



NATIONAL
CHARTER SCHOOL
RESOURCE CENTER

“The Death Spiral”

Identifying Early Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools

An Intimate Discussion with Authorizers:
Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers
Virtual | Zoom

charterschoolcenter.ed.gov

Norms for Today's Meeting

- Update your name to your full name and organization.
- Mute yourself when not speaking.
- Show your video to enhance dialogue and interaction.
- Be open to other opinions and courteous to your peers.



About the NCSRC

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



On the Webinar Today



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Today's Big Question



How can we identify schools that are falling off-track and help get them back on-track?

Session Objectives

Understand

Understand the potential for identifying schools in distress *early in the school failure trajectory*

Learn

Learn from your peers about how they identify struggling schools prior to failure

Incorporate

Incorporate indicators of distress in your monitoring and support of schools

Agenda



Why should authorizers be aware of indicators of distress?




What are indicators of distress?



How can indicators of distress be used to get schools back on track to success?



Guiding Question



What types of indicators come to mind when thinking of schools in distress?





Why should authorizers be aware of indicators of distress?

Why Are We Studying Indicators of Distress



School closure as an improvement strategy bore out mixed short- and long-term effects for displaced students.

High cost and low track record of success of comprehensive school improvement efforts meant students were in low-performing schools for too long.

Identifying struggling schools early and addressing issues before they fester, increases the odds that:

- Resources, such as time, effort, and funds, are used efficiently
- Schools are closed as a last resort
- Students have equitable access to high-quality options

Early Warning Systems and Death Spiral

Early Warning Systems:

- Review past events in broad context to identify potential characteristics of distress
- Review past events in one's own context against characteristics
- Apply characteristics to current events in one's own context to predict potential future events

Death Spiral:

- Identify organizational decline
- Define the stages of decline to determine when and how intervention(s) needs to occur

Used together: Indicators can help identify schools in distress *and* determine type of intervention(s) necessary *prior to school failure and negative impact on students.*



What are Indicators of Distress?

Indicators of Distress

Data signaling that a school's performance is declining in a number of areas.



