

Proposal for External Evaluation of the Federal Per-Pupil Facilities Grant

State of Utah

Solicitation No. MP11013

Submitted by:

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## Executive Summary

The Utah State Office of Education has solicited proposals for expert support in building a robust and reliable Performance Management Framework (PMF). The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), an education policy research and evaluation group at Stanford University is uniquely situated to provide the USOE with the technical analysis, program design and policy guidance required to take the PMF from concept to operations. This following proposal provides a comprehensive description of our proposed approach to the project; subsequent sections will provide deeper details concerning our qualifications to undertake the work and the task and cost specifics of the steps included herein.

CREDO had the following as its goals that it expects to accomplish by the end of this work with USOE:

- Create valid and robust measures of school quality using existing and new data collections
- Adoption of common performance standards for charter school reviews and renewals
- Build systems and processes for regular and consistent review of schools based on the new performance standards, and lastly
- Enhance local capacity to conduct and expand the Performance Framework by the end of the project.

CREDO will accomplish these goals using the steps below:

1. Development of Performance Measures for all Utah Charter Schools
2. Benchmarking of Utah Charter Schools with other charter and public schools, to the extent supported by current data collections
3. Development of a Utah Performance Management Framework, including performance standards, weighting schemes and a final Performance Review Tool
4. Dissemination of the Performance Management Framework through workshops and presentations, and
5. Assessment and refinement of the State Charter School Board monitoring practice, centered around the new Performance Management Framework and Performance Review Tool

At the conclusion of the project, CREDO will prepare an Evaluation Report, compiled from the previously deliverables discussed in our detailed response to the Scope of Work. The Evaluation Report will include listings of high-quality charter schools and a subset of high-quality charter schools that enroll underserved populations. Drafts of the Evaluation Report will be shared with USOE staff and the State charter School Board.

## **Project Narrative**

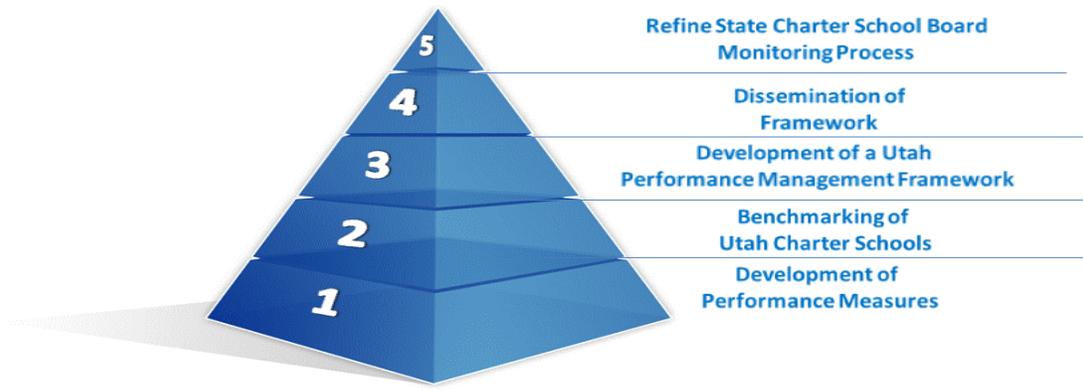
The State Charter School Board adopted the Building Charter School Quality Performance Management Framework at its June 2010 meeting. The Framework rests on a set of quality indicators, measures and metrics that reflect academic quality and operational quality, as endorsed by the Consensus Panel of the Building Charter School Quality initiative. Additional measures and metrics are desirable to support reports to the US Department of Education of charter school outcomes for schools served by the Charter School Grant Program.

By taking this important step, the State Charter School Board has indicated its interest in using empirical evidence about the schools it oversees in its judgments of schools performance.

Consistent and objective information about charter school quality will provide the State Charter School Board a sound basis for decisions regarding charter continuation and renewal. As well, public release of the quality measures will enhance the transparency of the State Board actions, and thereby empower parental choice with standardized information across schools and illuminate areas for support and development by charter support organizations.

