

Executive Summary

A. CSD facilitated Feedback Sessions with Charter Schools

CSD hosted discussions with charter school stakeholders throughout the state to gather input to better understand how it can help ensure the Performance Framework evaluation process is meaningful for all involved. Discussions were held in Taos, Santa Fe, Albuquerque and Las Cruces in late June and early July, and a total of 27 Charter Leaders or Stakeholders attended these various sessions. The discussions at these sessions were intended to focus on the development of the annual Performance Framework evaluation process and give charter schools an opportunity to make their voices heard. The two main goals of these sessions were 1) to generate information and ideas to share with the PEC in advance of their work session and 2) to allow CSD to use the information to strengthen the technical assistance provided to charter schools in order to better support charter schools' work to improve student achievement.

CSD presented Charter School Leaders with the School Improvement Plan (SIP) and the PEC Charter School Performance Improvement Plan Timeline that were approved by the PEC at the May 2016 meeting. CSD staff members sought to facilitate a constructive conversation to understand how the framework evaluation process can be most effective for charter schools. During these discussions, CSD staff members specifically facilitated discussions on the following topics:

- Site Visits
- PED Reporting, Data Reviews, Evaluations, and Feedback
- Self-Evaluations
- Improvement Plans
- Communications from and with the PEC
- Technical Assistance

In addition, CSD received significant feedback regarding PEC processes, interactions, and communications. CSD is presenting and addressing that feedback internally within the PED.

CSD staff members reviewed all the feedback provided by the Charter School leaders and looked for consistent themes relevant to the work the PEC will be engaging in on July 20th. We have compiled this relevant information below for the Commissioners to review.

I. Site Visits:

- a) Charter Schools request further transparency regarding the purpose and expectations of site visits. The schools would like the PEC to establish policies regarding site visits. This may include:
 - a. Objective rubrics to guide how site visits are scored and score weighting to understand the most important elements of the site visit.
 - b. Guidance regarding how site visit scores and outcomes will be used by the PEC.
 - c. Clarity on how the site visits measure the elements of the Performance Framework.
 - d. Whether and how interviews will be conducted; if they are conducted, specific questions that will be asked and how they will be reported and used.

- b) Charter Schools believe that the timing established by the PEC’s timeline may be too limiting and may not be effective for all schools:
 - a. Spring is a difficult time for a visit due to testing, but winter may be too early. Schools will not have data to share with the CSD.
 - b. Several Charter School leaders suggested that each school’s site visit should be conducted at the same time every year and that this date should be negotiated and written into their contracts.
 - c. Schools have indicated that they would like to be able to choose the best time of the year for their site visit. However, they have indicated they will need to better understand the purpose and use of the site visits to identify the best time for the visit.
- c) Charter Schools have made specific recommendations regarding what the purpose of the site visit should be and what elements should be, or should continue to be, part of the site visits. The Charter Schools would like to engage in a robust conversation with the PEC to develop protocols that will make site visits as meaningful as possible for everyone. Many times, the schools had varying views on the ideal purpose and structure for site visits. Some recommendations are provided below:
 - a. The site visits should be focused only on evaluating the performance frameworks.
 - b. The site visits should include additional elements beyond the performance framework, but these should be optional add-ons that can be selected or requested by schools.
 - c. First-year site visits should provide information and training.
 - d. Subsequent year site visits should include a follow up from prior years to see if the school sufficiently addressed areas of weakness. (Charter School Leaders requested that the site visit is seen as part of a continuous cycle of improvement and not just a “one-time” opportunity.)
 - e. Site visits should include both the file reviews and classroom visits that occurred in the previous year (SY 2015-16) as well as conversations with parents, students, teachers, and board members.
 - f. Classroom visits should be longer and more comprehensive.
 - g. Prior to the site visit, schools should identify 3-5 strengths and weaknesses; these should drive the site visit.

II. Data Collection and Review:

- a) Leaders shared their concerns over duplicative reporting (although few specifics were offered).
 - a. One specific concern was the collection of budget information through the PEC’s questionnaire in the Financial Performance Framework; schools feel that is data already available within the PED and they should not be required by the PEC to provide that information again.
 - b. They indicated that providing greater guidance and clarity on how each element of the organizational framework is to be evaluated may identify duplication and provide an opportunity to eliminate duplicative reporting.
- b) Clarity may be provided by development of PEC specific policies and processes. These will help charter school leaders better understand the roles and responsibilities of the PEC and PED.

- c) Charter School leaders expressed concerns that the negotiated “academic goals” and state letter grades are duplicative academic measures. Many indicated that they felt pressured into creating academic goals and eliminating mission specific goals.
 - a. Because all public schools are accountable for academic performance through the letter grades, schools wanted to move away from the PEC’s negotiated short cycle academic goals.
 - b. The schools want the PEC to focus on the mission specific goals that reflect how the schools are different from traditional schools.

III. Self-Assessment:

- a) Charter School Leaders wanted to understand the purpose of the PEC’s Self-Assessment.
 - i. Why has the PEC required this?
 - ii. How will this information be used by the PEC?
 - iii. How will this information be used by the CSD?
 - iv. How will this information fit into the school’s annual performance framework evaluation?
 - v. What should schools gain from this process?
 - vi. How does this process work with/align to the site visits?
 - vii. They do not believe all schools will provide honest or accurate assessments.
- b) Charter schools leaders wanted to understand how they are supposed to conduct this assessment.
 - i. What is the form or format?
 - ii. What information do they need to provide?
 - iii. What is specifically required/evaluated for each indicator—specifically in the organizational framework?
 - iv. Are they required to provide supporting documents and materials? If so, how would they provide these?
- c) The majority of the Charter School Leaders expressed their concern that this appears to have been decided without their input or feedback.
 - i. The Self-Assessment appears to conflict with current contracts and frameworks.
 - ii. They do not see how this can have value and be a good use of their time.
- d) Charter school leaders felt the timeline provided by the PEC did not make sense for academic evaluations.
 - i. Goal data is often not received until the end of the year, or in some cases, later.
 - ii. There was disagreement about whether this process would be most helpful before or after the site visit.
 - 1. If before, it should direct the site visit process.
 - 2. If after, it should contain responses to the site visit findings.
 - a. If it is not used in this manner, it could devalue the work and findings of the CSD; this would be inappropriate.

IV. Improvement Plan:

- a) Schools indicated a concern that the form provided does not work for their schools, will result in duplicative work, and does not recognize the autonomy of charter schools.
 - i. Schools already complete improvement plans for other entities in different formats. Schools expressed concern they are being required to “translate” those existing improvement plans to this new form.
 - 1. Audit CAPs

2. Title 1 Improvement Plans
 - ii. Charter schools already work with their Boards to annually evaluate and create self-directed improvement plans aligned to their schools goals (Performance Frameworks). Those do not take the same form as the PEC's required form.
 - iii. The PEC should focus on essential criteria instead of the form.
- b) Improvement plans should not be required indicator by indicator; instead they should be more about systems thinking.
- c) Schools expressed concern about the PEC's changing processes frequently; the improvement plan being an example of a new process.
- d) Some stated summer deadlines for this process are problematic:
 - i. Staff is not present
 - ii. Schools do not have all essential data (including student performance data)
 - iii. Timelines may need to be different for academic, financial, and organizational.
- e) Schools feel that the process as laid out will not be effective, and feel that this plan does not reflect the "continuous improvement cycle."
 - i. Improvement plans should be should be "working" documents that are adapted as data is gathered; schools should have freedom to adjust accordingly.
 - ii. Schools should identify root causes and responses should align to those causes.
 - iii. There should be a follow up process in which CSD/PEC evaluates both:
 1. Implementation of Improvement Plan.
 - a. Through site visit
 - b. Through required reporting
 2. Effectiveness of Improvement Plan.
- f) Schools do not understand why or how the PEC will "vote to approve improvement plans."

V. Communications with PEC:

- a) Several Charter School leaders expressed frustration that they do not have an opportunity to communicate with the PEC except at PEC meetings and at these times it is not a meaningful opportunity.
 - a. Schools would like the opportunity for meaningful input and comment on changes to processes, policies, frameworks, etc. prior to PEC votes to makes changes.
 - b. Several Charter School leaders noted that the lack of input makes them feel that the PEC does not respect the contractual agreements with the schools.
 - c. Schools feel that the PEC is making decisions without being "realistic about their resources."
- b) Schools expressed frustration at lack of clarity regarding PEC expectations; they would like to see better development of policies, processes, and expectations. They would like to have input through public meeting on the development of these.
- c) Schools expressed the feeling that the PEC is too dependent on a few strong voices that do not represent the entire charter community. Specifically, schools that are not members of the NMCCS feel that too much weight is given to the NMCCS position and that the NMCCS is credited as the only important representative of the charter community.
- d) Schools would like to know what the PEC's strategic plan/vision.
 - a. Annually, they would like to understand the PEC's strategic priorities.
 - b. Annually, they would like to have a voice in developing or providing feedback on priorities, processes, policies, etc.