumptions and discourage the exploration of other plausible explanations. To avoid this, identify many possible explanations and examine other data sources.
- 4. Identify action steps.** Identify instructional and scheduling changes, a timetable, staff members who will be responsible for implementation, and how stakeholders will be engaged and informed.
- 5. Monitor and adapt instructional changes.** Establish a process to monitor the implementation, collect data and make additional changes.

Helpful Resources

Quality Counts at 10: A Decade of Standards-Based Education from Education Week. Retrieved from www.edweek.org/ew/toc/2006/01/05/index.html

The Education Trust. *Making data work: A parent and community guide*. Retrieved from http://www.blwd.k12.pa.us/district_info/districtreportcard/Shared%20Documents/Making_Data_Work_Parent_and_Community_Guide.pdf

Pellegrino, J. W. (2001, April). *Rethinking and redesigning education assessment*. Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States. Retrieved from www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/24/88/2488.htm

Quenemoen, R., Thurlow, M., Moen, R., Thompson, S., & Morse, A. B. (2004). *Progress monitoring in an inclusive standards-based assessment and accountability system* (Synthesis Report 53). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

Sample step-by-step process for feedback on assessments

- 1. Define the purpose of the assessment.** Assessments can be used as an instructional tool and to make decisions about students' progress.
- 2. Collect, adapt, or design assessments that match the assessment purpose.** Multiple choice and short answer assessments can be used to assess content knowledge, some kinds of reasoning in isolation, and simple procedural knowledge. Essays can serve to assess student mastery of complex content or procedural knowledge and reasoning. Oral communication can be used to assess all of the achievement target areas.
- 3. Specify the performance standards.** Write clear, specific descriptions of the performance standards expected of student work. Provide examples of student work to articulate the precise definitions of each level.

Helpful Resources

Annenberg Media. (1997). *Assessment in math and science: What's the point?* [Video]. Can be viewed online at www.learner.org/resources/series93.html#program_descriptions

Herman, J. L., Aschbacher, P. R., & Winters, L. (1992). *A practical guide to alternative assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Education Northwest. (1998). *Assessment toolkit*. Portland, OR: Author. Retrieved from <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/700>

Sample step-by-step process for performance standards

- 1. Determine how the performance standard will be articulated.** Schools can use the state standards for proficiency or they can develop their own performance standards. A performance standard can be written in generalized terms to be used with multiple assessments or in specific terms as it relates to each assessment.
- 2. Use clear language when writing performance standards.** Limit the number of performance criteria and express them in terms of observable behaviors or product characteristics. The differences between achievement levels should be clear and aligned with UPASS expectations. If the performance standards will be used by multiple teachers, ensure they will be interpreted consistently.
- 3. Post the performance standards in the classroom.** Students should know what is expected of them and how they will be evaluated. Showing students examples of acceptable and unacceptable work will help them to understand what is expected.
- 4. Communicate the performance standards to parents.** Parental support of classroom learning improves when parents know the assessment expectations for student tasks.
- 5. Develop grading rubrics.** A generalized grading rubric based on performance standards allows students to self-assess their work and guide teachers in grading. The rubric needs to be clear and easily understood by students and parents. Specific rubrics should be available when tasks are assigned.
- 6. Display samples.** Student samples and teacher made models clarify tasks and show distinctions between levels of performance on the rubric. The display should also be used to identify and discuss strategies for students to improve their performance on assignments.
- 7. Allow time for students to analyze work.** Class discussions, teacher feedback, and opportunities to evaluate others' work according to the performance standards and rubrics ensure that students understand and use the performance standards as assessment criteria.
- 8. Communicate the level of student's mastery of the standards to their parents.** Conferences and regular progress reports sent home are two effective means of showing parents their child's accomplishments.

Helpful Resources

- Arter, J., & McTighe, J. (2001). *Scoring rubrics in the classroom*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Lawrence, KS: Author. Retrieved from <http://rubistar.4teachers.org>
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe, J. (2005). *Understanding by design*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Measures: High school graduation rate
College entrance exam composite and subtest measures

Definitions & Instructions

Few would debate the importance of earning a high school diploma. Researchers agree that graduating from high school leads to much better life outcomes; parents uniformly desire that their children walk down the aisle in cap and gown; policymakers compete over whose ideas will lead to more high school graduates. The same can be said about the ability to attend college, of which earning a high school diploma is a necessary part. What is less agreed upon, however, is the extent to which public schools are succeeding at graduating students and at preparing those students for higher education.

Graduation rate in Utah is calculated by taking the number of graduates, and dividing it by the number of drop outs, number of other completers, number of continuing students, and number of graduates combined (i.e., # graduates/ (# drop outs + # other completers + # continuing students + # graduates)). *Charter school governing boards should review ‘[Cohort Graduation and Dropout Rate by School](#)’ (for the most recent school year), and look at data for similar schools (e.g., similar target population, close in proximity, etc.) prior to setting entity identified graduation rate.*

An **academic core curriculum** helps students prepare for college level work by the time they graduate from high school. Courses are rigorous and closely aligned with academic standards. Although it was once assumed that only the most capable and motivated students could master a college preparatory curriculum, research shows that all students benefit from exposure to a challenging academic core. Utah describes an academic core curriculum as providing:

- Four units of English;
- Three units of Mathematics, met minimally through successful completion of the foundation courses, Algebra 1, Geometry, Algebra 2;
- Three units of science, including laboratory sciences such as biology, chemistry and physics;
- Three units of social studies.

