



SCHOOL RESTART AUTHORIZATION PROCESS GUIDE

Written by Public Impact and EdPlex | www.schoolrestarts.org

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Go to www.schoolrestarts.org to download the process guide, review authorizer resources, and learn more about school restarts.





PROCESS GUIDE INTRODUCTION & DEFINITION OF TERMS

What is Restart?

“Restart” is generally defined as *closing one underperforming school and opening a new school to serve the same students under new management*. The term restart came into wide use in 2009, when the U.S. Department of Education released guidance on what school intervention models districts and states could use to address a chronically low-performing school as part of Title I School Improvement Grants (SIG). Restart was one of four grant-eligible interventions, listed in approximate order from least to most intensive:

- **Transformation Model.** Replace the principal and implement a number of research-based strategies such as data-driven instruction, increased learning time, and greater school-based flexibility.
- **Turnaround Model.** Replace the principal and at least 50 percent of the staff, and implement a set of changes such as a new instructional model and increased learning time.
- **Restart Model.** Close the low-performing school and open a new school under a charter operator, charter management organization (CMO), or education service provider (ESP), and give prior students guaranteed enrollment to the new school.
- **School Closure Model.** Close the low-performing school and enroll students in higher-achieving schools within reasonable proximity to the closed school.

For this guide, we further clarify the restart definition to include:

- **New school operator:** In addition to CMOs, the restart school may be managed by ESPs that operate through contractual arrangements that substantially transfer management and staffing of the school to the new group.
- **New school governance:** Most restarts will require a change in school governance. For district-to-charter restarts, the school’s governance moves from a district school board to an independent charter school board. Charter-to-charter restarts should be accompanied by a total, or nearly total, change in charter school board members. For restart schools authorized under a contract agreement (not charter), the local school board may remain as the governing entity.
- **Serving the same students:** Current students in the low-performing school being closed are guaranteed enrollment in the newly established school or schools.
- **Single site, subdivided, or consolidated schools:** One or more low-performing schools may be closed and restarted by one or more new schools. For example, two underenrolled schools may be closed and restarted by a single school, or a large school may be closed and restarted by two smaller schools.
- **Same or nearby facility:** The closing school’s building is often used as the home for the new school, but does not have to be. If not, then the new building should be near the closing school so that it can conveniently serve the closing school’s students.
- **Whole-school and phase-in restarts:** The new school may serve all grades at once upon opening (*whole-school*) or may serve some subset of grades in year one and add additional grades in subsequent years (*phase-in*). If the restart school phases in, then either the closing school can phase out over a matching timeline or displaced students can be enrolled into nearby higher-performing schools.

Restarts represents a more dramatic intervention compared to internal turnaround initiatives (e.g. “turnaround” and “transformation” models), and a strategy that authorizers can use to avoid some of the negative consequences of closing schools where students do not have access to other quality options. Restarts should not be initiated as a last-ditch effort to avoid closure of a district or charter school, but as a proactive strategy that authorizers can initiate when the conditions are right.

Why Do Restart?

School districts, states, and other public school authorizers should consider restart as a strategy for initiating turnaround interventions in chronically low-performing schools. Restarts have led to swift and dramatic improvements in low-performing schools when a high-performing organization leads the new school, and systems are in place to facilitate a smooth transition and strong community support¹. In comparison to other school intervention strategies, restart can be the best option to make rapid gains in student achievement.

■ **Restart vs. Closure.** Restarts may appeal more than just closing a school—at least when conditions exist to bring in a high-quality operator—because they ensure continuity of service to a group of students, or because there are not higher-quality schools available to accommodate displaced students. Research

from early 2012 shows that school closure negatively affects student attendance and achievement. The impact on attendance dissipates after the first year, but the damage to student achievement persists unless the new school is substantially better than the closed school.² School restart has the potential to avoid these adverse impacts. In addition, a draft paper examining school closure versus restart in New Orleans from 2008 to 2012 records statistically significant better student outcomes for restart.³

■ **Restart or Turnaround vs. Transformation.** In the early years of the federal School Improvement Grants, both the restart and turnaround options outperformed transformation as effective school interventions. Though the results are preliminary, an analysis of the first two years of outcomes for Cohort I schools showed proficiency gains for turnaround and restart schools that were 1.5 times higher than transformation schools in math (9 to 10 points versus 6 points), and two times higher for reading (6 points versus 3 points).⁴

■ **Restart vs. Turnaround.** In deciding between restart and turnaround, a number of factors come into play since both can be effective and, ultimately, both can fail. A key factor is the availability of great school leaders and teachers. Districts with enough strong leaders and teachers may be able to support effective school turnarounds without outside help. Low-performing charters are unlikely to have

1. Published research reports and case studies highlight a multitude of restart success stories that document dramatic increases in student ELA and math proficiency on state assessments, in addition to other measures of school improvement. Although there is very limited peer-reviewed research to provide a more rigorous analysis of restart outcomes, these published reports provide some proof of restart success. Relevant reports include: Wolford, T., Stratos, K., & Reitano, A. (2013, December). *Renaissance Schools initiative progress report: 2010–2011 through 2012–2013*. Philadelphia, PA: The School District of Philadelphia. Retrieved from http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/uploads/TM/8_/TM8_61FkJvh05xlyLNSS9w/Renaissance_Report_Dec_2013.pdf; Ruble, W. (2015, November 4). *The effect of contracting out low performing schools on student performance*. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University's Department of Economics. Retrieved from <http://econ.tulane.edu/RePEc/pdf/tul1521.pdf>; Doyle, D., & Field, T. (2013). *The role of charter restarts in school reform: Honoring our commitments to students and public accountability*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact, and Washington, DC: NewSchools Venture Fund. Retrieved from http://www.newschools.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/the_role_of_charter_restarts_in_school_reform.pdf; Corbett, J. (2015, August). *Chartering turnaround: Leveraging public charter school autonomy to address failure*. National Alliance for