The Utah State Office of Education has solicited proposals for expert support in building a robust and reliable Performance Management Framework (PMF). The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO), an education policy research and evaluation group at Stanford University is uniquely situated to provide the USOE with the technical analysis, program design and policy guidance required to take the PMF from concept to operations. This narrative provides a comprehensive description of our proposed approach to the project; subsequent sections will provide deeper details concerning our qualifications to undertake the work and the task and cost specifics of the steps included herein.

CREDO proposes that the research and services covered by this engagement be organized in five stages. They are displayed graphically in Figure 1 as layers of a pyramid; each subsequent stage builds on the products produced by the previous one. Our proposed sequence differs a bit from that outlined in the Request for Proposals to reflect the progressive nature of the work.

**Figure 1: Stages of CREDO Proposal**

Each of these stages is presented more fully in the following sections.

### **1. Development of Performance Measures for all Utah Charter Schools**

When applied to education, the foundation of a Performance Management Framework (PMF) is the common set of measures that are applied consistently across all schools. This is an easy notion conceptually, but one that takes care and precision in practice. The adage that “Not everything that is important can be measured and not everything that can be measured is important” illustrates part of the challenge in this initial stage. Even if there were no budget constraints, a PMF must focus on the most important and most predictive signals of quality and avoid becoming bogged down in too much detail. Thus, a key task will be to narrow the field of potential performance measures to those that transmit the clearest and most complete picture of performance with the fewest number of factors.

The main source of information about the academic outcomes for students is the state’s accountability achievement test program. Presently, there are several years of historical experience with the Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) and students have been assigned unique student identifiers that enable individual students to be followed as they progress through schools. We will rely heavily on the U-PASS data to create a number of performance measures. Accordingly, if changes are slated for the testing system in Utah that would create significant discontinuities in the trends of performance, the USOE should be aware that recalibration of any PMF will be required.

Another consideration is that current data collections by USOE may not include all the data elements that would be included in the ideal PMF. Options to expand the set of available data must balance the costs of additional collections against the expected utility of the result. New

collections should be undertaken only if they can be obtained easily and serve critical roles in the overall Framework; otherwise, the PMF can be staged to add metrics in a manner that creates minimal cost impacts.

Finally, there are important political sensitivities that arise as performance measures are considered. Since the PMF will ultimately be applied to schools in a high-stakes manner, consideration must be paid to mitigating adverse reactions to the PMF that arise because it is new or because schools feel it is thrust upon them without prior involvement. There are several points throughout the engagement where school input is desirable and can serve to foster cooperation and ownership of the result. Accordingly, we have included opportunities for direct input into this stage of endeavor.

The following tasks and activities are needed to successfully produce performance measures and metrics that will underpin the Performance Management Framework.

- a. CREDO will create a “universe” of potential indicators, measures and metrics, based on the Building Charter School Quality Consensus Panel recommendations, US Department of Education Charter School Grant Program reporting requirements and USOE school accountability metrics
- b. We will sample or survey interested parties (school operators, state charter school Board, charter school association, USOE staff) to gain their input about desirable measures and ranked priority measures
- c. We will prepare a map of suggested measures by type (input, process, output, outcome) and by who supports it
- d. CREDO will assess the suitability of each potential measure for the Performance Management Framework
- e. CREDO will prepare a memorandum to document the vetting process and to present the recommended performance measures and metrics
- f. With support from USOE staff, CREDO will inventory all available data to create the preferred metrics
- g. With support from USOE staff, CREDO will create plans to develop non-existent data, after considering the options to expand future USOE collections, conduct special data outreach, or partner with charter support organizations for collaborative data development.
- h. CREDO will undertake data collection, including new collections, if proven feasible under time and budget constraints of this work plan
- i. Using our existing statistical programs and analytic procedures, we will conduct a data quality review
- j. We will compile and review school-level source variables
- k. We will compute performance measures based on school-level variables and prepare univariate analysis on each
- l. We will review the performance measure distributions; and conduct detailed examination of outliers for each metric