Leadership

Governing Board

Operations

Finance

Talent

Culture

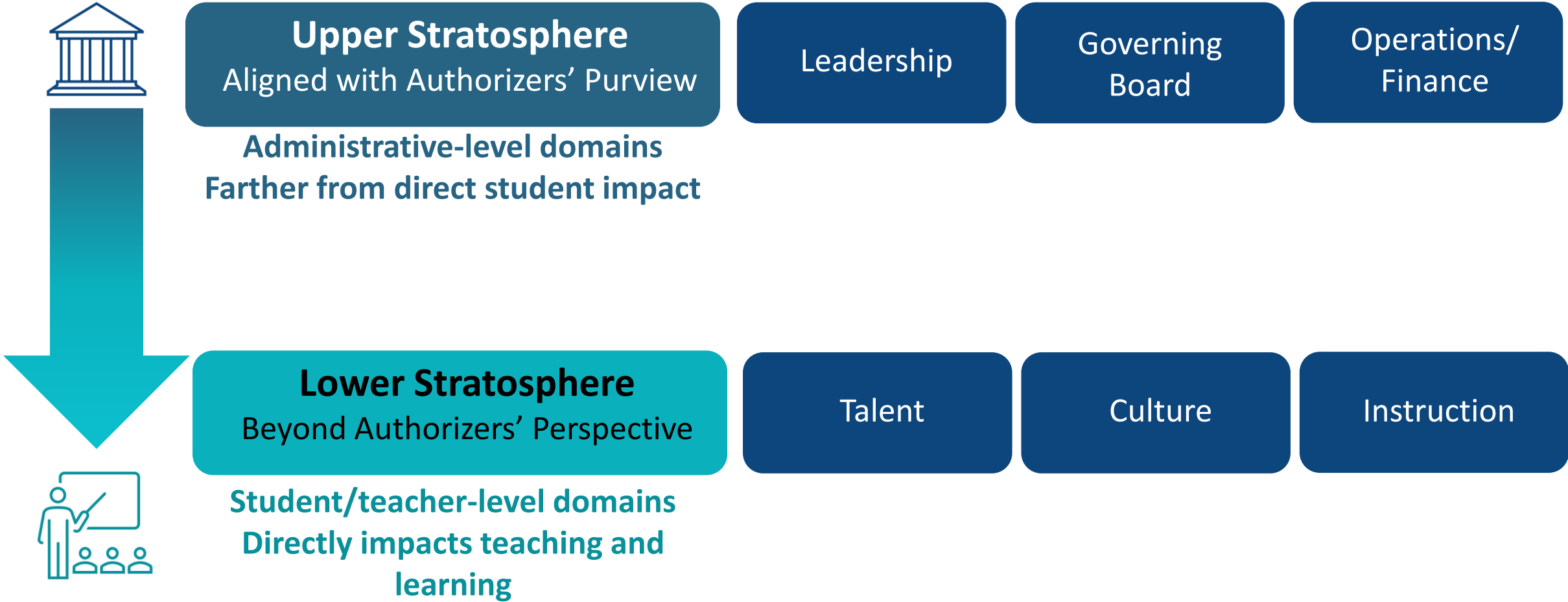
Instruction



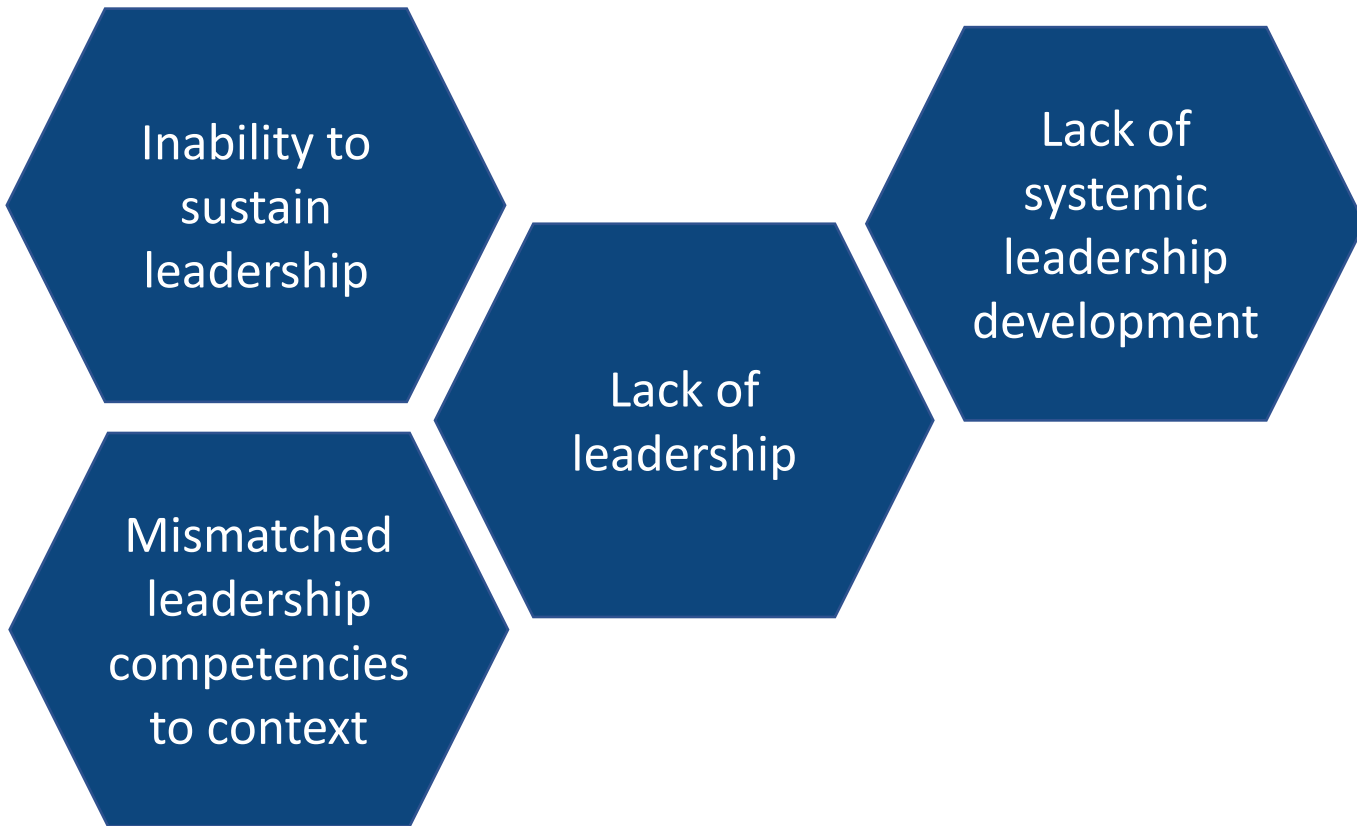
Finding: Authorizers tend to focus on indicators at the upper layer of the stratosphere of a school's functions.