Public Charter Schools and The Center on School Turnaround. Retrieved from http://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/560116/Publications/Chartering_Turnaround/turnaround_web.pdf?t=1456868996006; Empower Schools. (2014, April). *Urban school reform in Lawrence, Massachusetts: Pioneering the “open architecture” model*. Retrieved from <http://empowerschools.org/download/583/>

2. Engberg, J., Gill, B., Zamarro, G., & Zimmer, R. (2012, March). Closing schools in a shrinking district: Do student outcomes depend on which schools are closed?. *Journal of Urban Economics* 71(2), 189–203. Retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S009411901100060X>

3. Ruble, W. (2015, November 4). *The effect of contracting out low performing schools on student performance*. New Orleans, LA: Tulane University's Department of Economics. Retrieved from http://econ.tulane.edu/documents/ruble_JMP_Contracting.pdf

4. U.S. Department of Education. (2014, February 14). *School Improvement Grant (SIG) national assessment results summary: Cohorts I and II*. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/sif/assessment-results-cohort-1-2-sig-schools.pdf>

enough strong teachers and leaders in place and thus are nearly always candidates for restart or closure. The research is inconclusive about which strategy is preferable, suggesting that context matters a great deal. For example, a December 2015 study by the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development, based at Vanderbilt University, examined student achievement data from 2012 to 2015 on two school intervention strategies in Tennessee: Memphis iZone schools that were district-run turnaround or transformation efforts, and Memphis schools that were restarted either by an outside operator or the Achievement School District (ASD) itself.⁵ The study showed greater positive impacts among the iZone schools than the ASD restart schools in the first three years of these turnaround initiatives.

In contrast, a 2013 report published by the School District of Philadelphia's Office of Research and Evaluation analyzed the relative performance of restart and turnaround school interventions for the first three years of the Renaissance Schools initiative.⁶ The report highlights greater student proficiency improvements in the charter restart schools, along with sustained improvements in school culture indicators, higher rates of student retention, and overall increases in student enrollment. The report also notes that the declining performance of the turnaround model schools may be explained by a failure to faithfully implement the turnaround model due to changes in district leadership and unstable school funding.

Although restarts disrupt school communities less than outright closure, they are generally more disruptive than transformation and turnaround interventions, given their change in governance and school management, and the likely departure of

many teachers and staff who interact daily with students and parents. Communities can tolerate only so much change before they begin to resist, impeding the restart strategy. To build a successful and sustainable restart intervention model, authorizers must balance the urgency for dramatic change with political realities and community needs.

This guide was created to improve school restart efforts based on establishing strong authorizing practices, authentic community engagement, and other conditions for success. In addition, this guide can help decision-makers evaluate their infrastructure before deciding whether to pursue a restart.



5. Zimmer, R., Kho, A., Henry, G., & Viano, S. (2015, December 8). *Evaluation of the effect of Tennessee's Achievement School District on student test scores*. Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation & Development. Retrieved from http://mediad.publicbroadcasting.net/p/wpln/files/201512/ASD_Impact_Policy_Brief_Final_12.8.15.pdf

6. Wolford, T., Stratos, K., & Reitano, A. (2013, December). *Renaissance Schools initiative progress report: 2010–2011 through 2012–2013*. Philadelphia, PA: The School District of Philadelphia. Retrieved from http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us/uploads/TM/8_/TM8_61FkJvho5xlyLNSS9w/Renaissance_Report_Dec_2013.pdf

Who Should Use This Guide?

Early restart experiences highlight the challenges and pitfalls that schools and authorizers face in designing and implementing a financially and politically sustainable restart process.

This guide explains the optimal processes and policies that can make restart authorizations more consistently successful. Restart is an important turnaround intervention that can be used for low-performing district schools *and* charter schools. The recommendations in this guide generally apply to both types of schools unless otherwise stated.

The restart process is not the sole responsibility of the authorizer; for the process to succeed, many groups play important roles:

- **Authorizers.** The primary audience for this guide is an authorizer, including jurisdictions at the state and local level that have the authority to open, close, and oversee schools regardless of whether those schools are run by charters or districts. Authorizers may be school districts (85 percent of charter authorizers in the U.S. are districts), independent entities, universities, or statewide authorities given specific jurisdiction, such as state education agencies or achievement school districts. The authorizer type may matter for whether some steps in the guide apply and/or who completes the steps. For example, an independent authorizer would need to work with the local school district when approving a restart provider for a low-performing district-run school. Even districts without charter schools can be considered authorizers because they are making decisions about opening, closing, and/or contracting out the management of their schools.
- **School Operators.** School operators considering taking on a restart can use this guide to outline what steps to expect. The guide also lays out principles to structure a fair and equitable system of accountability that takes restart challenges into consideration.
- **Community & Advocacy Organizations.** This guide is a resource for third-party organizations that are well positioned to support school improvement by empowering communities to participate in the process, supporting a talent pipeline

for principals or teachers, advocating for change to policymakers, and/or serving as a trusted third party to broker strategic change within a school district.