The steps outlined for Stage 1 will produce the following milestones and results:

1. 1 Survey results of performance measure suggestions

- 1.2 Memorandum on assessment of suggested performance measures, including the recommended list of items (to be included in the Final Evaluation Report)
- 1.3 Data Inventory for performance measurement list – sources, reporting periods, coverage
- 1.4 Dataset of performance measures by school (to be delivered to the USOE Charter School Office)
- 1.5 User guide for computing the performance measures, including notes on their historical trends
- 1.6 List of performance measures for future development and collection (to be included in the Final Evaluation Report and also turned over to the USOE Charter School Office)

## **2. Benchmarking of Utah Charter Schools with other charter and public schools, to the extent supported by current data collections**

In addition to performance measures for Utah charter schools, it is necessary to have an independent standard of reference to use as a gauge for setting reasonable and fair thresholds for performance. The experience of other Utah public schools might be considered for creating the reference standard if they could be shown to be sufficiently similar to the Utah charter schools.

There is strong reason to expect this is not the case, however. For one thing, charter schools in Utah do not serve a representative selection of all students. In addition, the level of performance in some public schools does not merit emulation. For these reasons, we suggest an approach that extends the circle of inquiry beyond the state limits: we propose the development of benchmark groups for each of Utah's charter schools. CREDO is in a unique position to conduct this stage of the project due to our extensive data holdings at the student and school levels for three quarters of the charter schools in the United States.

Even with this valuable resource, it is important not to over-promise what is possible. As was observed in the June 2010 meetings with the USOE Charter School Office team, creation of performance measures – in Utah and elsewhere – is constrained by what schools currently collect and report. CREDO will work with our SEA data partners to identify the range of data elements that are collected in other states (in addition to the variables we already have in hand). We can assure with confidence that benchmarks will be possible for the academic quality indicators that Utah data will support, including status growth metrics. We will endeavor to produce as many performance measures for operational quality as possible. In the event that operational quality benchmark measures prove infeasible, we will use the distribution of Utah charter schools without benchmark comparisons as the basis for setting performance targets in the following stage of the project.

We expect the following tasks and activities to occur during Stage 2 of the project:

- a. We will structure benchmark parameters based on common data definitions and availability across performance measures
- b. We will gather relevant data from other states to develop a benchmark dataset
- c. We will create school-level profiles for Utah charter schools
- d. We will conduct a matching analysis to create Utah and national benchmark candidates

- e. CREDO will identify schools without matches – and will move to student-level matching using CREDO’s Virtual Control Record matching process
- f. We will subset all candidate schools that are located in states with CREDO data access MOUs
- g. CREDO will compute base year performance for all benchmark schools for use in final matching
- h. We will perform final matching within each pool based on base year performance
- i. We will examine the final matches and make final benchmark group assignments
- j. Using data through the 2008-2009 school year, we will produce distributions for each performance measure for each Utah charter school’s benchmark group. (Specific attention will be paid to measures of academic quality as the final and determinate outcomes.)
- k. We will convene and facilitate a meeting with the charter schools to explain the benchmarking process and share their benchmark schools

Results for Stage 2 will include:

- 2.1 Benchmark groups for Utah charter schools, with comparative performance measures (to be included in the Final Evaluation Report).
- 2.2 User guide for creating benchmark groups

### **3. Development of a Utah Performance Management Framework, including performance standards, weighting schemes and a final Performance Review Tool**

By the end of the prior stage, CREDO will have prepared the necessary performance measures and metrics for each Utah charter school and their benchmark groups. These components are necessary but not sufficient to produce a Performance Management Framework. In Stage 3 of the project, the focus will be on developing judgment about performance standards and the relative weights of the various measures in a final determination of quality. Performance standards set the thresholds for acceptable and sub-par results, answering the question, “How much is ‘good enough’?” These standards are set in advance of schools’ actual experience and create targets for each school to achieve; as such the standards serve as performance incentives for schools. Because the standards will be applied consistently to all schools, and are known in advance, they provide a fair, reliable and level assessment of school results.