A **common curriculum** is one that has the same outcome expectations for all students including, but not limited to, students identified for special education and students who are English language learners. The intent is to achieve more equitable outcomes for all students. A common curriculum defines a core of essential skills and knowledge each student is expected to attain. It does not mean that all students will master the content at the same speed or same depth. Since the curriculum provides common expectations for the performance of all students, teachers are more easily able to maintain a consistent high level of instruction.

Curricular units for continuing education, life, and career options communicate with students about workplace attitudes, such as completing work on time, conscientiousness, cooperation, and self-discipline, and workplace skills such as problem solving, decision making, collaboration, and communication. Continuing education curriculum helps young people develop a positive attitude

toward learning and become motivated to continue their education. The curriculum helps students see a pathway to the future and acquire study skills and learning strategies to cope with new academic challenges. Lifelong learning skills emphasize what students will need to succeed in the workplace, become competent citizens, and relate well to others.

Disaggregated groups consist of race/ethnicity and gender. Specifically, disaggregated groups for this indicator are African American/Black, American Indian/Alaska Native, Caucasian American/White, Hispanic, Asian American/Pacific Islander, Male, and Female. **Disaggregated data** means data that have been taken apart and thoroughly examined. Data may be disaggregated by grade level, teacher, demographic information, subject area, gender, ethnicity, special education status, and/or any number of other factors. The purpose of disaggregating data is to help make strategic plans and decisions to improve student achievement.

The **ACT®** test assesses high school students' general educational development and their ability to complete college-level work. The multiple-choice tests cover four skill areas: English, mathematics, reading, and science. The Writing Test, which is optional, measures skill in planning and writing a short essay.

The **SAT** assesses high school students' academic readiness for college. These exams test the reading, writing and math skills that students' learn in school and that are critical for success in college and beyond. It gives both the student and colleges a sense of how they will be able to apply the thinking, writing and study skills required for college course work.

Colleges in Utah that require the ACT or SAT are: University of Utah, Utah State University, Southern Utah University, Snow College, Dixie State College, Utah Valley University, Brigham Young University, and Westminster College. *Charter school governing boards should review the most recent [‘ACT Utah Report’](#) prior to setting entity identified predictive scores by disaggregated groups or median score on ACT by disaggregated groups.*

<i>Indicator - Student achievement level</i>		
Measure	Metric	Best Practice Guideline
High school graduation rate	Percentage of students graduating high school using Utah graduation formula	71.8%
College entrance exam composite and subtest measures	Percentage of students reaching score predictive of college success by disaggregated groups	> 21
College entrance exam composite and subtest measures	Median score by disaggregated groups	TBD

Sample step-by-step process for preparing students for life after high school

- 1. Believe all students can learn.** It is important that all staff, including administrators, teachers, special education professionals, and other support staff, hold this belief. It is not possible to support a common academic core curriculum in a setting in which the adults do not believe in the learning capacity of all students.
- 2. Read background literature.** Teachers, special education professionals, and administrators should become familiar with the background literature and research available on the design and results of enacting a common academic core curriculum.
- 3. Identify curriculum standards and expectations.** Build a common core by compiling the course expectations, and their corresponding standards, in all content areas that all students will be expected to know and be able to do in order to transition to in the next grade or graduate. Examine the total curriculum to ensure that all standards are adequately addressed and that all students will have the opportunity to meet the expectations of the common academic core.
- 4. Communicate standards and expectations.** Students need to know how courses enable them to make progress toward mastering the common academic core. Content area standards and course outcome expectations can be distributed in a course syllabus, posted in the classroom, and discussed at the beginning of each unit, lesson, or activity.
- 5. Address learning needs.** Although courses will differ in the manner and pace by which content is taught, teachers of all courses should maintain high expectations for student performance and schools should offer adequate course selection for all students.
- 6. Require problem solving and higher order thinking.** Some students may require more time to master basic level skills and information. It is not appropriate to withhold practice in problem solving and higher order thinking until they have achieved this mastery. Instead, these skills should be embedded in coursework at all proficiency levels for all students.
- 7. Motivate all students.** Teachers should be aware of individual student learning needs and choose appropriate instructional strategies and practices that motivate all students to increase their academic achievement.
- 8. Consider making achievement of the common academic core curriculum a requirement for high school graduation.**
- 9. Make revisions.** Be sure all students have access to challenging coursework that addresses the common academic core. This can be accomplished by reviewing disaggregated student data and making appropriate curriculum revisions.