- **Funders.** Organizations seeking to support effective school restart can use this guide for information on what actions authorizers, community groups, and schools can or should take to set the conditions for success.
- **Policymakers.** The guide may help lawmakers and boards of education better understand the policies necessary to support school restart efforts.
- **School Districts.** Although this guide focuses on the process for implementing restart interventions that involve bringing a charter or other school management organization in to run a new school via a charter or contract, aspects of the recommendations can be applied to quality review processes for internal district reform efforts.

What Additional Resources Can I Find on the Restart Website and Resource Database?

This guide is hosted at www.schoolrestarts.org, which includes a complementary online database with tools and resources to support restart authorization. Collected from authorizers and support organizations across the country, the resources offer practical examples of the materials that support each step of the restart process. This guide also includes boxed descriptions of real-life examples of the recommended guiding principles in cities and states, with links to documents and resources available at www.schoolrestarts.org. Introductory text accompanies each resource to explain when and how the document was used and to summarize any lessons the parties involved learned—providing important context to assist readers in adapting the practices and tools for their own operating conditions.

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CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS & GENERAL RESTART GUIDANCE

What Local Conditions Influence the Potential Success of Restart Efforts?

Authorizers will need to establish restart policies and practices that are best suited for their local operating conditions, such as:

- **Supply of Quality Operators.** A restart's success depends largely on the organization that opens the new school; the country's supply of organizations that can undertake restarts is uneven.
- **Ability to Engage Community.** This guide includes suggestions for how to authentically engage the community so that schools are set up for sustained success. Ideally, the government agency responsible for serving the community with a quality education will be in a position to lead the community dialogue. Sometimes trust may be lacking between the community and the prevailing education agency, making third parties helpful in organizing and communicating with the community.
- **School Performance Transparency.** School intervention efforts generally and restart work specifically rely on consistent, transparent accountability systems that publish concise, understandable reports on school performance, regardless of the type of school governance. Such a system helps establish a clear mandate for school intervention work and creates a solid foundation for ongoing community engagement.

- **Authorizer Authority.** Authorizers can be further differentiated based on their legal authority to implement restarts, and the complex mixture of education policies, political dynamics, and the characteristics of individual school communities. Some state or local policies provide more clarity than others about the urgency and preferred methodology for school improvement. In some places, school restart is designated as the preferred intervention for chronically low-performing schools, which in turn gives authorizers a clearer mandate and path forward.

General Best Practices for Charter School Authorization

Many of the best practices associated with the authorization of new-start charter schools apply to restart authorization. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers' (NACSA) Principles and Standards⁷ on effective charter school authorization provide a comprehensive resource for charter authorization policy and practice. NACSA publications and policy guidance on "replicating quality"⁸ also provide specific guidance on authorization practices and charter school policies that can encourage the replication of high-performing charter schools and CMOs that can serve as restart operators. This guide does not repeat NACSA's guidance, but does include recommendations that are specific to authorizing a school as a restart. This guide is best used in conjunction with **NACSA's materials**.

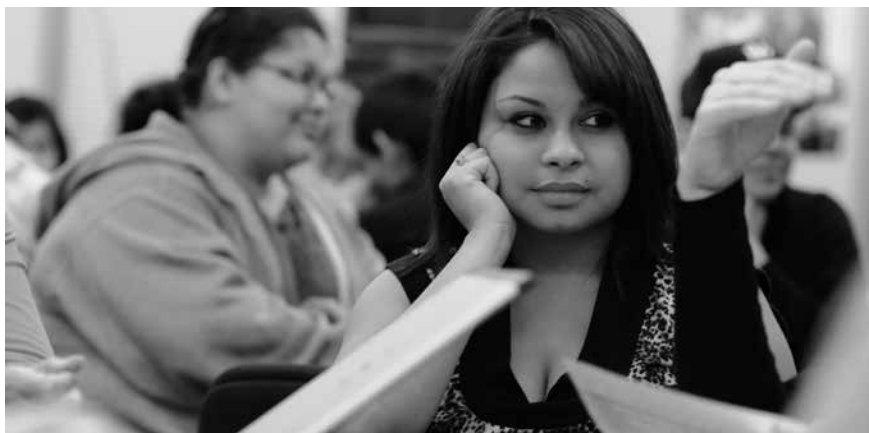
7. National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (n.d.). *Principles and standards: Practices that guide authorizing across the country*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitycharters.org/for-authorizers/principles-and-standards/>; National Association of Charter School Authorizers. (n.d.). *12 essential practices: Great charter schools don't just happen*. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitycharters.org/for-authorizers/12-essential-practices/>

8. National Association of Charter School Authorizers & Charter School Growth Fund. (2014, January). *Replicating quality: Policy recommendations to support the replication and growth of high-performing charter schools and networks*. Retrieved from http://www.qualitycharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/ReplicatingQuality_Report.2014.01.pdf

Continuous Improvement as a Key Approach

In the same way that schools are asked to continually measure themselves against accountability metrics, authorizers, funders, and support organizations should carefully evaluate the outcomes of their processes and establish a shared sense of accountability with their restart school operators. An authorizer has some responsibility if a school restart fails. All involved should look for opportunities to set measurable goals, evaluate progress, publicly report on outcomes, and in turn, improve processes when outcomes don't match expectations. This guide provides recommendations regarding data metrics that can measure progress and success at each restart school (see **Step 7: Accountability**). Authorizers are encouraged to supplement school performance data with qualitative data from participants in the process. In addition, authorizers should consider establishing community councils that regularly analyze and report on the full portfolio of school intervention efforts, including restart (see **Step 1: Envision**).