The experience of Utah charter schools and their benchmarks will be useful inputs into the decisions about performance standards, as they will document what has been achieved in the various performance areas. However, additional judgments will be needed. One must decide if the typical record of past performance is acceptable or whether more aggressive standards are needed. It will also be important to determine if there are exception conditions for particular schools that explain their observed results.

The final step in creating a Performance Management Framework is to decide what weights, if any, to assign to the various measures. Some systems apply no weights and display sets of performance measures (achievement, academic growth, engagement, etc) in groups. Others employ complex weights to create a total rating score. Still others apply weights and then

translate the overall results into letter grades or “Amazon-style” star ratings.

Each of the approaches described above presents a different profile about the Performance Management System to the charter schools and the general public. The overall image -- which is an important signal of intentions -- bears consideration and discussion with the State Charter School Board. It is vital that the State Charter School Board members achieve consensus of how much they value each of the performance measures in the overall delineation of school quality.

Based on related work in other communities, this portion of the work requires both concentrated time with the Board to ensure full understanding of the tradeoffs and incentives of each choice, as well as elapsed time to allow Board members to reflect and discuss the alternatives. To assist, CREDO can, at the Board’s request, produce simulations of various schemes and demonstrate how they change the ratings and rankings of schools. Ultimately, however, the final choice of weights must be one the Board fully understands and fully supports; if not, the conditions are set for future challenge.

The final choice of weights and ratings will influence the design of the Performance Review Tool, which is conceived as a one-page summary of each charter school’s performance assessed against the performance standards. We will design several alternatives for review by the USOE staff and Board and then deliver a final design and user guide for its creation. If desired, CREDO will join in a presentation of the Performance Review Tool to the charter schools and the general public.

CREDO anticipates the following tasks and activities in Stage 3 of the project:

- a. CREDO will facilitate discussion and choices of USOE staff and State Charter School Board on thresholds for performance standards on each performance metric.
- b. We will produce weighting scenarios to illustrate a range of rating systems for the Utah Performance Management Framework
- c. CREDO and USOE Charter School Office staff will collaboratively facilitate discussions with USOE staff and State Charter School board about the preferred rating system.
- d. CREDO will use the preferred rating system to test against 2009-2010 school year data for goodness of fit
- e. We will iterate between design and testing as necessary until consensus is achieved
- f. We will produce rankings of the Utah charter schools according to the PMF, and produce special listings of high-quality charter schools and high-quality charter schools educating underserved populations
- g. Once the Performance Management Framework is finalized, we will create several design options for a Performance Review Tool (possibilities include performance dashboards, stoplight rating systems, scores clustered by category, etc.)
- h. CREDO will prepare a user guide for the preparation of the Performance Review Tool of choice.

The tasks and activities in Stage 3 will produce the following results:

- 3.1 Articulated Performance Standards for each performance metric
- 3.2 Preferred weighting for Performance Management Framework
- 3.3 Final Performance Management Framework

- 3.3.1 Data Dictionary for all source data used in the Performance Measures
- 3.3.2 Computation Guide for calculating Performance Measures
- 3.3.3 Description of final rating scheme (weights, substitutions, etc.)
- 3.4 PMF Rankings of all charters, high-quality charters and high-quality charter schools educating underserved populations
- 3.5 Final Performance Review Tool design
  - 3.5.1 User Guide for Performance Review Tool

#### **4. Dissemination of the Performance Management Framework through workshops and presentations**

The Utah State Office of Education has wisely recognized that equal in importance to the development of a reliable performance management system is the support of school capacity to gain awareness, understanding and ownership of the measures and metrics for their own operations. Helping school operators and management companies improve their ability to measure their performance -- and take appropriate action when required -- produces two vital results. First, it couples the expectation of high quality with an adequate level of training and support that motivated schools will absorb, to their benefit. Second, it minimizes any claim of “Gotcha” by the charter school community; the schools and their supporters cannot claim to have been jumped by the introduction of the Performance Management Framework if they have had repeated overtures of inclusion and the offer of rich content through training workshops.