Authorizers identify indicators of distress related to school leadership, school governing boards, and operational/financial elements, which may reflect additional areas of concern in areas of talent, culture, and instruction.

Effects beyond the Stratosphere



Leadership Indicators

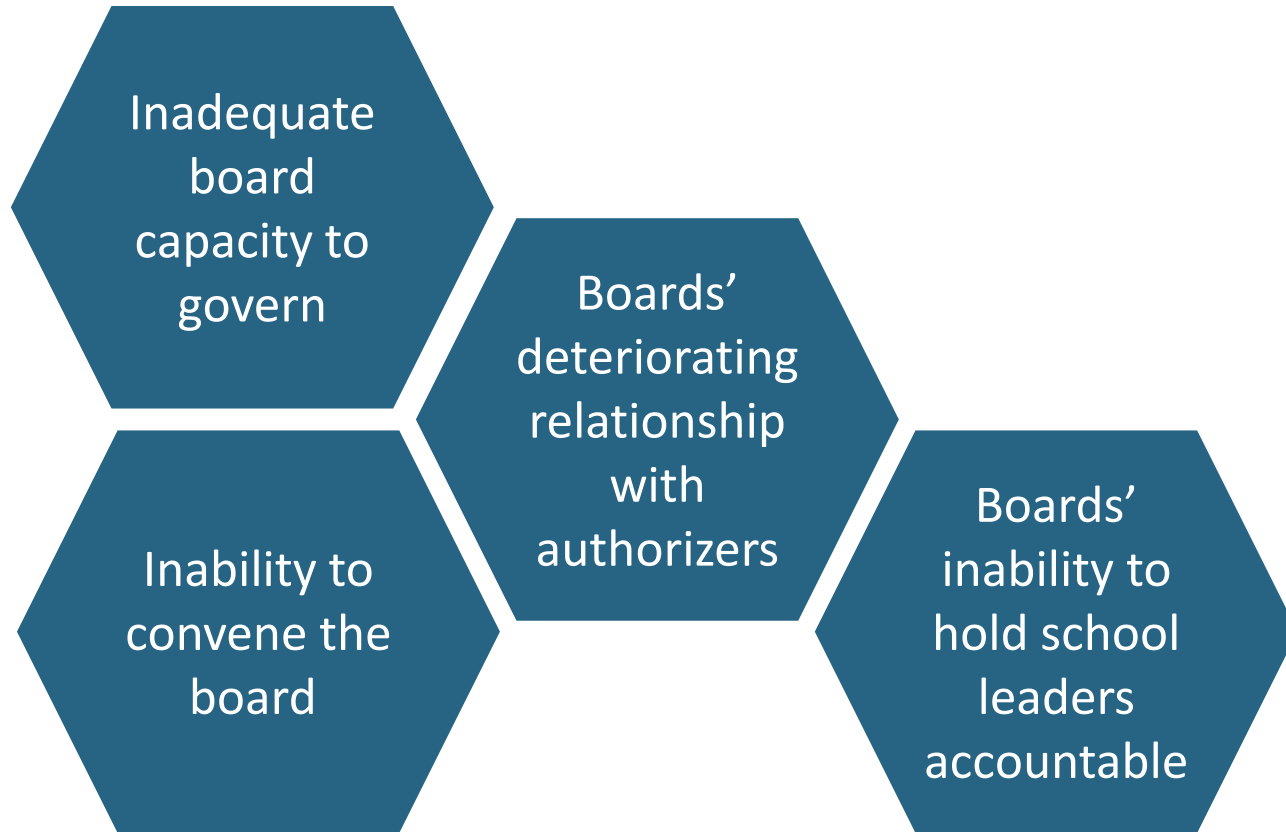


What might this look like?

Systematic Leadership Development

“Founder’s syndrome,” as described by authorizers, may not be visible for many years after a school’s opening if the same leader remains. Until he or she departs, the absence of distributed and succession plans may be the only indicator of impending distress.

Governance Indicators



What might this look like?

Inability to Hold School Leaders Accountable

Authorizers described instances when “some boards are completely in the pocket of the school leader,” such as when the founding board and principal all emerged from a shared social network. One authorizer described a board that “chose the leader over the school” resulting in letting the school close rather than replace the school leader.