If authorizers plan and structure the overall restart authorization process to embed multiple feedback mechanisms and opportunities to measure outcomes, then they will have more data to use as they seek to improve restart authorization over time. Some helpful resources regarding continuous improvement can be found [here](#).



Before You Start: Stakeholder & System Mapping

We recommend creating a map of all parties and structures that exist around public K–12 education before embarking on substantial restart work. Some use the phrase “ecosystem map” to describe such a document. This analysis can be prepared by an authorizer in collaboration with foundations, support organizations, and community members if possible to ensure that the map is comprehensive and unbiased. In preparing it, attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Who are the parties involved or interested in improving public education in our district/city? Write a brief profile of each organization or individual identified.
2. What are the views of each of them on school improvement efforts—specifically those efforts that may result in closing failing schools and replacing them with new schools?
3. Why does each party hold those views—what are the root causes of any distrust or skepticism, or what is the rationale for their support?
4. What groups or individuals can influence each party profiled?

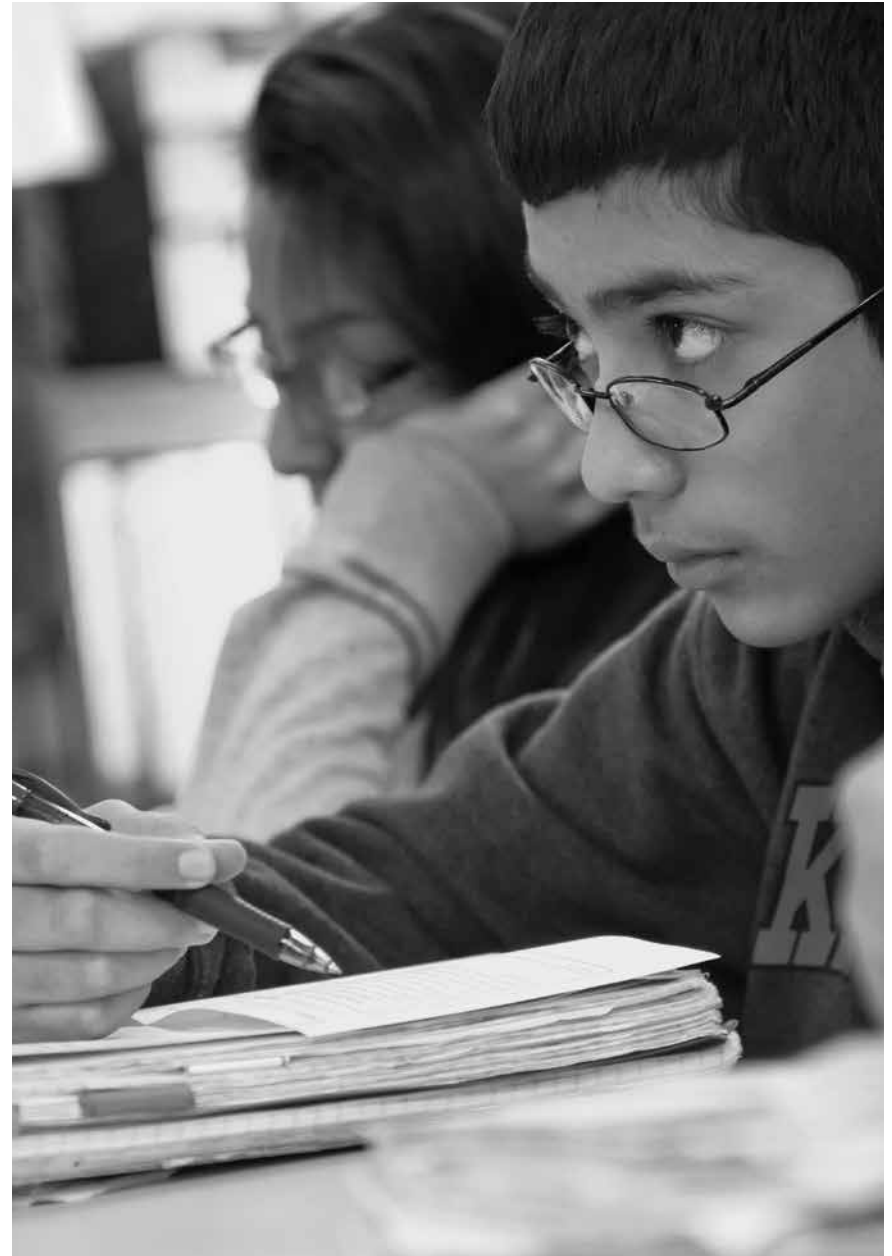
It is important to be as honest as possible in outlining the perspectives of each party involved. For example, if tensions on race and class affect people's perceptions of the school system, note them as forthrightly as possible. Creating this type of map in advance helps ensure thorough, specific communication efforts and inclusive change efforts. The map also anticipates various group's potential reactions so that authorizers and operators are better positioned to build trust, relationships, and productive dialogue. Sample ecosystem maps can be found [here](#).

Designing the Process with Community Input

In addition to incorporating community involvement in the specific implementation steps of school restart, several cities have approached restart work from a larger-scale perspective at the outset. They created a guiding coalition of community members that advises the district and/or authorizer on setting up the restart authorization process itself. Community members help weigh the pros and cons

of different timelines and approaches to this work while sharing their perspectives about the needs of their neighborhoods and community. If done well, this sort of community engagement can generate more support for the process in general as well as a greater sense of urgency across the city for dramatic intervention and change in schools.

