

Idaho Public Charter School Commission

Protecting student and public interests by balancing high standards of **accountability** with respect for the **autonomy** of public charter schools and implementing best authorizing practices to ensure the **excellence** of public charter school options available to Idaho families.

Tamara Baysinger, Director for the Idaho Public Charter School Commission.

I appreciate this opportunity to share with you some of what we've done and learned over the past year.

Commission Members

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As most of you know, the Commission is the state's largest authorizer, responsible for overseeing 73% of Idaho's 56 public charter schools.

Our 7 Commissioners hail from all around the state. Pleased to have Chairman Reed here today (you can ask him all the hard questions).

Idaho's charter school sector is 20 years old. Our charter statute passed in 1998. Creation of the PCSC followed in 2004.

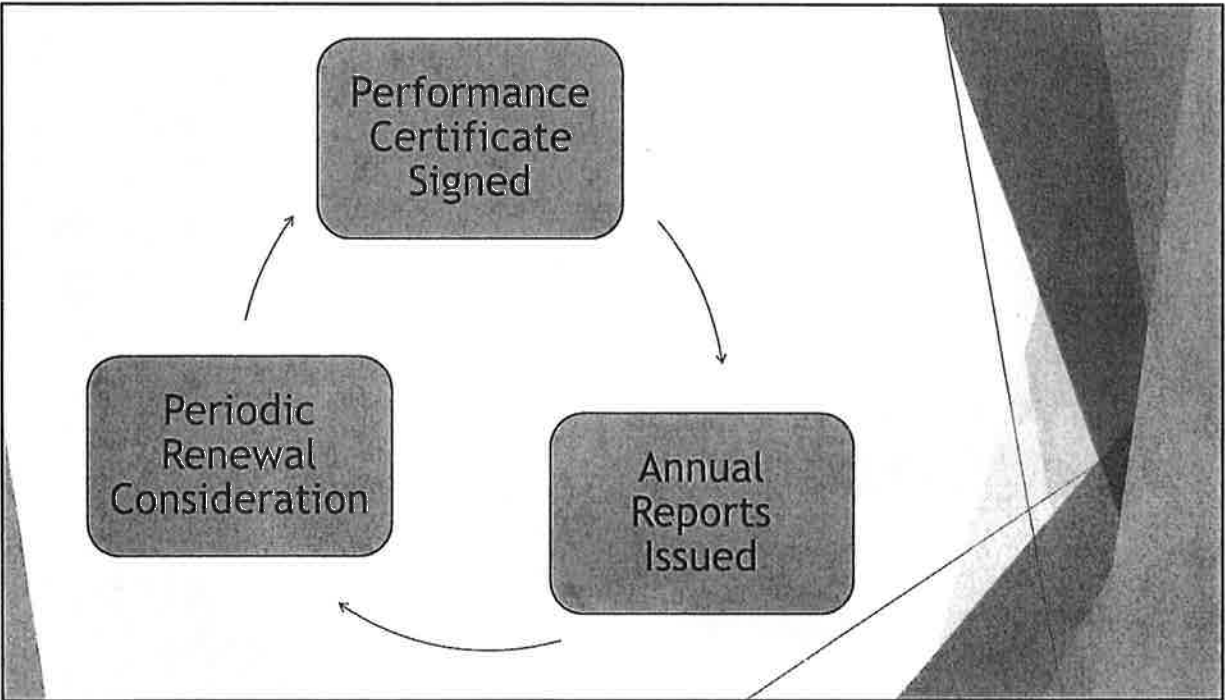
It has been a privilege to watch over the years as our charter school community has changed. I especially appreciate where the Commission is at today. We're able to look around with a historical perspective and make informed observations about what has gone well and where we can focus our efforts to strengthen the charter sector.



So, a quick review on the nature of the charter sector: It's about innovation, choice, and improved opportunities for students and educators.

You've heard me talk before about the central concept upon which the charter movement is based: that is, public charter schools exchange increased autonomy for increased accountability. In other words, they receive extra latitude to determine their own inputs in exchange for a commitment to high quality outcomes. Successful achievement of improved academic results drives the continued existence of the school.

This "charter bargain," is the bedrock of the charter sector. 20 years in, how are we doing?



Let's start with the accountability side of the scale:

The Commission has now reached full implementation of Idaho's statutory accountability structure, which is consistent with national best practices.

In this structure, schools and authorizers agree on outcome-based performance expectations against which the schools are evaluated for the purpose of periodic charter renewal.

Having this structure in place frees us up to turn our energy toward helping schools maximize their opportunity for success.

New Resources for Charters

- ▶ **New Charter Petitioner Guidance**
- ▶ **Pre-Opening Support Program**
- ▶ **New School Leader Orientation**
- ▶ **Monthly Board Governance Guidebook**
- ▶ **“Board-to-Board” Round Table Conversations**
- ▶ **Webinar Series**

(What are we doing to support student learning?) As an authorizer, one thing we're doing is looking for resource gaps we can fill in order to support our schools' work.

During the past year, we connected with other entities (SDE, ISBA, ICSN) to learn more about the services they already offer, in order to avoid duplication. We then surveyed our schools and engaged them in conversation to learn about their needs.