Operations



Breakdown in compliance and reporting functions



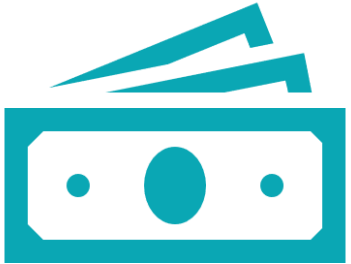
Failure to align to market needs

What might this look like?

Breakdown in Compliance and Reporting Functions

As one authorizer described it, “We’re finding that when they’re missing those simple operational things, there are usually bigger operational issues that are in existence.”

Finance



Failure to properly manage finances



Misappropriation of funds

Indicator Deep Dive

Failure to Properly Manage Finances

Finance-related indicators of distress might point to a school leader who was not providing oversight for finances. One authorizer noted that when a school leader is “not marshaling resources correctly, [it] means that you’re getting close to kind of circling the drain.”

Indicators Below the Stratosphere



Talent

- Hiring challenges, turnover
- Teacher capacity decline



Culture

- Lack of connection with students, families
- Inhospitable professional culture



Instruction

- Lack of focus on instruction
- Cohesion/alignment issues in curriculum, standards, assessments



How can indicators of distress be used to get schools back on track to success?

Caselets



What are the issues you see at this school?



How could you collect information to learn about these issues?



How detrimental are these issues to the health of this school?



If this school was under your authorization, what would you do?



How are authorizers using indicators of distress?

Group Discussion

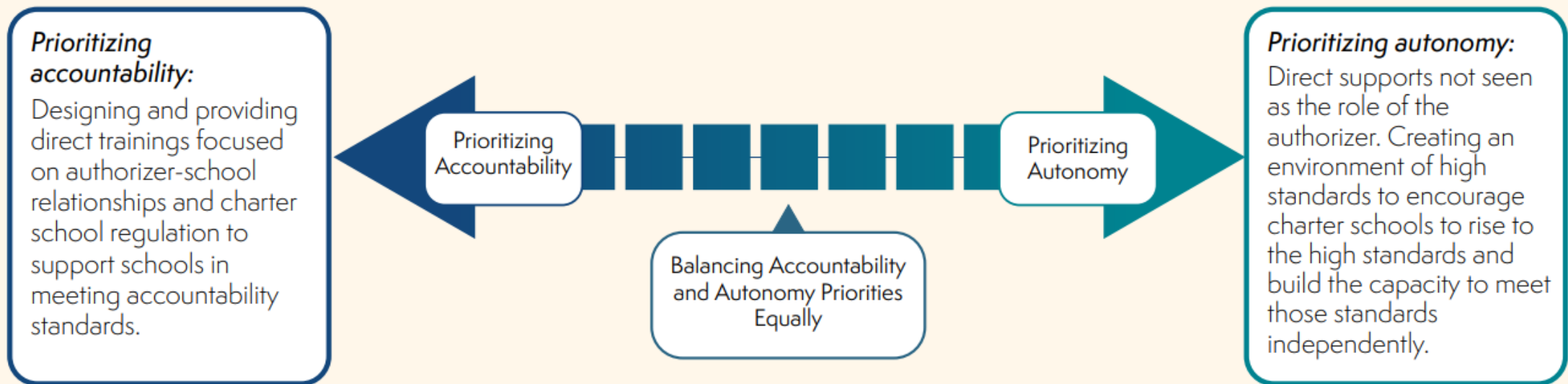


Finding: The context of authorizing has continued to evolve as the field matures, especially as it relates to school improvement.

Authorizers are weighing the implications of school improvement needs on their work in supporting school autonomy and accountability

The Role of Autonomy and Accountability in School Distress

Figure 1. Authorizers' Balance of Accountability and Autonomy



Guiding questions

1

Where do you see the role of authorizers heading with respect to schools in distress prior to formal renewals?

2

What is the role of authorizers in determining equitable outcomes for all students?

3

Should authorizers push to capture further data “below the stratosphere” and pertaining to talent, culture, and/or instruction?

Q&A



What's Next for Indicators of Distress Research?



- Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools: Tools to Support Authorizer Data Collection
- Indicators of Distress Part II: The School Leader and Board Member Perspective

**Invite your Schools and Board Members to Save the Date:
Webinar on Indicators of Distress
(Oct. 27 • 2:00-3:30)**

Recently Released NCSRC Virtual Events & Resources

- Back to School Support for English Language Learners: an asynchronous learning module
- Building Community Partnerships: A How-To Guide and videos
- Logic Model Toolkit



How can you contact us?



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