CREDO is the sole developer and owner of the Performance Management Institute (PMI), a 2-day intensive workshop on performance measurement and management. The workshop is specifically designed for the charter school community. Its structure is modular and includes a section devoted to introducing the quality indicators, measures and metrics from the BCSQ consensus process. We propose to replace that module with content customized to the Utah performance measures and metrics, and to expand the section on balanced scorecards to present in detail the Performance Review Tool. Customizing would flow through to the training workbook and the on-line avatar-based training, which USOE could host on their website or CREDO could arrange to host.

To assure familiarity with the workshop content, we propose to host an in-house workshop for State Charter School Board members, USOE staff and any interested parties from the community recommended by staff. We would be particularly interested in having someone attend who may be interested in developing the skills and practice to deliver the workshop on an on-going basis.

CREDO is committed to building enduring capacity as part of its work, and is willing to grant a no-fee license to a local organization agreement to deliver the PMI solely to Utah charter schools on an on-going basis.

The customized workshop would be delivered to Utah charter schools once the Performance Review Tool has been finalized. We estimate the need for 10 workshops, and propose that CREDO will conduct all if necessary. However, if local interest in supporting the PMI on a continuing basis is identified, we would agree to have the local provider conduct the final several workshops, and we would redirect funding for that effort.

The following tasks and activities are required for successful completion of Stage 4:

- a. CREDO will customize the Performance Management Institute to reflect Performance Management Framework measures and metrics and design of Performance Review Tool
- b. We will revise the training binders for a Utah-specific PMI
- c. CREDO's on-line PMI will be customized to align with the workshop and training binder for hosting on USOE website
- d. We will host in-house PMI for USOE staff, State Charter School Board members, state charter association and other key officials
- e. CREDO will conduct or oversee 10 PMI workshops

Stage 4 results will include:

- 4.1 Customized Utah Performance Management Institute training
- 4.2 Customized Utah Performance Management Institute training binder
- 4.3 Customized web design for Utah Performance Management Framework
- 4.4 Workshop evaluations of participants of the 10 PMIs

#### **5. Assessment and refinement of the State Charter School Board monitoring practice, centered around the new Performance Management Framework and Performance Review Tool**

The Performance Review Tool will be the outward-facing interface for the entire Performance Management Framework. As such, it should be expected to have significant impact on the business processes and monitoring practice of the State Charter School Board. Some changes will arise from the change in granularity of the system: the Board will want to consider when various data sources for components of the framework become available and what impact is likely on the content and timing of Board reviews. Others are more deliberative in nature: how long should a school be permitted to retain a charter if it is demonstrated that their results are inferior?

CREDO will create a process map of the current State Charter School Board process and data flow and then provide recommendations for refining the process to improve alignment of the Performance Review Tool with Board procedures and practices..

We expect to complete the following tasks and activities in the final stage of the project:

- a. CREDO will complete an assessment report on current State Charter School Board monitoring practice, including recommendations for modifications to build practice around Utah Performance Management Framework
- b. The project team will facilitate discussions with State Charter School Board about streamlined monitoring and renewal procedures
- c. CREDO will produce detailed flowcharts of new operating practices, including calendar of activities, staging of school interactions and public notifications

The results that will be created by the Stage 5 tasks and activities are:

- 5.1 Assessment Report on the State Charter School Board Oversight Procedures
- 5.2 New flowchart of monitoring and decision practices (to be incorporated in the Final Evaluation Report)

At the conclusion of the project, CREDO will prepare an Evaluation Report, compiled from the previously described deliverables. The Evaluation Report will include listings of high-quality charter schools and a subset of high-quality charter schools that enroll underserved populations. Drafts of the Evaluation Report will be shared with USOE staff and the State charter School Board. While CREDO is open to candid and constructive discussion of any findings and interpretation, we respectfully reserve all editorial rights on the final document. The prerogative is consistent with our University mission and preserves our position as independent actors.

