

# Moving from Startup to Sustainability

New Hampshire Charter Schools Conference  
September 20, 2023



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# Madcap presidential primary jockeying notwithstanding, my favorite autumnal pastime in New Hampshire is ...

Waiting for responses ...



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# Which type of growth initiative is most relevant to you based on your school's history and future trajectory?



- Adding enrollment within existing cohorts
- Adding cohorts within existing grades
- Adding new grade levels
- Adding a new campus



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# Maintaining quality while transitioning from startup to sustainability is surpassingly difficult.

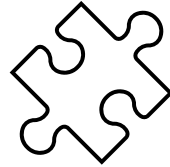
Should schools historically be hellbent on growth?



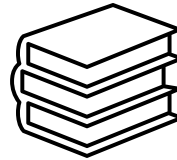
# A Cautionary Tale



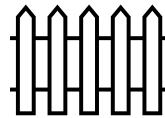
# Objectives



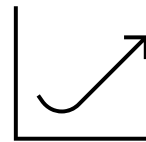
SAWBAT articulate the competing considerations that operators face while transitioning from start-up to sustainability



SAWBAT develop a critical understanding of how (a) to mitigate foreseeable growing pains, and (b) to meet demand without compromising quality



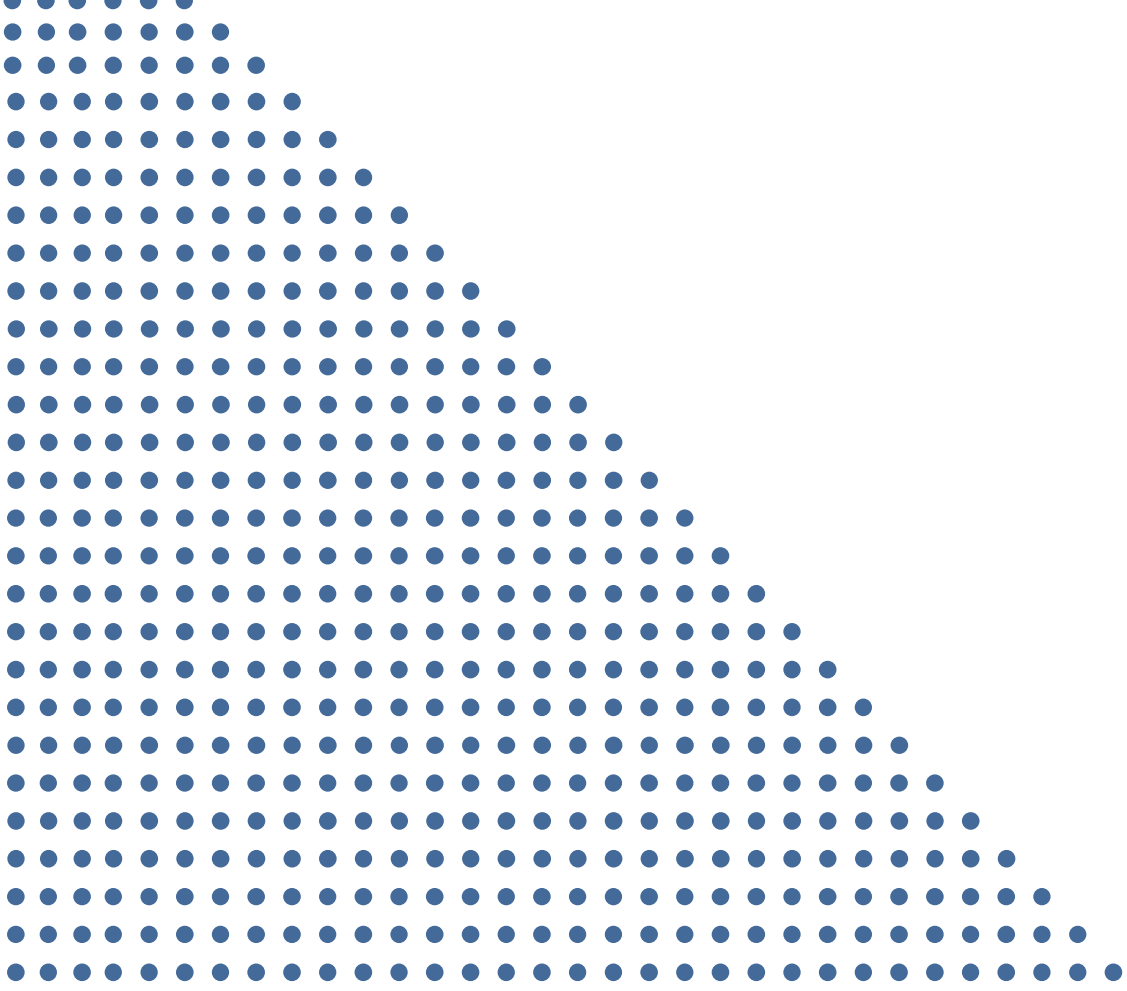
SAWBAT identify the factors that complicate efforts by charter operators to engage in long-term planning efforts and explain why it is nevertheless important that they do so with care and intentionality



SAWBAT understand how to initiate or accelerate a scale-up effort without sacrificing quality

# Agenda

1. Charter School Growth [Background and Theoretical Overview]
2. Barriers to Achieving Sustainability
3. Mitigating Foreseeable Growing Pains: Strategic, Sustainability, and Succession Planning



# Charter School Growth [Background and Theoretical Overview]





# Original Conception vs. Reality in Practice

- Original Conception: Labs of innovation that use their heightened autonomies to pilot novel practices for dissemination to traditional public schools
- Reality in Practice: Isomorphic convergence
- Upshot: Increased homogeneity . . .
- . . . which can be desirable in some instances so long as newly added seats approximate the quality of those on which they were based!

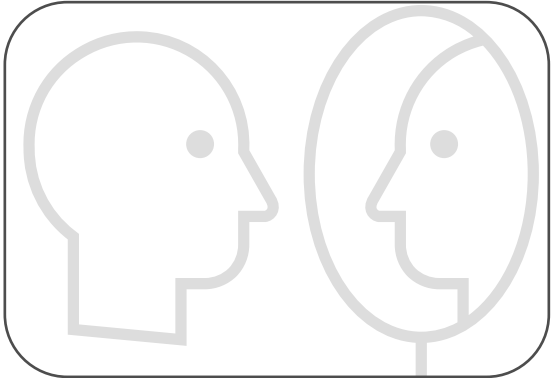


# Environmental Factors that Incentivize Growth

- Regulatory frameworks designed to impede rapid expansion
- Funding (public & private)
- Streamlined authorization & oversight processes
- “Proven provider” carveouts (charter caps, enrollment ceilings, geographic restrictions)



# Internal Considerations That Drive Growth



Mission  
Imperatives



Budgetary  
Demands



Operational  
Realities



Political  
Pressures



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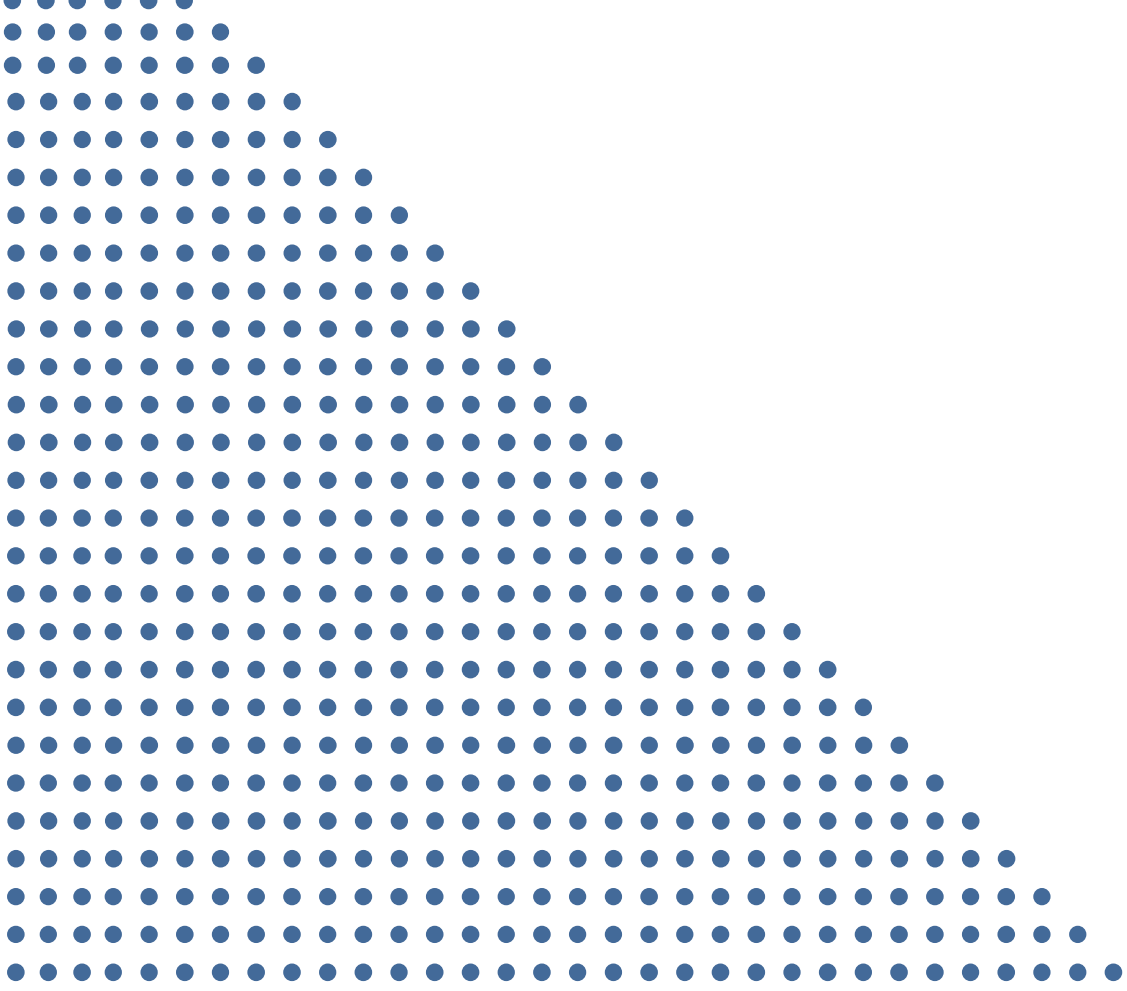


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Totally Insignificant

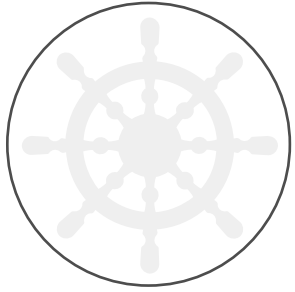
Highly Significant



# Barriers to Achieving Sustainability



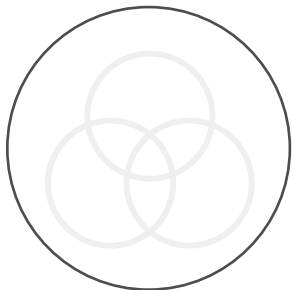
# Common Challenges Encountered During Growth



Leadership Pipelines



Teacher Burnout / Turnover



Tension Between Standardization  
& Differentiation



# Leadership Pipelines

- Idiosyncratic models place premium on familiarity, heighten dislocations associated with turnover (Gawlik, 2015; Ni et al., 2015)
- Absent strong leadership, attempted implementation of “a laundry list of programmatic characteristics may only lead to limited success” (Hays, 2013)
- Structured training models deployed by CMOs tend to provide a stronger foundation than the reactive, self-directed approach typically offered at standalones (Torres et al., 2018)
- Flipside: grueling “stretch assignments” featured in CMO training programs may accelerate burnout and turnover (Higgins & Hess, 2009)