Helpful Resources

ACT (2005). *Courses count: Preparing students for postsecondary success*.
<http://www.act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/CoursesCount.pdf>

ACT & The Education Trust. *On course for success: A close look at selected high school courses that prepare all students for college*. Retrieved from
<http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs/2005/fb071505.htm>

The American Diploma Project. (2004, February). *Ready or not: Creating a high school diploma that counts*. Retrieved from <http://www.achieve.org/ReadyorNot>

Education Trust- West. (2004, spring). *The A-G curriculum: College-prep? Work-prep? Life-prep*. Retrieved from <http://www.edtrust.org/west/publication/the-a-g-curriculum-college-prep-work-prep-life-prep>

Sample step-by-step process for addressing continuing education, life, and career options

- 1. Communicate.** Often students have an orientation to the present rather than the future. Teachers should communicate the importance of acquiring skills for postsecondary education, career, and life. They can motivate students to acquire skills important for adulthood if they link the acquisition of such skills to future earning power and satisfaction with life.
- 2. Provide opportunities for the development of skills.** Develop activities that help students foster the development of important attitudes and skills, such as dependability, positive attitudes toward tasks, and other related life and workplace skills.
- 3. Choose workplace problems for students to solve.** This type of activity gives students time to learn more about problem solving, decision making, and seeking alternative solutions to problems.
- 4. Give students opportunities to work.** Students working in the community and sharing the experiences in class can result in shared learning and a more realistic sense of workplace expectations.
- 5. Provide instruction in communication, conflict management, and collaboration skills.** These skills will be beneficial no matter what future path students pursue.
- 6. Encourage self-directed learning.** Show students how to plan and complete projects on time.
- 7. Cultivate resilience skills.** Acquiring these skills will help students develop the confidence and competence to persist in future endeavors.
- 8. Explore implementation of dual enrollment opportunities.** Dual enrollment opportunities between high schools and postsecondary institutions, Tech Prep programs, or college access programs helps students, particularly those at risk of high school failure, to complete high school and continue to postsecondary education.

Helpful Resources

- Dougherty, C., Mellor, L., & Smith, N. (2005). *Identifying appropriate college-readiness standards for all students*. Austin, TX: National Center for Educational Accountability.
- Lerner, J. B., & Brand, B. (2006). *The college ladder: Linking secondary and postsecondary education for success for all students*. Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum.
- North Central Regional Educational Laboratory and the Metiri Group. (2003). *enGauge 21st century skills: Literacy in the digital age*. Naperville, IL and Los Angeles, CA: Authors.

Indicator – Board Performance & Stewardship

Measures: Board member development
Regulatory reporting & compliance

Definitions & Instructions

A school's **vision statement** provides a description of where the school is headed. It describes a picture of the future and how leaders, educators, and partners see events unfolding over an extended period of time.

A **mission statement** is a description of the schools' purpose. It sets the foundation and brings focus to the school. It should be to the point and should define "why the school is there" and "what are the school is going to do." A mission statement provides clarity and direction.

To **sustain a shared vision and mission** means to make sure that they are upheld, communicated, and celebrated over time. The vision and mission are the foundation upon which all school decisions, plans, and goals are built. A shared vision and mission are known by all stakeholders including staff, administrators, students, parents, and the community. *Charter school governing boards should review the governing board training modules on the State Charter School Board's website prior to setting entity identified percentage of governing board members passing all available modules.*

A school's **learning and work environment** includes all of the places within and outside the school where students, staff, teachers, and administrators conduct their activities. This includes the physical environment, such as the building and its grounds, and the cultural environment, including the way people conduct themselves and interact with others.

A **safe environment** is one that respects students' personal, developmental, academic, social, and emotional needs. Physical and affective environments are protected and comfortable. **Effective environments** are those in which the goals and objectives of the school may best be accomplished.

Using **multiple communication strategies** means that the charter school governing board transmits information to stakeholders in more than one way. In public education, traditional methods of communication tend to be one way (school to home) and usually in a written format (e.g., a newsletter or progress report). Advances in technology enable charter schools to use the Internet, electronic mail (e-mail), automated telephone systems, and voice mail to communicate with and among teachers, administrators, community members, and families. Personal contacts with families through parent-teacher conferences, family-school liaisons, and the use of interpreters and bilingual materials can be effective ways of communicating with an increasingly diverse school population.

An **evaluation process** assesses goal attainment and quality of performance. Administrator proficiency is typically determined in advance and identifies behaviors, knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to be effective in the job. A process used to improve proficiency is one that includes analysis of strengths and weaknesses and a plan to address weaknesses on an individual and group basis. An effective evaluation and professional development plan ensures administrators receive training in the skills they need to be proficient at their jobs.

Disaggregated data means data that have been taken apart and thoroughly examined. Data may be disaggregated by grade level, teacher, demographic information, subject area, gender, ethnicity, special education status, and/or any number of other factors. The purpose of disaggregating data is to help make strategic plans and decisions to improve student achievement.

Achievement refers to student academic performance, usually related to a state, district, or school accountability system. This generally translates into test scores on the state assessment.

The **planning process** is a series of activities or steps that lead an organization to identify what is being done to support and further the mission and vision of the organization and what changes will strengthen the organization. The planning process takes time and actively engages all stakeholders in various tasks. When done correctly, the planning process results in a strategic plan that provides an outline of organizational goals and a blueprint for accomplishing those goals over a specific period of time. *Charter school governing boards should review the [‘Annual Reporting Calendar’](#) (for the current school year) prior to setting entity identified percentage of required reports that are complete, accurate, and on time.*

School improvement plans are plans that schools create to guide them in the school improvement process. School improvement plans specify the school’s goals and research based strategies and activities selected to help the school meet its objectives. The plan designates those responsible for the activities, a timeline, and accountability measures.

Continuous improvement is an ongoing and iterative process through which schools make incremental improvements to their quality and performance.

A **charter agreement** means the terms and conditions for the operation of an approved charter school, and includes the entire charter application. The charter school agreement is maintained at the USOE and is considered the final, official and complete agreement. The **Articles of Incorporation** are the primary rules governing the management of a corporation in Utah, and are filed with the state prior to submitting a charter application. **Board bylaws** are the written rules for conduct of an organization. They should not be confused with the Articles of Corporation which only state the basic outline of the company, including stock structure. Bylaws generally provide for meetings, elections of a board of directors and officers, filling vacancies, notices, types and duties of officers, committees, assessments and other routine conduct. Bylaws are, in effect a contract among members, and must be formally adopted and/or amended in an open and public meeting. *Charter school governing boards should review the Articles of Incorporation, Board Bylaws, and Charter Agreement to ensure there is agreement amongst all documents. Changes to the Charter Agreement must be approved by the chartering entity.*

Indicator – Board performance & stewardship

Measure	Metric	Best Practice Guideline
Board member development	Percentage of board passing all available training modules available on State Charter School Board website	100%
Regulatory and reporting compliance	Percentage of all required reports that are complete, accurate, and on time	100%
Regulatory and reporting compliance	Articles of Incorporation, Board Bylaws, and Charter are all in agreement and the school's Charter is not changed without proper agreement from chartering entity	100% agreement

Sample step-by-step process for reviewing a vision and mission statement

- 1. Review the vision and mission statements for clarity and consistent meaning.** Make sure the mission and vision statements correctly define the school. Share the statements with other members of the community and ask what the statements mean to them. Eliminate words that are difficult to understand or that can have different meanings to different groups.
- 2. Revise the statements periodically.** A charter schools' purpose may change making it necessary to rewrite the mission and vision. *Governing board must seek permission from its chartering entity to change the mission of the school. Check with your chartering entity for how to modify your charter.*
- 3. Implement the statements.** The mission and vision statements should guide the goals and decision making at every level in the school. The statements should clearly define the work, spirit, and expectations of administrators, teachers, staff, and students. At mission-driven schools it is easier to focus on what will help the students reach the schools' goals and objectives. Statements can inspire and motivate everyone involved to work toward a common goal. They can also serve as a reference in recruiting, hiring, and evaluating staff.

Helpful Resources

National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. Washington, DC at www.publiccharters.org

Education Northwest: Charter starters: Leadership training. Retrieved from <http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/928>

US Charter Schools. Developing a mission statement. Retrieved from http://www.uscharterschools.org/pub/uscs_docs/r/mission.htm

Sample step-by-step process for sustaining a shared vision or mission

- 1. Communicate the vision.** Communicate the vision and mission to the entire school community. It is helpful to establish a communications team to share this information.
- 2. Reinforce and support the mission and vision.** Continuously reinforce and support the mission and vision of the school and use them to guide all decision making. Establish a systematic process to ensure that all decisions are regularly reviewed and considered for modification to maintain alignment with the mission and vision.
- 3. Focus the staff.** Focus the staff on implementing the vision and mission by using them as a foundation for designing instructional programs. Focus the school community on implementing the mission and vision by using them as a filter for school improvement initiatives.
- 4. Update stakeholders on progress.** Allow time for the achievement of the mission. Provide updates to stakeholders on the progress toward accomplishing the mission. Articulate and reinforce the mission and vision in written and spoken communications. Establish a feedback loop to ensure that the mission and vision are revised as necessary and that strategies are appropriately modified to maintain momentum toward accomplishment of the mission.

Helpful Resources

Dlott, S, (2006). *Surviving and thriving as a superintendent of schools: Leadership lessons from modern American presidents*. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Rowman & Littlefield.

Lindsay, C. P., & Enz, C. A. (1991). Resource control and visionary leadership: Two exercises. *Journal of Management Education*, 15(1), 127-135.

Smith, S. C., & Stolp, S, (1995, Spring). Transforming a school's culture through shared vision. *OSSC Report*, 35(3), 1-6. Retrieved from http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/search/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED384970&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED384970

Sample step-by-step process for creating a communication plan

- 1. Develop a communication plan.** Involve school staff and parents or guardians of students attending the school in developing a plan that meets the needs of the school's population. Conduct discussions of the best ways to communicate in board meetings. A communication needs assessment is one way of including all stakeholders in this process. When developing communication strategies, schools need to pay particular attention to parents' educational levels, language abilities, work schedules, access to and knowledge of technology, and cultural expectations. Board members should be trained on formal and informal strategies to increase the quality and effectiveness of family-school communication.
- 2. Introduce the communication plan.** At the beginning of the school year, inform administration about the various strategies and expectations for school-home communication. Provide families with information on how they can reach board members and let them know what types of resources they will receive at various times during the school year.
- 3. Make sure that all methods of communication are easily understood and inclusive.** Communication to parents should be jargon-free and in a language spoken by the family at home, if possible. When addressing letters sent home, use "Dear Parents and Caregivers" or "Dear Parents and Guardians" to include the families of children being raised in other family settings. Arrange teacher conferences and school events at times when the majority of family members can attend. Provide transportation, interpreters, and bilingual materials if necessary. Since many families do not have access to computers or the Internet, provide multiple forms of outreach.
- 4. Assess the communication plan.** Check with administration, staff, community members, and families on a regular basis to make sure they are receiving and understanding information being sent from the governing board. Ask families if they have any questions about school policies and procedures. Survey families at the end of the school year to assess the effectiveness of the communication strategies.

Helpful Resources

American Federation of Teachers. *Communicating with parents*. Retrieved from <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/psrp/psrpcommparents0907.pdf>

Bulloch, K. L. (2003). *Home-school communications*. Retrieved from www.educationoasis.com/resources/Articles/home-school_comm.htm

Jennings, W. B., Adelman, A. J., & Smith, N. (2000, November). *Charter schools: Creating and sustaining family friendly schools*. Retrieved from www.uscharterschools.org/gb/familyfriendly.

National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) www.nspr.org

Sample step-by-step process for improving administrator proficiency

- 1. Develop the administrator evaluation process.** Specify and clearly communicate expectations for performance. Expectations should be related to the school's mission and achievement goals. Performance objectives should describe the behavioral expectations for this leadership position. Identify the person responsible for evaluating performance.
- 2. Apply the process objectively.** Rate all employees who are subject to evaluation using the same criteria for performance. Indicators should be valid, reliable and consistently applied.
- 3. Identify areas of strength and areas for improvement.** Collect and analyze data to determine strengths and areas in need of improvement. Discuss the results with the employee. For improvement purposes, it is helpful for the process to be more diagnostic than judgmental.
- 4. Develop an improvement plan with identified performance objectives for each area of weakness.** After identifying areas in need of improvement, the evaluator and administrator should collaboratively identify and discuss performance goals. The goals should be specific. Professional development should be discussed.
- 5. Implement and monitor the improvement plan.** Conduct regular discussions, observations, and walk-throughs to monitor progress and identify additional needs. Professional learning communities and portfolios are also a viable means of helping staff to reflect on their progress toward meeting goals and objectives.
- 6. Evaluate the improvement plan during the staff member's next performance review.**

Helpful References

- Berube, B., & Dexter, R. (2006). Supervision, evaluation, and NCLB: Maintaining a most highly qualified staff. *Catalyst for Change*, 34 (2).
- Borko, H. (2004). Professional development and teacher learning: Mapping the terrain. *Educational Researcher*, 33(8), 3-15.
- Kyriakides, L., Demetriou, D., & Charalambous, C. (2006). Generating criteria for evaluating teachers through teacher effectiveness research. *Educational Research*, 48(1), 1-20.
- Porter, A. C., Youngs, P., & Odden, A. (2001). *Advances in teacher assessments and their uses*. In V. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teaching* (pp. 259-297). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Sample step-by-step process for reviewing disaggregated data and creating an improvement plan

- 1. Provide administrators and teachers access to disaggregated data.** Test scores and other achievement measures should be disaggregated by program type and demographic characteristics and provided in a readable form to those who will develop the school improvement plan.
- 2. Compare academic achievement of population subgroups and/or those served by different programs.** Disaggregating the data and comparing achievement rates helps decision makers to determine whether instruction is working for all students. Those involved in developing a school improvement plan should examine the academic achievement of population subgroups such as by income level, ethnicity, and gender. The achievement rates of students in special programs should also be examined.
- 3. Set goals based on the data.** Review the disaggregated data in collaboration with the School Accountability Committee to determine goals for next year and timelines for reducing achievement gaps. Share these disaggregated data results with all stakeholders.
- 4. Study the research on what works to close the achievement gap.** If there are gaps in achievement rates between the various subgroups, examine the research on what works with those subpopulations or with the program being offered. Base decisions about changing strategies on the research that best reflects the context for the school.
- 5. Provide professional development to ensure that strategies are successfully implemented.** Be sure that individuals who are responsible for implementing new strategies are provided with the professional development they need to succeed.
- 6. Assess the success of the strategies at the end of the school year by examining disaggregated results.** Retain those strategies that appear to be working. Examine the implementation of unsuccessful strategies and make changes as appropriate.