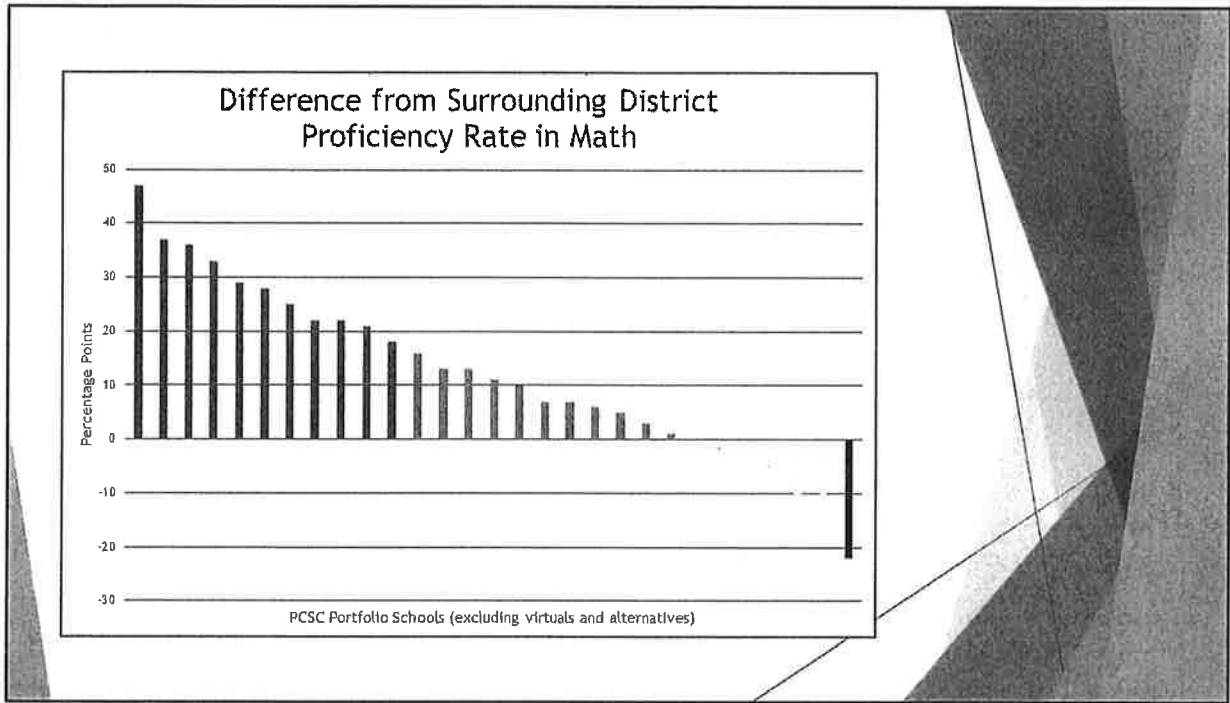
I won't belabor each item, but I'm particularly excited about our new pre-opening support program. This is a collection of tools combined with a series of one-on-one meetings with our staff. Its purpose is to guide new charter schools through the maze of preparation necessary to open their doors. Schools that open on solid footing are more likely to succeed over the long haul.

We've also developed a New School Leader Orientation program to help incoming charter administrators and board members adjust to the charter sector and put them in touch with resources.

Additional opportunities for shared innovation and training are under development.

We're also making better data available to schools and stakeholders.

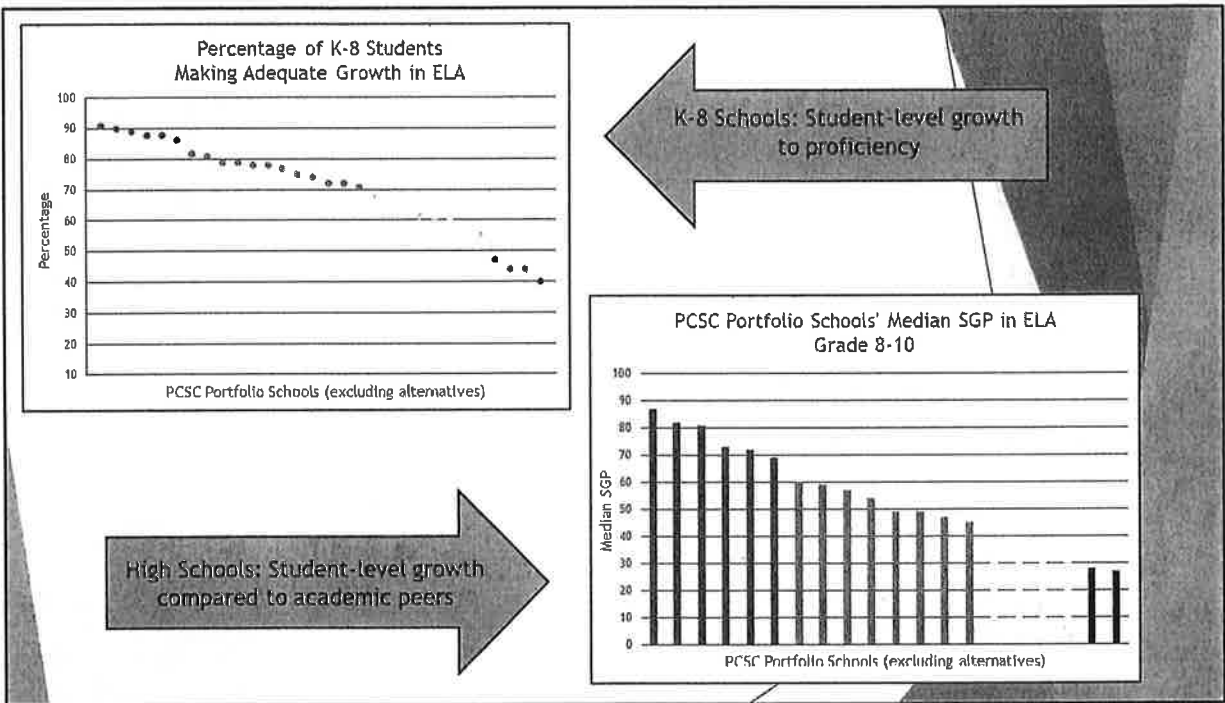
Last May, the Commission adopted a new performance framework that is designed to adjust to the context of different types of schools. It provides feedback on school outcomes regardless of their size, grade levels served, student demographic, and educational model. Extensive data is provided in our 2017 Annual Report, which is included in your packet, so I'll just give a couple examples.



Here, we’re looking at charter schools’ math proficiency rates in the context of their own communities.

Each bar represents a charter school in the PCSC’s portfolio. The graph shows how each school’s proficiency rate compares to that of its surrounding district.

In math, 75% of PCSC portfolio schools exceeded the proficiency rates of their surrounding districts for kids in the same grades served by the charter school. In ELA, it was 80%.



We also look at individual, student-level growth. This is especially critical for understanding the effectiveness of schools that serve challenging populations, including our virtual schools.

To meet the standard, 70% of students in elementary and middle grades should show adequate growth. This is true of 2/3 of our schools for ELA and half of our schools for math. In both subjects, another 20% of our portfolio is within striking distance of meeting that standard.

At the high school level, we compare individual students' growth to that of other students who have a similar academic performance history. Especially at our brick-and-mortar schools, the majority have a median growth percentile of at least 45.

Alternative charters are excluded from these charts because they are evaluated using further specialized measures. However, their outcomes trend better than statewide averages for alternative schools.

I don't want to spend too much time on data today, because you can find it in the annual report that was shared in your packet. I'd encourage you to take a look there,

and also at the individual schools' reports on our website. They contain state and district comparisons – both academic and demographic – proficiency, growth, postsecondary readiness, and operational and financial status information.

Our schools have been in touch to let us know they appreciate this kind of contextualized and comparison data. They report finding it useful for teacher goal-setting and messaging their success to families.

Questions We're Asking

How can we continue to customize oversight for unique schools?

How can we increase diversity in Idaho's charter school enrollment?

Where can we offer additional autonomy to balance the accountability that is already in place?

By examining meaningful data and listening to our schools, we can identify both positive outcomes and areas for improvement.

Here are some of the questions we're asking ourselves:

1. ... Our office is going into 2018 with plans to learn more from Idaho charters, as well as other states, about how to identify appropriate standards and collect useful data regarding schools with unique populations. We want to find that magical unicorn balance of consistent, high expectations that are also realistic and relevant.
2. Next ... (2) ... The data shows that most Idaho charters still serve a less diverse population than other public schools. It is also true that their academic outcomes for non-white, FRL, and special needs subgroups trend above average. It's going to take some time to effect change, because our statute does not allow charters to enroll diverse students preferentially, but we're encouraging the submission of new charter petitions targeted at diverse students. We require all petitioners to detail how they will invite and serve all students. However, public perception remains an issue. Ultimately, the whole charter sector will need to work together toward increased awareness that these schools are open to everyone.

3. Finally ... (3) ... Public charter schools are subject to most of the same requirements as other public schools. Many of these requirements are inputs intended to ensure appropriate use of taxpayer dollars and/or improve academic achievement. In other words, they are inputs intended to result in improved outcomes. But, public charter schools are already held to outcome-based performance standards – a level of accountability that serves to protect students and taxpayers. We appreciate the conversations that are underway to explore how, on a practical level, charters can be granted autonomy to balance their accountability.

Needs Schools Identify

- ▶ Reduced Reporting Burden
- ▶ Increased Funding Flexibility
- ▶ Expanded Startup Funding Options
- ▶ Other Funding Needs
 - ▶ Classified Staff Salary Increases
 - ▶ Facility Funding
 - ▶ Special Education Staff for High-Needs Schools

Along similar lines, here are the specific needs we hear articulated to us by school leaders.

I know these sound familiar, but schools and petitioners continue to report these issues as roadblocks that limit their ability to serve students fully.

I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts to you, as well as your support for the Commission's ongoing work. Here's looking ahead to an even better charter sector in another 20 years.

Questions?

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