# Teacher Burnout / Turnover

- “Short supply of saints” (Wilder & Jacobsen, 2010)
- Model success predicated on talented, high-energy staff working long hours with an evangelical zeal (Higgins & Hess, 2009)
- Teachers expecting to exercise autonomy may bristle when expected to implement prescriptive instructional and disciplinary models (Torres, 2014)
- Teachers at standalone schools crave the very systems, supports, and procedures that may cause CMO-affiliated teachers to chafe (Torres, 2014)





# Tension Between Standardization & Differentiation

- Standardization necessary to run a coherent school or system; school-level autonomy, experimentation, and innovation endemic to charter sector (Wohlstetter et al., 2015)
- “Rote, mechanistic implementation” leads to “resistance” or “blind compliance”; need active engagement in adaptation (Peurach & Glazer, 2012)
- Idea that success is predicated on strict adherence to “proven” practices is likely to preclude reevaluation of model (Higgins & Hess, 2009)

# From the perspective of your school, rank the following challenges to high-quality growth from most to least relevant:

1st

Leadership  
Pipelines

2nd

Teacher Burnout  
/ Turnover

3rd

Tension Between  
Standardization  
& Differentiation



*Poor first year performance simply cannot be overlooked or excused. . . . Once this has happened, the future is predictable and extremely bleak.*

*Peltason & Raymond (2013)*

# Typology of Approaches to Growth

- Premeditated: clearly delineated planning & management activities, long-range vision based upon defined growth objectives
- Organic: growth plans develop in response to changing pressures, demands, circumstances
- Opportunistic: growth based entirely on the availability of resources (e.g., facilities, school leaders, money, community support) deemed essential

*Farrell et al., 2013*



# **Before embarking on a growth initiative, consider the following questions...**

1. To what extent is growth consistent with the fulfillment of our mission?



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× Misaligned

Perfectly Aligned

## **Before embarking on a growth initiative, consider the following questions...**

1. To what extent is growth consistent with the fulfillment of our mission?
2. Do we have the capacity to add seats without compromising the quality of our educational programming?



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Strongly disagree

We have a robust school leadership candidate pipeline and training program

We have high-quality candidates to fill teaching vacancies and can safely maintain these talent pipelines as we grow

Our central office is equipped to provide responsive instructional and operational support services to additional campuses / grade levels / classrooms

The composition of our board is adequate to provide effective oversight in the event that we grow

We have access to adequate funding streams and suitable facilities to support continued growth

We have a strong data culture and reliable mechanisms for holding the board, school leadership, and (perhaps) a CMO accountable for performance

Strongly agree





## **Before embarking on a growth initiative, consider the following questions...**

1. To what extent is growth consistent with the fulfillment of our mission?
2. Do we have the capacity to add seats without compromising the quality of our educational programming?
3. Is there unmet demand for the model we are providing?
  - Will we have the enrollment to support our budget?



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4. To what extent is our program well-designed to serve the students and families in the community in which these seats will be located?



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3. Is there unmet demand for the model we are providing?
  - Will we have the enrollment to support our budget?
4. To what extent is our program well-designed to serve the students and families in the community in which these seats will be located?
5. To what risks would growth expose us, and to what extent are we prepared to mitigate them?
  - Reputational risk / Brand maintenance
  - Accountability risk
  - Financial risk
  - Political risk



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# From the perspective of your school, rank the following potential risks associated with growth from most to least concerning

1st Reputational risk /  
Brand maintenance

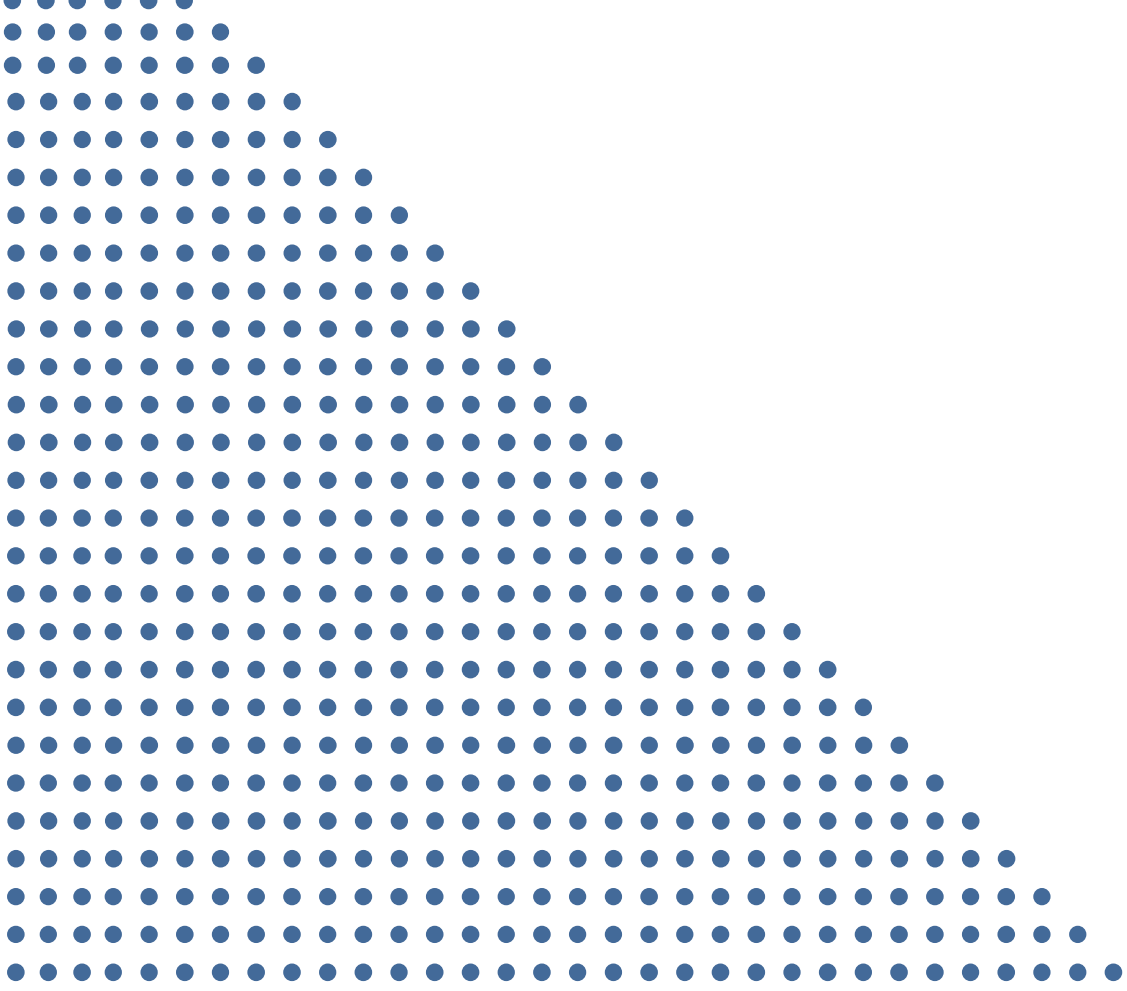
2nd Accountability risk

3rd Financial risk

4th Political risk



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# Mitigating Foreseeable Growing Pains: Strategic, Sustainability, and Succession Planning



# Strategic Plan

Academic Achievement

Culture & Climate

Family & Community Partnerships

Sustainability

# Sustainability

Enrollment

Funding & Facilities

Talent

# Talent

Board

Teachers

Leadership Succession



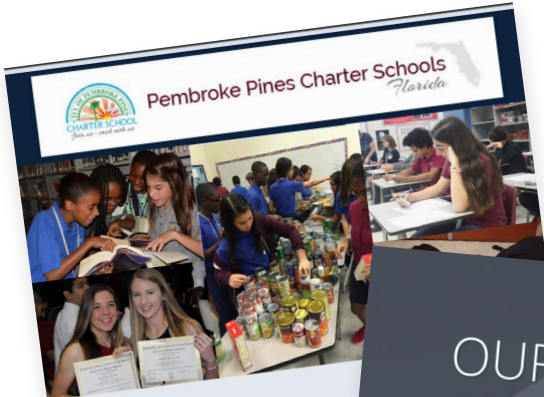
# Strategic Planning

Purpose

Process

Product

Predictive Value / Periodic Review



**STRATEGIC**  
**2015-20**  
EMPOWERING  
FOR THE POSSIBILITIES

### OUR CORE BELIEFS

**Community.** We believe that education requires the collaboration of parents, students, educators, administrators, advocates, organizations and the public. To come together and welcome each other into a community of learning and into the aspiration of improving the educational experience for more students.

**Inclusivity.** We believe that a better future for our children and our society requires the interconnection of many points of view, beliefs, languages, ethnicities, cultures, backgrounds and experiences. It enriches the experience of learning, problem-solving and development.

**Academic Excellence.** We believe that every student has the potential for excellence.



## Our vision for the future

...ion 20 years ago, Noble has been built on a foundation of love and high expectations, rigorous standards and high support. We are not limited by ideas of what we can do both, we have done both. We know that they are powerful beyond what we know we can and must do more.

...assembled the following plan based on the input of alumni, students, parents, teachers, board members, and staff. We can accomplish and is honest about the challenges we've faced. Students have grown up with us and far too many have had a negative experience with us. There is only one right choice after high school and we know Black students at Noble are graduating at rates below their Latinx peers.

...the next five years of Noble we will focus on... and... what... their... better... le... n... it's... room

...With positive and equitable experiences as a foundation, we will recognize the agency of our students in their post-secondary choices. We will empower students with the information and support to succeed in college and lead exemplary lives. This emphasis on student agency does not lower the bar of expectations for academic preparedness or skills growth for students at Noble. We will be vigilant so that students' rates are not pre-determined based on adult perceptions of abilities, interest, or incoming preparedness, but rather continue to strive so that all students receive rigorous college-preparatory curriculum and skills growth that enables true choice at the end of the Noble experience.

...In executing this vision Noble will set the standard as a catalyst for educational equity in Chicago and provide a model to the nation. We will live our mission to empower students with the scholarship, discipline, and honor to succeed in college and live exemplary lives.

And so our plan begins with a bold vision for our future:

**Noble will ensure that all students have equitable and positive school experiences that equip them to succeed on the path of their choice, leading to 75% of alumni completing college.**



**salem SA academy**  
CHARTER SCHOOL

**2018 - 2023 Strategic Plan**  
**College, Career, and Life Success for All**  
Adopted by the Board of Trustees on June 20, 2018

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# From your perspective, what value can be derived from undertaking a strategic planning process?



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# Strategic Planning

Purpose

Process

Product

Predictive Value / Periodic Review

**To examine the school's mission, vision, and key design elements, identifying which to reaffirm and which to reimagine**

To signal to all community members that their input is valued by actively engaging them in the planning process

To determine how to accentuate the school's strengths and mitigate its weaknesses based on an assessment of internal capacity and external conditions

**To articulate a vision for how a school pursues its mission over the next five years**

To chart a course for the school's future while honoring the work that has taken it to this point

To align all stakeholder groups around a shared vision for how a school community moves forward

**To establish goals against which trustees can hold both themselves and their leadership teams accountable**

To set goals, establish timelines, and identify the activities, resources, and individuals that will support the plan's implementation

To conduct an honest appraisal of how the school is perceived by a range of stakeholders across a host of domains

To drive the creation of a data dashboard

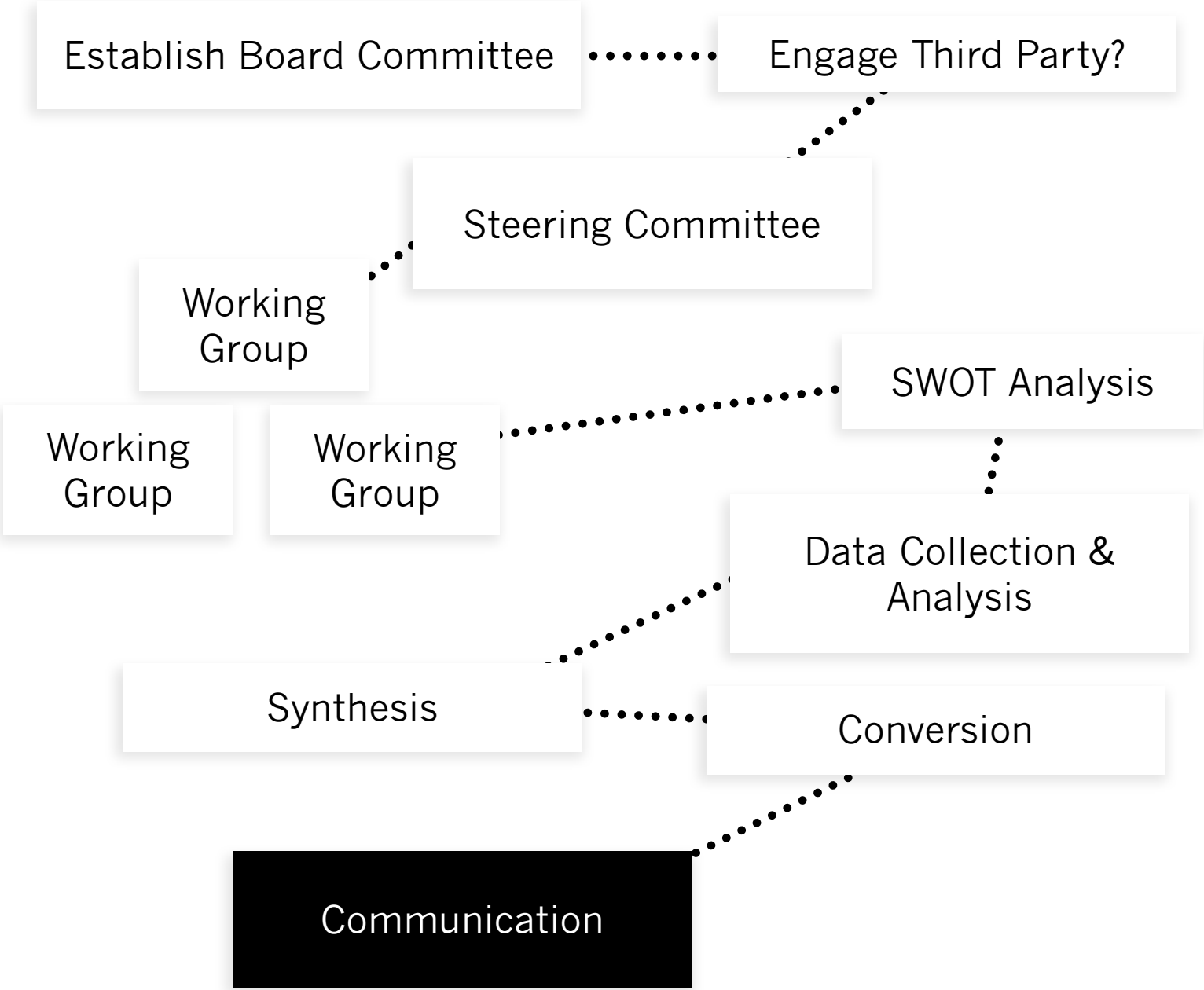
# Strategic Planning

Purpose

Process

Product

Predictive Value / Periodic Review



# Strategic Planning

Purpose

Process

Product

Predictive Value / Periodic Review

## Organization Information



### PRIORITY 5: SUSTAINABLE GROWTH + HEALTHY ENROLLMENT

There are five critical priority areas in accomplishing our mission and becoming a high performing charter School and BBPCS has developed a Five Year Strategic Plan that addresses these essential areas, which include:

<b>PRIORITY #1</b>	LEADERSHIP
<b>PRIORITY #2</b>	ACADEMICS
<b>PRIORITY #3</b>	SCHOOL CULTURE
<b>PRIORITY #4</b>	COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS
<b>PRIORITY #5</b>	FINANCE

**Focus on student retention**  
Schools that have faced declining enrollment have struggled particularly with retention. Keeping students in our schools is our top priority and a key strategy to ensure we meet our enrollment goals. For more details on our student retention strategy, see Priority 3.

**Five-year Growth Chart**

Year	Enrollment (Approximate)
Year 1	40
Year 3	75
Year 5	100

The Five Year Growth chart represents what we want to Achievement, School Culture (i.e. – student discipline, staff community involvement. Percentages are calculated in accordance with the New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Charter Schools.



### ADMINISTRATION AND POLICY

- Develop and implement a program for early intervention.
- Implement consistent policies for student disciplinary actions aligned with the school's mission.
- Utilize data to inform decisions about the future of OCS.
- Establish policies and procedures for ongoing faculty evaluation and feedback.
- Define human resources needs and develop a strategy to outsource this function.
- Create a succession plan for Executive Director and/or Administrative Team.
- Secure and update current facilities for each school.
- Plan for future acquisitions and costs for school facilities.

# Strategic Planning

Purpose

Process

Product

Predictive Value / Periodic Review

## Strategic Plan

### Overview

- Continued growth in the Governance and Administrative leadership of the school.

### Justification

- The Lead Administrator, in collaboration with the Board of Trustees, will regularly review, develop, and if necessary, amend the school's charter mission to promote student achievement.

## PRIORITY #2: ACADEMICS

### Overview

- Successfully achieve high scores on the State administered standardized test: PARCC
- Achieve recognition as a Blue Ribbon Charter School
- Create a college preparatory curriculum
- Promote academic excellence in the areas of Math, Language Arts Literacy, Science, and Social Studies
- Establish a high class technological infrastructure
- Incorporate technology in all aspects of instruction

### Justification

The Benjamin Banneker Preparatory Charter School promotes academic excellence. We want our scholars to excel in Math and Science. BBPCS will update its academic standards to align with the State Standards. BBPCS will create a rigorous curriculum that encourages all students to embrace life-long learning and implement a comprehensive Science, Technology, and Math program that enhances student learning. It is the goal of the school to help our scholars achieve in the 21<sup>st</sup> century by providing a high quality curriculum and our pursuit of evolving into a world-class institution.

## School Leader Evaluation

### Standard 4. CEO Leadership and Organizational Management

A Lead Administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by leadership and management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Exceeds Expectations       Meets Expectations       Below Expectations

Comments:

### Standard 5. CEO Leadership and The Technical Core of Curriculum Planning and Development

The Lead Administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the design and implementation of curricula and strategic plans that enhance teaching and learning: alignment of curriculum, curriculum resources, and assessment; and the use of various forms of assessment to measure student performance.

Exceeds Expectations       Meets Expectations       Below Expectations

Comments:

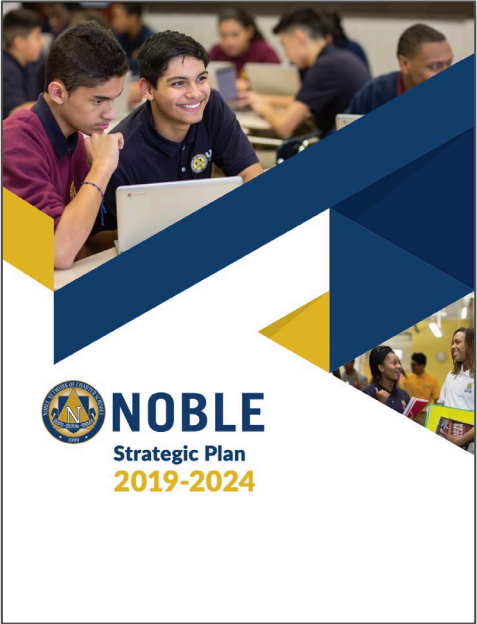
### Standard 6. CEO Leadership and Instructional Management

The Lead Administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.

Exceeds Expectations       Meets Expectations       Below Expectations

Comments:

# Strategic Planning Resources



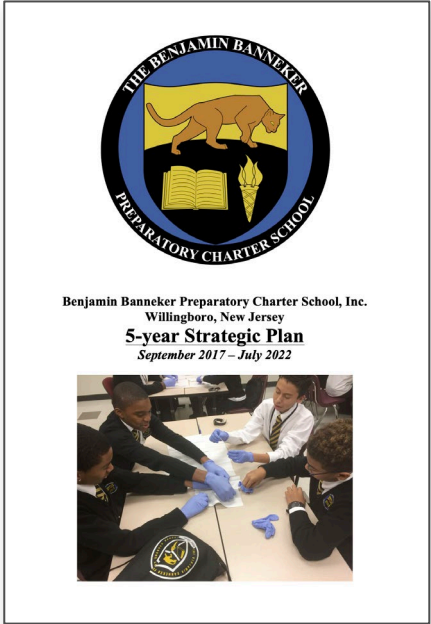
Noble Schools, 2019-2024



Odyssey Charter Schools, 2019-2024



Marion P. Thomas Charter School, 2022-2027



Benjamin Banneker Preparatory Charter School, 2017-2022



# Sustainability Planning

*Although schools may deliberately plan around per-pupil allocations, it is under-enrollment that seems to spark the classic death spiral of many schools: low enrollment, producing low revenues, producing marginal academic programs, driving enrollment down further still.*

Christian P. Wilkens,  
*How to Lose Your Charter*  
*Journal of School Choice*, 2013

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Woefully ineffective

Highly effective



# Sustainability Planning



## Public

- Title
- IDEA
- McKinney-Vento
- ESSER
- E-Rate
- Perkins
- CSP

## Private

- Foundations
- Corporations
- Individuals



Availability

Capacity

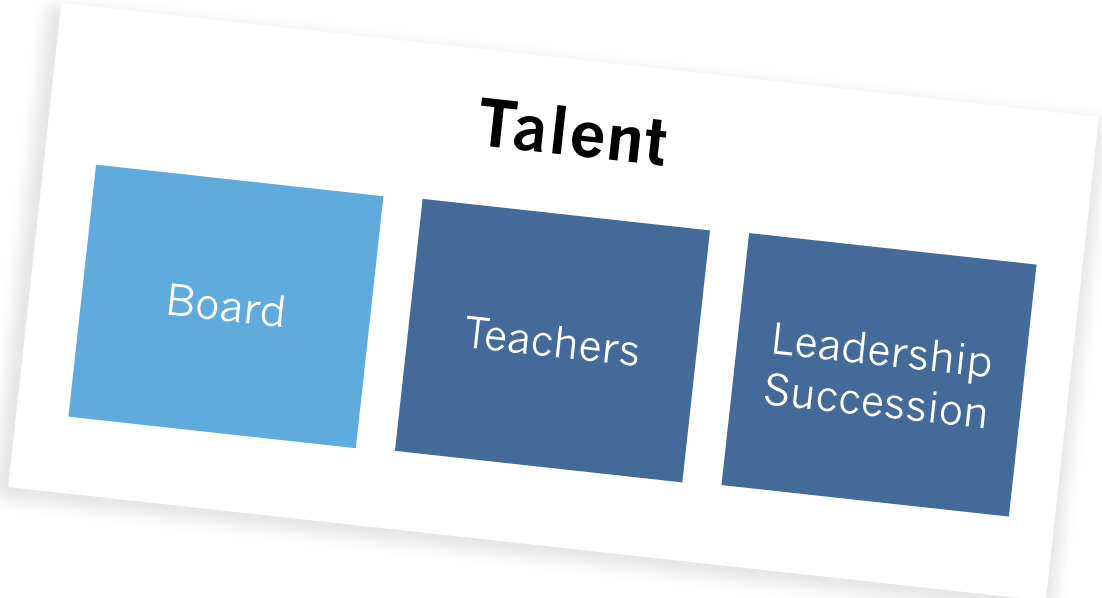
Suitability

Affordability





# Sustainability Planning



*Governance —> Sustainability*

- Institutional knowledge
- Credibility
- Caretaker of key relationships

*Focus Areas*

- Recruitment pipelines
- Training
- Development and deployment of effective structures and practices



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# From the standpoint of creating sustainable governance practices, rank order your board priorities from most to least pressing

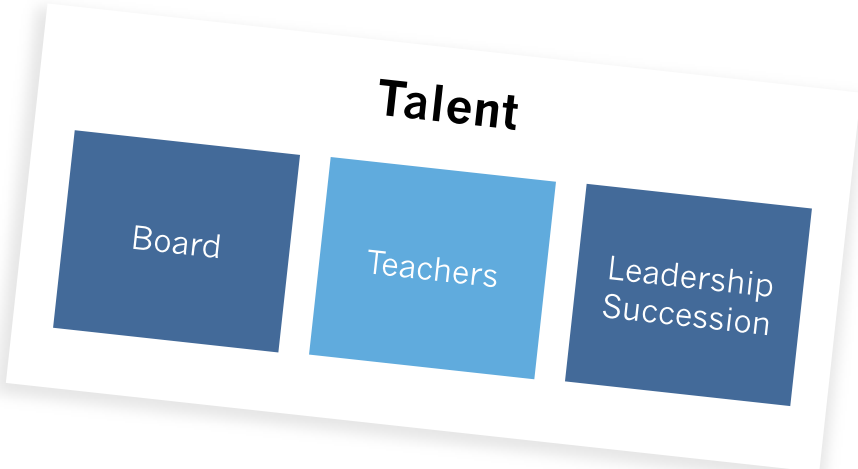
1st Cultivating pipelines of new trustees

2nd Training and ongoing development (individual and collective)

3rd Developing and deploying effective structures and practices



# Sustainability Planning



**The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought.** In the past decade, the interest in teaching as a career has dwindled, jeopardizing the quality of the education that children in America's public K-12 schools are receiving.

**Vanishing teachers** ♦

According to most recent data, 13.8% of teachers are either leaving teaching altogether after the school year, creating vacancies behind them. **13.8%** of teachers aren't in their position a year after: **6.5%** left the school but remained in the profession (turnover) and **7.3%** left teaching.



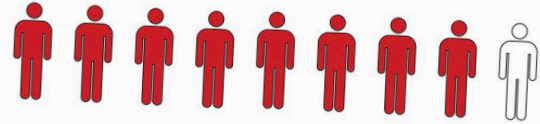
**Shrinking supply** ♦

High turnover and attrition is not the only problem. The number of people entering the career in teaching significantly declined from 2008 to 2016.

√ **15.4%**  
drop in number of people awarded education degrees

√ **37.8%**  
drop in number of people enrolled in teacher preparation programs

**Teachers don't have a say in their professional development opportunities** ♦



**8 in 9** teachers have less than a great deal of influence determining the content of their professional development

**Teachers' satisfaction with professional development is low** ♦

**1 in 4** find subject-specific professional development very useful

**1 in 4** find professional development related to using computers for teaching very useful

**1 in 5** find professional development related to student discipline and classroom management very useful

Emma Garcia & Elaine Weiss,  
**Examining the factors that play a role in the teacher shortage crisis**  
*Economic Policy Institute, 2020*

# Sustainability Planning

**Strategic Plan**

- Academic Achievement
- Culture & Climate
- Family & Community Partnerships
- Sustainability

**Sustainability**

- Enrollment
- Funding & Facilities

**Talent**

- Board
- Teachers
- Leadership Succession



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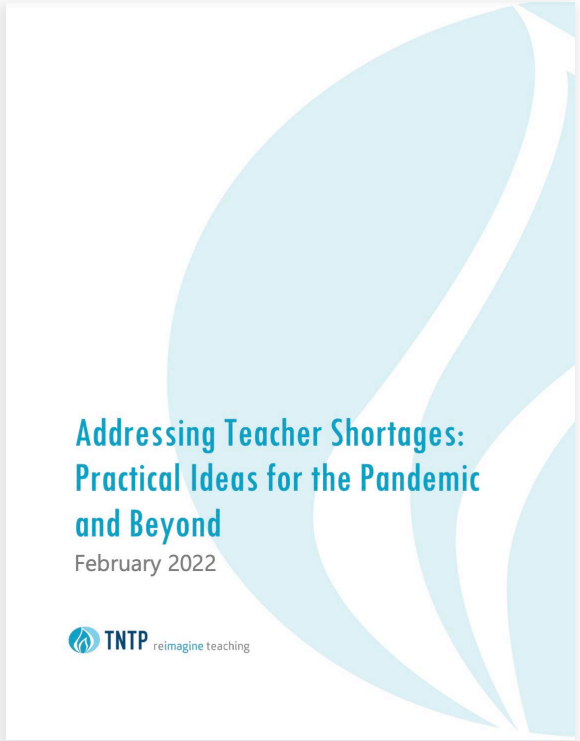


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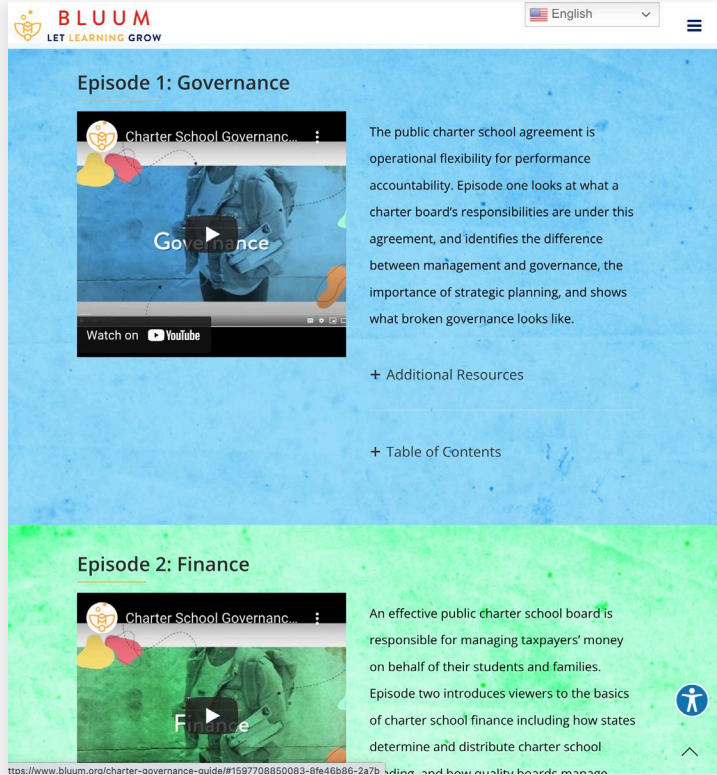
# Which aspect of sustainability planning feels most urgent to you at this particular moment in time?



# Sustainability Planning Resources



Addressing Teacher Shortages: Practical Ideas for the Pandemic and Beyond, TNTP, February 2022



Charter School Governance, The Essential Guide, BLUUM

*Why challenges associated with leadership turnover are heightened in charters*

- Centrality of smooth succession to sustainability: continuity, culture, & climate
- Unique features of charters
  - Specificity of mission
  - Gravitational pull of founders
  - Limited opportunities to cultivate a deep bench
- Unique features of charter leadership
  - Nature of role often requires handling responsibilities traditionally associated with both school leadership and district leadership
    - Board, funder, and political relationships
    - Legal
    - PR

# Barriers to Succession Planning



Role Uncertainty



Conflict Avoidance



Funding



Complacency



Time Constraints



Finite Resources



Politics





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# Which barrier to succession planning resonates most profoundly with you?



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# Best Practices

**Maintain Transparency**

**Distinguish Between  
Emergency & Intentional**

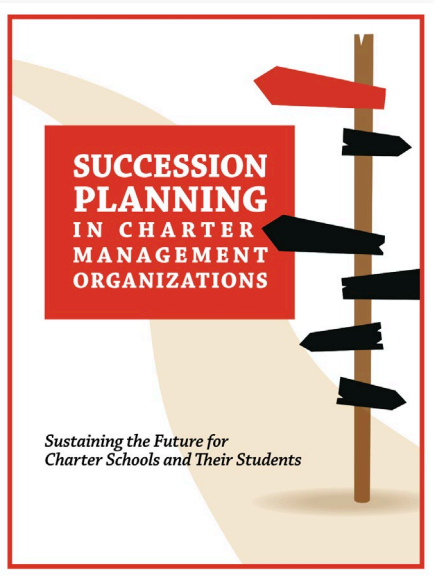
**Tie into Strategic Plan**

**Assign Responsibility to a  
Board Committee**

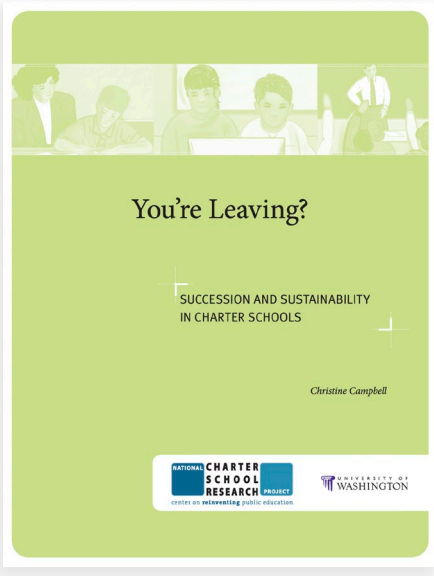
**Build Your Bench**



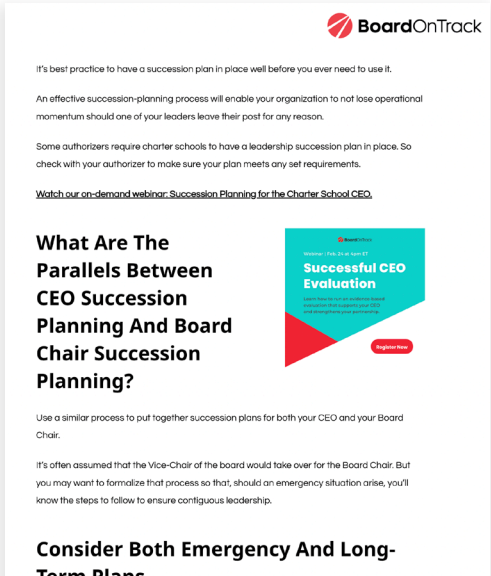
# Succession Planning Resources



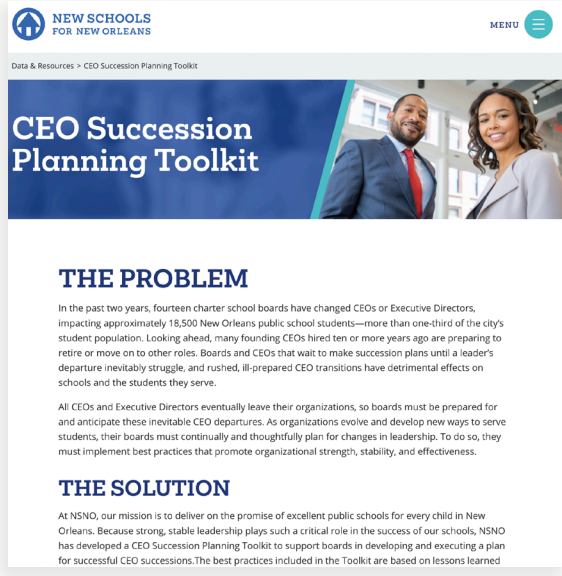
Succession Planning in Charter Management Organizations (Gates Foundation)



You're Leaving? Succession and Sustainability in Charter Schools (National Charter Schools Research Project)



Succession Planning for Charter School Boards and CEOs (Board On Track)



CEO Succession Planning Toolkit (New Schools for New Orleans)

# Open Discussion