However, this approach carries risks. If the conversation with the community goes poorly, sparking restart opposition, authorizers and policymakers may find their options more limited. Thus it is especially important to set clear parameters up front about what decisions are being made and how the input will be used. For example, at the outset of the conversation, authorizers and policymakers could say, “Our city will address the needs of students in our lowest-performing schools by pursuing dramatic change efforts at X number of schools and feeder patterns throughout the city. Dramatic change includes . . .”. This signals that change itself is nonnegotiable, and at a set scale—setting up the process to seek community input on the “how” instead of the “what.” See **Step 1: Envision** for more details. See [here](#) for examples of community engagement to actually design the process to restart schools.



RESTART AUTHORIZATION STEPS & RECOMMENDED TIMELINE

FIGURE 1. OVERVIEW OF PROCESS STEPS



Key Steps in the Restart Process

This guide is organized around a series of steps that generally run in sequence, though some of the steps overlap and/or are split into two parts depending on context. A detailed version of the recommended timeline, including the rationale for the sequence of steps, can be found [here](#). Authorizers and operators share primary responsibility for many of the steps; third parties may guide certain steps in situations where there are organizations with the ability to lead the work. The steps:

- 1. Envision:** Conduct broad community conversation about the vision for student success, and commit to comprehensive intervention for low-performing schools (including restarts)
- 2. Identify:** Identify general needs (2A) and then specific list of schools (2B) for restart
- 3. Engage:** Engage community around the general (3A) and then specific (3B) vision for the restarted school, and empower school communities to participate in the restart process
- 4. Recruit:** Recruit operators and publish general needs for restart providers

- 5. Approve:** Receive, evaluate, and approve operator applications for general restart needs
- 6. Match:** Articulate specific site-based requirements, review match applications, and match restart operators to closing schools
- 7. Accountability:** Establish performance expectations and terms in a contract
- 8. Transition:** Support planning time for restart operator and oversee transition work
- 9. Post-Opening:** Monitor progress, celebrate success, and remove barriers for new school

Community engagement occurs *throughout* the entire process. In this guide, we provide community engagement recommendations within designated subsections of each process step. In addition, community engagement is the primary focus of **Step 1: Envision** and **Step 3: Engage**. The detailed [timeline](#) on page 14 attempts to illustrate some of the most important overlaps. For example, **Step 4: Recruit** can and should occur simultaneously with the three prior steps. In fact, a strong operator recruitment strategy can be an ongoing process.

The Recommended Restart Authorization Timeline

Establishing a strategic timeline lays the foundation for success in a school restart initiative, and outlining the ideal timeline at the outset improves transparency and clarity for everyone.

Ideally, the timeline will:

- Support ongoing authentic community conversations, so that decision-makers seek input prior to making key decisions
- Provide sufficient time to review applicants against criteria with restart-specific components
- Provide as much planning and preparation time as possible for the school operator from the moment they are confirmed as the replacement to the school's opening
- Allow for distinctly separate steps of “identifying the school that will be restarted” and “matching a qualified school operator to the needs of the students”
- Announce the replacement school decision in advance of enrollment and/or school choice deadlines that apply to families and students
- Provide lead time and flexibility so that decision-makers are not forced to match a provider that would not be a good fit because there's no time to find another

Other factors will influence and constrain the timeline:

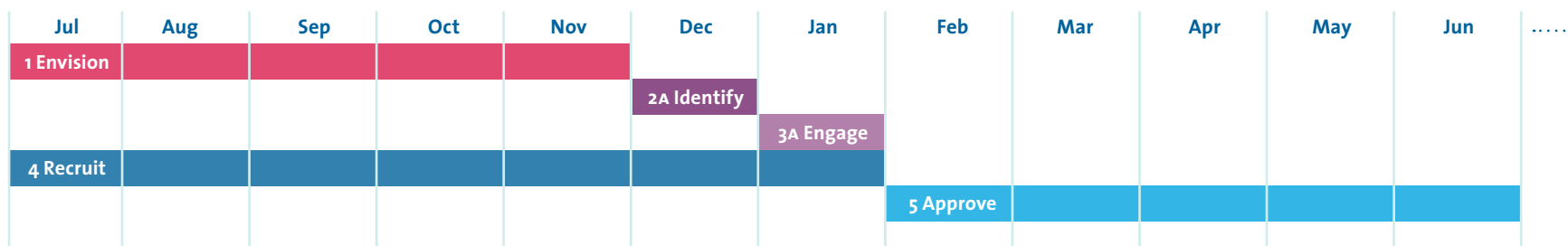
- Timing of the release of academic results data that directly affect the identification of the school that will be closed and restarted
- Grant or supplemental funding deadlines and requirements (such as School Improvement Grants)
- If the closing school is district-run, collective bargaining agreement provisions on employment terms such as notice periods and work hours
- District or authorizer budget timelines that govern when and how budgets should be prepared to show how base-level student funding will be expended
- Lead time required for needed facility renovation or repair work

Publishing a transparent and strategically aligned timeline sets the stage for informed and authentic community engagement. A strong guiding timeline will address community engagement touchpoints throughout the process so that community members can easily see when, where, and how their voices will be heard. The recommended timeline that follows can be adjusted to fit specific contexts. Although many of the authorizers and operators contributing to this guide have followed timelines with less time for planning, communication, and decision-making, they consistently stress the value of starting earlier and making decisions earlier in the school year in order to promote the success and sustainability of the restart initiative.

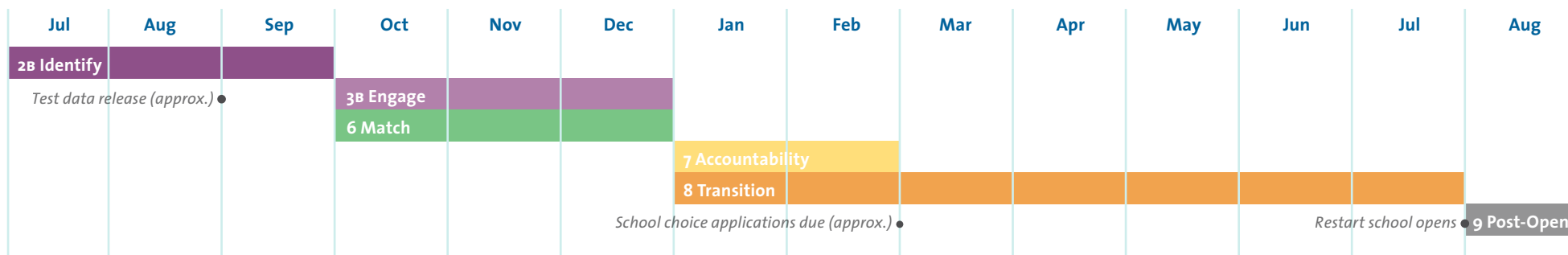
FIGURE 2. RECOMMENDED TIMELINE FOR RESTART AUTHORIZATION PROCESS

STEP	NAME	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
1	Envision	Conduct broad conversation on vision for student success and commit to strategic intervention (once every 3–5 years)
2	Identify	Identify general (2A) and then specific (2B) needs for restart
3	Engage	Engage community around general (3A) and the specific (3B) vision for replacement schools
4	Recruit	Recruit operators and publish general needs for restart providers
5	Approve	Receive, evaluate, and approve restart operator applications
6	Match	Articulate specific site-based requirements, review match applications, and match providers to closing schools
7	Accountability	Establish performance expectations and terms in contract
8	Transition	Support planning time for restart operator and oversee transition work
9	Post-Opening	Monitor progress, celebrate success, and remove barriers for new school

24 TO 12 MONTHS PRIOR TO RESTART Engage with community, recruit and approve a pool of qualified restart operators



12 TO 0 MONTHS PRIOR TO RESTART Identify schools to be restarted, match to qualified operators, and support transition



The “Lame Duck” Phenomenon

Many authorizers express concerns about the “lame duck” phenomenon. The concern revolves around the belief that if a decision to close or restart a school is announced too early in the school year, then the staff and families in the school will disengage rapidly and, in the worst case, leave the school before the school year ends. The experiences of several authorizers and operators in our sample⁹ suggest that this concern does not always bear out in staff and student behavior. In practice, some authorizers report identifying a school for closure as early as 15 months before the final school day, with only minimal staff and student attrition—most of it in summer. Charter operators and/or districts can consider the strategies in Figure 3 to minimize staff and student attrition.

Several authorizers note the positive impact that a matched restart operator can have on the existing low-performing school when they are provided open access to staff, students, and families during the transition.

Denver’s Process for Early Identification of Potential Restart Schools

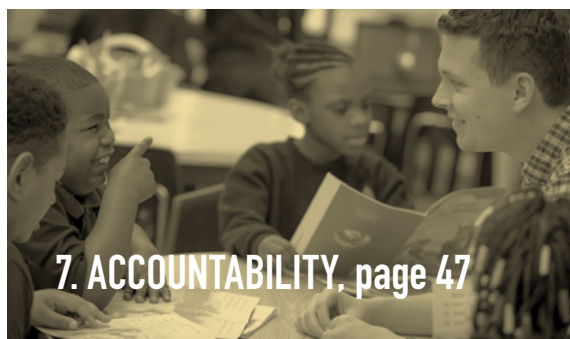
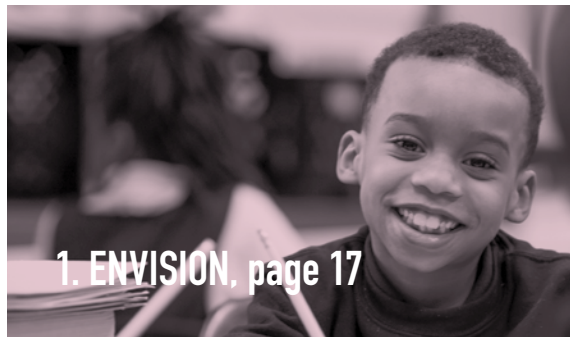
In Denver Public Schools, decisions about closing low-performing schools are made up to 18 months before closure. This provides time for a competitive process to identify a restart operator and for the community to weigh in repeatedly. In the final year of operations, some closing schools have experienced a positive bump in performance. Learn more [here](#) about the DPS process.

FIGURE 3. STRATEGIES TO MINIMIZE WITHIN-YEAR ATTRITION IN IDENTIFIED RESTART SCHOOLS

Staff Attrition	Student Attrition
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Offer bonuses to teachers who complete the school year 2. Clearly communicate the interview and hiring process for the incoming school 3. Support teachers through the new position search and transition 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide supplemental services such as tutoring and interventions at the closing school through the end of the year 2. Engage families in envisioning and planning for the incoming school 3. Adhere to any existing protocols that limit intra-year student transfers to instances of demonstrated need (for example, the student actually moves homes) 4. Provide preference or guarantees for existing students to enroll in the restart school 5. Maintain clear and consistent communication with families so that they understand the process and don’t mistakenly believe that there will be no school available to them

9. See Acknowledgments page for a list of authorizers, operators, and other organizations that contributed insights about the restart process in their respective communities.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH RESTART AUTHORIZATION PROCESS STEP





1 ENVISION SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- A broad conversation with the community to define a vision of success for all students in all schools will establish common expectations for what students should be able to do to succeed in college and career.
- Communities are more likely to support dramatic school change such as restarts when community members feel urgency to improve the status quo and are encouraged to redefine their expectations for what students and schools can achieve.
- Restart initiatives are more likely to be successful in meeting the needs of students and to achieve sustainability if the process for implementing restarts is developed with community input.



ENVISION: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Unlike other steps in this guide, the Envision step is not part of a recurring cycle that takes place every year, or with every “round” of restart decisions. It is a periodic process step—every three to five years, for example—that establishes aspirational goals for student success and a commitment to and process for dramatic improvement in low-performing schools. The Envision step encompasses many strategies, not just restart, to improve school performance and begin to identify the rationale to apply one strategy versus another.

Establish a Vision for Student Success in Public Schools

Restart initiatives should be connected to a broader vision for student success that articulates the community’s expectations for developing college- and career-ready students and the role of public schools to meet these expectations. Without this connection, restarts may be viewed as a punitive action taken against low-performing schools or even against community neighborhoods. The vision for student success can be embedded in a school district’s or charter authorizer’s multi-year strategic plan.

In the absence of a strategic plan that was developed with community input and includes restarts as part of a comprehensive strategy, authorizers should pursue a community envisioning process that sets high expectations for public schools and creates demand for transformative change in low-performing schools. Authorizers should use multiple means to gather input from families and community members, including public surveys, focus groups, community forums, and discussions with community leaders. Ideally, the envisioning process will:

- **Establish restarts as a viable strategy among school interventions.** Identify restart as a priority school turnaround strategy when the right conditions are in place (conditions such as having a high-quality restart operator, at a time when school closure is not viable, and to preserve school assets and adequate facilities).
- **Set priorities for student success.** Identify what knowledge, academic skills, character traits, and academic milestones are most important to the community, and how these priorities will be measured.
- **Focus on great schools.** Establish an overarching goal centered on great schools as defined by the student success measures. The plan should be agnostic about school type (such as charter, district, turnaround) and instead focus on what great schools look like and communicate a plan to work toward that.
- **Elevate expectations for low-performing schools.** Even in very low-performing schools, families and school communities often believe their school is OK as it is (“The principals and teachers care about our kids. This is a great school”). Authorizers must work to elevate expectations for what students can achieve by highlighting local and national schools that succeed with low-income or otherwise disadvantaged students.
- **Create urgency for dramatic improvement.** Raise awareness of school performance data (aligned to student success measures) and a shared understanding that the community can and should be demanding more of its schools.
- **Create broad public awareness and support.** Summarize the vision in a publicly accessible, widely disseminated document. Similar to a comprehensive strategic plan, the vision should provide a framework for communicating and explaining the rationale for authorizer strategies and initiatives.

Denver: The District Strategic Plan as a Call for Bold Interventions in the Lowest-Performing Schools

Denver Public Schools published its “Denver 2020: Every Child Succeeds” strategic plan in 2012. The plan’s goal for 2020 is to establish “great schools in every neighborhood” with 80 percent of students attending a high-performing school, as measured by the district’s school performance framework. The plan was developed with extensive community input, including multiple community meetings, surveys, staff gatherings, and focus groups. The plan did not specifically identify restarts as a core strategy for achieving the 2020 goal, but established a vision for school excellence as the foundation for bold school transformation initiatives that included school restarts, closures, and the creation of innovative, autonomous schools. Learn more [here](#) about the process for developing the Denver strategic plan.

Design the Restart Process with Community Input

After establishing a vision for student success, authorizers should consider how community input can inform the authorizer's process for implementing restarts, closures, and internal turnarounds. In addition to incorporating community input in the specific implementation steps of school restart, several cities have created a guiding committee of community members, which first advises the school district and/or authorizer on setting up the restart authorization process itself. If done well, it can generate community support for the restart process, and increase the sense of urgency across the city for more dramatic intervention and change in schools.

Even when authorizers commit to a prominent community role in restart decisions, they may hesitate to invite community input on the design of the process. As highlighted in *Building Family and Community Demand for Dramatic Change in Schools*, several factors may lead authorizers to deprioritize community input into the restart process¹⁰:

- **Time:** Collecting community input and building trust takes time. Authorizers feeling an urgency to put a restart process in place may view community input as unnecessary given competing priorities. However, the additional time spent up front in collecting community input on the restart process will often minimize or avoid later delays that arise from individuals, organizations, and community leaders who feel disconnected from important decisions about local schools. Furthermore, a well-designed and appropriately staffed community engagement process can be achieved relatively quickly, such as in three to four months.
- **Relinquishing control:** By seeking input in the restart process, authorizers give up some control over the design of the process. This poses real and perceived risks that the input process will result in misaligned recommendations, and that the process will be politicized and gamed by staunch restart proponents and opponents. Authorizers can minimize these risks by running a transparent and well-organized community input process.

- **Community resistance:** Community members will likely have legitimate reasons to be skeptical of a restart initiative, including previous failed reform efforts and a history of poor communication. Although inviting community input into the restart process will bring these concerns to the surface, it helps authorizers to better understand the reasons for resistance and design a process to overcome these barriers.

The process for collecting community input should be tailored to the authorizer's operating context, but authorizers should consider the following guiding principles and structural recommendations:

- **Develop a broad committee of community members and leaders.** The committee should be large (such as 25 to 50 members) and diverse in profession, age, ethnicity, neighborhood, and other variables, to get diverse perspectives and build a base of community leaders that can serve as restart champions. The range of participants can include parents, students, teachers, school and district leaders, and representatives from churches, community-based organizations, elected officials, university partners, education advocacy organizations, and labor unions. Although expecting unanimous committee support for a plan is unrealistic, soliciting guidance from such a broad range of leaders will increase overall awareness and support for the process, and will clarify concerns and opposition. In some cases, authorizers might first align support with key leaders in the community (such as the mayor, superintendent, governor, or city council), and work with them to establish a broad, diverse, and representative committee.
- **Clarify nonnegotiables.** The envision work should be grounded in "nonnegotiables" about the restart process to ensure that process recommendations are aligned with the initiative's overall objectives. For example: schools performing below a minimum threshold must be considered for restart intervention, high school restarts should be accompanied by turnaround interventions (such as

10. Public Impact: Brinson, D., & Steiner, L. (2012, May). *Building family and community demand for dramatic change in schools*. Chapel Hill, NC: Public Impact. Retrieved from http://publicimpact.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/building_demand_for_dramatic_change_in_schools-public_impact.pdf

restart, transformation, or turnaround) at low-performing feeder schools, restart schools must continue to serve the same students/neighborhoods, and school operators must have a record of success with similar student populations.

- **Structure the conversation.** Authorizers should establish a very organized process to collect input from a large and diverse committee. The process will likely need to include subcommittees with a defined scope and timeline, guiding questions, membership norms, effective subcommittee leadership, and mechanisms for approving and communicating process recommendations.
- **Manage expectations.** The authorizer must clearly communicate that the role of the committee is to provide recommendations only: The authorizer makes the final decisions about the design of the restart process. The authorizer must also commit to a transparent process for communicating committee recommendations and its final decisions.
- **Use the committee for engagement throughout the restart process.** Committees formed in Step 1: Envision can serve as the foundation for the Engage step once restarts are contemplated in specific areas of the city. When the efforts become more focused on a specific neighborhood, the committee can be reformed to add leaders and interested parties from the neighborhood while preserving the continuity of the broader conversation.
- **Sustain the committee to evaluate progress.** In addition to providing initial recommendations for the restart process, the committee (or a representative subset of committee members) can periodically evaluate and publicly report on the progress of the school restart initiatives. This type of ongoing committee could be supported to provide an annual report to a board of education or state superintendent about progress toward specific performance improvement goals.

Philadelphia's Renaissance School Advisory Board (RSAB): Collecting Citywide Input to Design a School Restart Initiative

As part of its five-year *Imagine 2014* strategic plan, the School District of Philadelphia committed to a process to transform historically underperforming schools into successful neighborhood schools. In order to collect broad input on a restart process for turnaround schools, the district established a citywide Renaissance School Advisory Board (RSAB) of more than 60 community leaders, educators, parents, education advocates, and district leaders, which provided recommendations on three critical restart elements: school identification, turnaround provider recruitment and selection, and community engagement and communication.

The RSAB set up the Renaissance schools process, leading to its first set of seven district-to-charter restart schools in fall 2010. By fall 2016, the Renaissance schools initiative will have led to the restart of 23 schools through six implementation cycles. The initiative has persisted despite targeted opposition and severe public education funding reductions.

Find resources and information about what lessons the RSAB learned [here](#).

Go to www.schoolrestarts.org to download the process guide, review authorizer resources, and learn more about school restarts.



2 IDENTIFY SCHOOLS FOR RESTART

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Restarts require significant investments of financial resources, political capital, and opportunity costs — so the stakes are high for picking the “right” schools for a restart intervention.
- Authorizers should carefully compare a restart to other interventions that may provide better options for students in failing schools — including school closure, consolidation, or internal turnaround.
- Once schools are identified for restart intervention, school communities are placed in a temporary state of uncertainty. Done well, the identification step will move community conversations expediently through the stages of anger and frustration to the stages of inquiry and support for the new restart operator.



IDENTIFY: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Use a Two-Step Process to Identify Restart Schools

The process should identify not only low-performing schools, but also schools with characteristics that are favorable to a restart. For many authorizers, this requires a two-step process to first identify an initial set of eligible schools based on objective, quantitative metrics, then narrow the list to those schools that are best suited for restart based on specific qualitative and quantitative measures. As noted in the recommended timeline, the initial list of eligible schools can be identified as early as 20 months out from a potential restart (as follows in Step 2A). By the September before a restart—11 months ahead—the list of eligible schools should be narrowed to specific schools (as follows in Step 2B). Figure 4 (page 24) highlights the purpose, essential questions, and sample measures for the two steps.

The identification process must be done with transparency and consistency in order to gather input and build community support for decisions, and to encourage operators to apply for restart opportunities. Note that this process should be addressed in Step 1: Envision—soliciting input from community members about selection criteria.

Step 2A: Identify initial set of restart-eligible schools

Step 2A should apply quantitative threshold criteria that define what schools are included and excluded from a potential restart. Authorizers should first identify a set of eligible, lowest-performing schools that have not demonstrated adequate academic progress, using an objective academic performance benchmark aligned to the state accountability system or another publicly published performance index, as measured over time.

Many states have created a minimum expectation for school performance that helps define the threshold criteria for intervention (such as the lowest-performing 5 percent, an “F” grade on the state accountability system, or meeting closure

criteria at charter renewal cycle). In addition to this minimum threshold, authorizers may consider if any additional inclusionary or exclusionary criteria should apply to the eligible list of schools. