National Charter School Resource Center

Assessing Schools in Distress

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

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1

Introduction & Instructions

This assessment tool provides a opportunity to check in with how an individual school is performing across a variety school functions.

The intention of this tool is to help schools, governing board members and authorizers take a nuanced look into areas of strength and weakness to identify potential indicators of distress or places to leverage success.
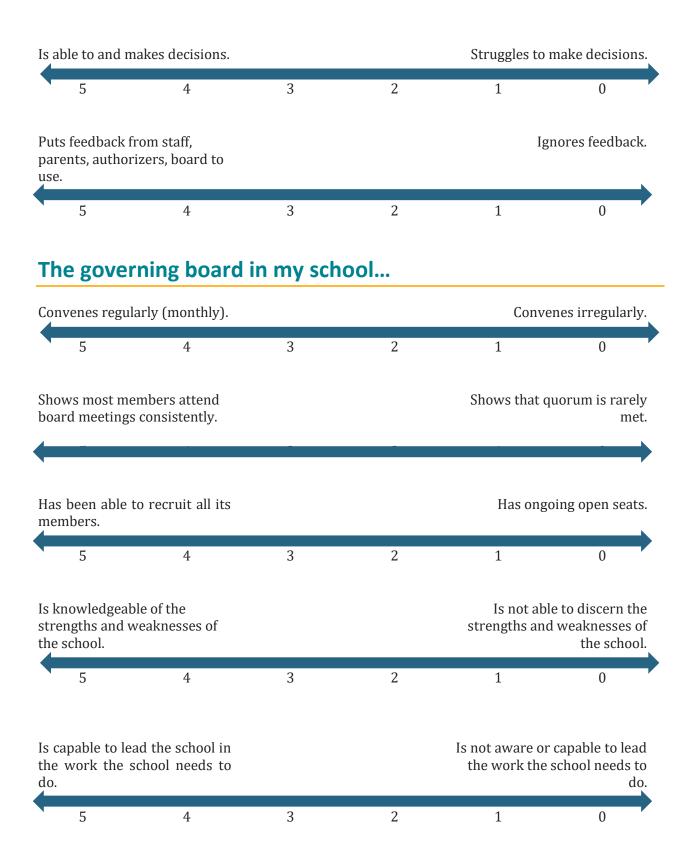
For each of the following categories of indicators, rank your school on the scales provided. Once you have identified where your school falls on the scale, assess how your school scored in each area.

For indicators in which your school scored higher, how can you leverage these for success? Assess the areas where your school scored lower or fell in the middle of the spectrum. What are steps you can take to improve these? What resources do you need to do so?

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

The leadership in my school…

Has the respect and/or trust of the staff.   Is not respected by the staff.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Is competent to improve the school.   Lacks the competencies needed to improve the school.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Creates an environment where staff have ability to make and buy-in to decisions.   Does not allow staff to make decisions.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Has been stable.   Is new.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

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National Charter School Resource Center • U.S. Department of Education

2

Is able to and makes decisions.   Struggles to make decisions.

5   4   3   2   1   0

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

5   4   3   2   1   0

The governing board in my school…

Convenes regularly (monthly).   Convenes irregularly.

5   4   3   2   1   0

Shows most members attend   Shows that quorum is rarely
board meetings consistently.   met.

Has been able to recruit all its   Has ongoing open seats.
members.

5   4   3   2   1   0

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

5   4   3   2   1   0

Is capable to lead the school in   Is not aware or capable to lead
the work the school needs to   the work the school needs to
do.   do.

5   4   3   2   1   0

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3

Chair is in regular communication with the authorizer.   Chair refuses to meet with the authorizer.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Responds timely to requests from the authorizer.   Does not respond to requests from the authorizer.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

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

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Comprehensively evaluates the leader on a regular basis (annually).   Does not evaluate the leader.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Stays true to its role of governance by focusing on vision and strategic leadership.   Often manages the school by focusing on the day to day decisions .

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Regularly engages with school staff and community.   Hardly ever engages with school staff and community.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

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4

Operations

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

There is no process/procedure or staff are not following it to make operational decisions.

5	4	3	2	1	0

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

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

5	4	3	2	1	0

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

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

5	4	3	2	1	0

The annual audit shows sound operations.

The annual audit shows flaws.

5	4	3	2	1	0

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

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

5	4	3	2	1	0

Reports are submitted and submitted on time.

Reports are often late and/or missing.

5	4	3	2	1	0

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5

Student enrollment is consistently close to budgeted amounts.

Actual student enrollment numbers are consistently below budgeted amounts.

5   4   3   2   1   0

The school has a clear and consistent student recruitment process.

The school does not have a student recruitment process.

5   4   3   2   1   0

The school regularly and positively engages with the community

The school does not engage; engages negatively with the community.

5   4   3   2   1   0

Finance

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

There is no process/ procedure or staff are not following it to develop the budget.

5   4   3   2   1   0

The school is not in debt default.

The school has recently defaulted on loans, payments.

5   4   3   2   1   0

The school's near-term viability is healthy.

The school's near-term viability is declining.

5   4   3   2   1   0

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6

The school's debt to asset ratio
is stable.

The school's cash flow will not
sustain.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

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

Financial decisions are made
by one person at the school.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Finance decisions are made in
best interest of students.

Finance decisions do not make
sense; do not add up.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Talent

Staff are teaching in their
certified area.

Staff are not certified to teach
their current assignments.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Staff to student ratios are
appropriate to students'
needs.

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

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

Staff qualifications match
students' needs.

Key personnel to meet
students' needs are lacking.

| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 0 |

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7

Staff are stable; turnover is minimal.					Staff turnover is increasing; personnel leave in middle of the school year.
5	4	3	2	1	0

Staff are regularly, comprehensively evaluated.					Staff are only evaluated once a year or not at all.
5	4	3	2	1	0

Staff are engaged in ongoing PD to meet their/their students' needs.					Staff do not receive PD; PD is seen as meaningless or not on topics of need.
5	4	3	2	1	0

Culture

Student attendance is stable and high; chronic absence is low and addressed.					Student attendance is declining; chronic absence is increasing and not addressed.
5	4	3	2	1	0

Student attendance is stable and high across student subgroups.					Student attendance is declining or uneven across student subgroups.
5	4	3	2	1	0

Student behavior infractions and/or conequences are minimal or decreasing.					Student behavior infractions and/or consequences are increasing.
5	4	3	2	1	0

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8

Student behavior infractions and consequences are handled consistently across student subgroups.

Student behavior infractions and/or consequences are handled inconsistently across student subgroups.

5	4	3	2	1	0

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

Staff culture is dimunitive: cliquish and cut throat among teachers.

5	4	3	2	1	0

Instruction

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

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

5	4	3	2	1	0

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

The school's curriculum and assessments lack rigor and are not aligned, nor are they aligned to grade level standards.

5	4	3	2	1	0

Students are engaged in their learning.

Students are not engaged in their learning.

5	4	3	2	1	0

Assessing Schools in Distress – Supplemental Workbook
National Charter School Resource Center • U.S. Department of Education

9

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

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

5   4   3   2   1   0

Students receive targeted support based on their needs.

Students do not receive differentiated assistance.

5   4   3   2   1   0

Students are thriving and showing growth across student subgroups.

Students are not thriving and showing growth across student subgroups.

5   4   3   2   1   0

Additional Measures

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

5   4   3   2   1   0

5   4   3   2   1   0

5   4   3   2   1   0

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10

Putting the Indicators into Practice

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

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

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

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11

What resources do you need to address areas of weakness?

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

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

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12