Helpful Resources

Bernhardt, V. (1999). *The school portfolio: A comprehensive framework for school improvement* (2nd ed.). Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.

Creighton, T. B. (2001). *Schools and data: The educator's guide for using data to improve decision making*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Love, N. (2002). *Using data/getting results: A practical guide for school improvement in mathematics and science*. Norwood, MA: Christopher Gordon.

Wellman, B., & Lipton, L. (2003). *Data-driven dialogue: A facilitator's guide to collaborative inquiry*. Sherman, CT: MiraVia.

Sample step-by-step process for building a planning process

- 1. Build a planning team.** Representation from various stakeholder groups will increase buy-in. Take time to create a supportive culture for honest, open communication and collaboration. Without a “team” approach, implementation will be more difficult.
- 2. Focus the planning process.** Avoid developing elaborate plans that identify many goals and objectives as these plans have too many areas of focus to have significant impact. Keep the planning process targeted to specific goals and activities that will directly impact student achievement.
- 3. Gather data and analyze results.** Gather information on how the school is accomplishing its academic mission including achievement results, discipline logs, observations, and other indicators. Examine the data with the planning team and look for areas of need. These areas become the focus of the goals and action steps.
- 4. Develop goals and action steps.** Based on the findings from the data, develop a few, measurable goals, define action steps, set timelines, and designate individuals responsible to accomplish the actions.
- 5. Make the plan visible, monitor progress, and report frequently.** Make everyone aware of their responsibilities. Acknowledge the work as it is underway and celebrate successes.

Helpful Resources

- Bernhardt, V. L. (2000). *Designing and using databases for school improvement*. Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education.
- Creighton, T. B. (2001). *Schools and data: The educator’s guide for using data to improve decision making*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a professional learning community? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.
- Reeves, D. B. (2000). *Accountability in action: A blueprint for learning organizations*. Denver, CO: Advanced Learning Centers.
- Wahlstrom, D. (1999). *Using data to improve student achievement: A handbook for collecting, organizing, analyzing, and using data*. Virginia Beach, VA: Successline.

Sample step-by-step process for continuous improvement

- 1. Formalize and support roles for leaders and implement improvement strategies.**
Creating a team of individuals to lead continuous improvement efforts is critical to ensuring that strategies are successfully planned and implemented, that their impact is assessed, and practices are sustained or modified, as appropriate. Team members should be representative of stakeholders in the school community and should reflect a range of skills and perspectives. Training for team members may be helpful to improve their problem solving skills and to ensure they understand the cycle of continuous improvement.
- 2. Communicate improvement goals and strategies clearly and frequently.** The school improvement plan should clearly articulate goals, specific strategies, and measurable objectives. All members who are involved in implementing the plan must have clear and shared understanding of these components as well as timelines for meeting goals and expectations of specific individuals. When changes to goals and strategies are needed, these must also be clearly and frequently communicated.
- 3. Encourage reflective practice and learning communities.** One way to infuse the notion of continuous improvement is to encourage reflective practice. Among instructional staff, reflection allows for examination of beliefs, goals, or practices to gain a deeper understanding of what contributes to student learning. Learning communities can also be supported by creating opportunities for teachers to have in depth and open conversations about their practice, what works and does not work, and why. Opportunities may include lesson study, self-assessment activities, and group discussions of practice before, during, and after implementation of improvement strategies.
- 4. Implement improvement strategies and assess progress and impact.** Monitor progress throughout the implementation process to ensure that goals are met. It often makes sense to make small or incremental changes before scaling up. Evaluate the effectiveness of improvement strategies as outlined in the school improvement plan to identify if progress toward goals was made, if there were unexpected outcomes, and what changes may need to be made for future implementation.
- 5. Support sustainability and institutionalization of effective strategies.** As evidence of successful improvement strategies becomes available, undertake efforts to sustain and institutionalize them.

Helpful Resources

- Herman, J., & Gribbons, B. (2001). *Lessons learned in using data to support school inquiry and continuous improvement*. Los Angeles, CA: Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing.
- Zmuda, A., Kuklis, R., & Kline, E. (2004). *Transforming schools: Creating a culture of continuous improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Indicator – Financial Performance & Sustainability

Measures: Current ratio
Debt ratio
Occupancy costs
Maintain applicable bond covenants
Current assets to total annual operating expense
Adherence to budget

Definitions & Instructions

Finances play an integral role in support of public education in Utah. Each charter school accounting must comply with **Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)**, established by the **Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB)**. The accounting methods must be capable of producing financial reports that conform with GAAP and the legal requirements of Utah. Utah public schools operate on a July 1 to June 30, fiscal year. Each charter school is responsible for submitting the AFR and APR by October 1st following the close of the fiscal year. The annual audit report including a single audit is due November 30th.

The **Annual Financial Report (AFR)** reports all school financial data by fund. The General fund is the largest and records the majority of operating expenses for the operation and maintenance of education.

The **Annual Program Report (APR)** reports all school financial data by major program. (i.e., Direct Instruction, Special Education, Career Technology Education, Capital Projects, etc.).

Fiscal health is “the successful management of multiple systems that include the school’s financial condition, the external environment, budget and long-range planning processes, internal controls, financial reporting, and internal capacities” (National Resource Center on Charter School Finance and Government, 2009).

Benchmarking is a business management process that uses the definition of indicators, measures, and other metrics to evaluate performance and improve outcomes.

Resources are the ways and means educators have available to them for increasing student achievement including tangible assets, technological capabilities, and funding. Staff time and capacity are also valuable resources.

Maximization of use of resources means that money (salaries and other funds), time, staff, materials, and other supports are allocated to and expended in those areas that show the greatest relationship to improving student achievement. Typically maximization means that more resources are allocated to instruction and instruction related factors.

There is always the possibility of unexpected costs in operating a charter school. The State Charter School Board discussed the need for schools to maintain a **cash reserve** for unexpected expenses and set a minimum standard as 30 days cash on hand. The Board agreed that maintaining a reserve of 30 days cash on hand is a requirement for continued operation, but also upheld that schools should set their own appropriate amount, as it will vary based on school needs. (In many industries, maintaining 90-180 days of cash on hand is the norm, but this may not be realistic.) *Charter school governing boards should receive financial reports at each open and public meeting. A part of this report should be a calculation of the corporation's cash reserve. Charter school governing boards should consult with financial advisors prior to setting entity identified cash reserves.*

Current ratio is a liquidity ratio that measures a company's ability to pay short-term obligations. The ratio is mainly used to give an idea of the company's ability to pay back its short-term liabilities (debt and payables) with its short-term assets (cash, inventory, receivables). The higher the current ratio, the more capable the company is of paying its obligations. A ratio under 1.15 suggests that the company would be unable to pay off its obligations if they came due at that point. *Charter school governing boards should receive financial reports at each open and public meeting. A part of this report should be a calculation of the corporation's current ratio. Charter school governing boards should consult with financial advisors prior to setting entity identified current ratio.*

A **debt ratio** indicates what proportion of debt a company has relative to its assets. The measure gives an idea to the leverage of the company along with the potential risks the company faces in terms of its debt-load. A debt ratio of greater than 1.0 indicates that a company has more debt than assets; meanwhile, a debt ratio of less than 0.9 indicates that a company has more assets than debt. Used in conjunction with other measures of financial health, the debt ratio can help determine a company's level of risk. *Charter school governing boards should receive financial reports at each open and public meeting. A part of this report should be a calculation of the corporation's debt ratio. Charter school governing boards should consult with financial advisors prior to setting entity identified debt ratio.*

Occupancy costs are the whole life costs of buildings and their associated land from occupancy until disposal. These costs may be incurred on a regular or irregular basis. *Charter school governing boards should review ['USOE School construction resource manual'](#) and ['The answer key: How to plan, develop and finance your charter school facility'](#) prior to setting entity identified occupancy costs.*

A **bond covenant** is an agreement between the issuer and holder of a bond, requiring or forbidding certain actions of the issuer. Positive covenants require actions while negative covenants forbid them. The exact terms of a bond covenant must be written in the bond indenture.

Current assets are a balance sheet account that represents the value of all assets that are reasonably expected to be converted into cash within one year in the normal course of business. Current assets include cash, accounts receivable, inventory, marketable securities,

prepaid expenses and other liquid assets that can be readily converted to cash. Current assets are important to businesses because they are the assets that are used to fund day-to-day operations and pay ongoing expenses.

Total annual operating expenses are a category of expenditure that a business incurs as a result of performing its normal business operations during the period of one fiscal year.

Budget is an estimation of the revenue and expenses over a specified future period of time. A surplus budget means profits are anticipated, while a balanced budget means that revenues are expected to equal expenses. A deficit budget means expenses will exceed revenues. Budgets are usually compiled and re-evaluated on a periodic basis. Adjustments are made to budgets based on the goals of the budgeting organization. *Governing boards should approve and then re-visit their budget on a regular basis in open and public board meetings, and make adjustments as appropriate.*

<i>Indicator – Financial performance and sustainability</i>		
Measure	Metric	Best Practice Guideline
Current ratio	$\frac{\text{Current Assets}}{\text{Current Liabilities}}$	> 1.15
Debt ratio	$\frac{\text{Total Liabilities}}{\text{Total Assets}}$	< 0.9
Occupancy costs	$\frac{\text{Facility Costs}}{\text{Total Operating Revenues}}$	< 22%
Maintain applicable bond covenants	No Default Certification, Audited Financial Statements	No default. School upholds contractual obligations
Current assets to total annual operating expenses	$\left[\frac{\text{Current Assets}}{\text{Total Annual Operating Expenses} \div 365} \right]$	> 30 – 60 days cash on hand
Adherence to Budget	$\frac{\text{Budgeted expenditure} - \text{Expenditure}}{\text{Budgeted expenditure}}$	Overall budget to actual expenditures within 5% of budget

Sample step-by-step process for allocating resources

- 1. Become aware of available resources.** Investigate sources of monetary and non-monetary resources for the school including business and community resources.
- 2. Map resource use.** Identify all of the resources allocated to the school. If possible, map the way resources have been allocated over the past several years.
- 3. Conduct a cost analysis.** Use the Resource Cost Model (Pan, Rudo, Schneider, & Smith-Hansen, 2003), economic cost function approaches (Reschovsky & Imazeki, 1998), or other cost analysis program to identify base resource needs and to allocate resources to programs and other fiscal categories depending upon specific needs and goals for effectiveness.
- 4. Make sure resources are equitable, consistent, and focused.** Examine resources to ensure that they are equitable, consistent with the vision, mission, and strategic priorities of the school, and focused on student learning. Use these resources to support school goals and priorities. Secure additional resources and/or reallocate funds if possible.
- 5. Make sure resources are sufficient.** Examine resources to ensure that they are sufficient to support the learning goals of the school. Demonstrate sound fiduciary practices and responsibilities.
- 6. Track the correlation between spending and student outcomes.** Be sure to take into account other influences on achievement so that correlations can be correctly interpreted. Monitor and modify the instructional programs, organizational practices, and physical facilities of the school to sustain continuous school improvement. Establish a “critical friends” network to provide an opportunity for “shared learning” and collaboration that maximizes the impact of resources.
- 7. Reallocate resources as needed.** If specific types of spending, such as spending to reduce class sizes or spending on tutoring, lead to increased student achievement, consider reallocating other resources to maximize impact. If the same trend continues over a period of a few years, consider enacting policies to expand these activities.

Helpful Resources

MetLife. *Leadership and resource allocation*. Retrieved from www.ecs.org/MetLifeToolkit/resource/resource.htm

Pan, D., Rudo, Z., Schneider, C., & Smith-Hansen, L. (April 2003). *Examination of resource allocation in education: Connecting spending to student performance*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

Reschovsky, A., & Imazeki, J. (1998). The development of school finance formulas to guarantee the provision of adequate education to low-income students. In W. J. Fowler (Ed.), *Developments in school finance, 1997* (pp. 121-148). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

National Resource Center on Charter School Finance and Government. (2009). *Assessing the fiscal health of charter schools: A new toolkit*. Presented at the 9th Annual National Charter Schools Conference, June 23, 2009. Washington, DC.

Indicator – Student Attendance & Reenrollment

Measures: Student attendance rate
Within year enrollment
Year-to-year reenrollment rate
Continuous enrollment rate

Definitions & Instructions

At the core of school improvement is an understanding that students have to be present and engaged in school to learn. Research suggests that attending school regularly is important to ensuring children develop a strong foundation for subsequent learning. During the early elementary years, children are gaining basic social and academic skills critical to ongoing academic success. Unless students attain these essential skills by third grade, they often require extra help to catch up and are at grave risk of eventually dropping out of school. Schools must keep daily attendance and the **attendance rate** calculation is used for AYP and UPASS (assessment), as well as Average Daily Attendance (ADA) and Average Daily Membership (ADM) (finance). *Charter school governing boards should review attendance rates for similar schools (e.g., similar target population, close in proximity, etc.) prior to setting entity identified student attendance rate.*

A common measure related to student engagement is student **attrition**, a reduction or decrease in numbers, size or strength. Attrition may be due to a number of factors including choosing another school, moving away, dropping out, or expulsion. **Continuous enrollment**, the inverse of student attrition, is the percentage of students who stay enrolled in a school over time. **Within year enrollment** refers to students who are continuously enrolled throughout an entire school year (fall enrollment report through end-of-year report). **Year-to-year reenrollment** rate refers to students who remain enrolled from one year to the next (fall enrollment report one year to fall enrollment report the next year). **Continuous reenrollment** refers to students who remain enrolled at the same charter school from year to year, for all available years. *Charter school governing boards should review continuous enrollment rates for similar schools (e.g., similar target population, close in proximity, etc.) prior to setting entity identified student enrollment rates (i.e., within year enrollment, year-to-year reenrollment, continuous reenrollment).*

The State Charter School Board strongly believes that all charter schools **need to understand why students leave**. Schools can accomplish this by tracking, documenting, and reporting on why students leave their school through exit interviews. While recognizing the time and resources this requires, the State Charter School Board agrees it is vital for schools to document the extent to which students are leaving for logistical reasons (e.g., commuting distance too far, or moving away) versus dissatisfaction with some aspect of the school. This data can be used for self-improvement, as well as for reporting to authorizers and other stakeholders.

Indicator - Student attendance and reenrollment

Measure	Metric	Best Practice Guideline
Student attendance rate	Percentage of students attending target number of days (167 school days)	93%
Within year enrollment rate	Percentage of students continuously enrolled throughout the year	87%
Year-to-year reenrollment rate	Percentage of students re-enrolled from one year to the next	80%
Continuous reenrollment rate	Percentage of students continuously enrolled for all available years	TBD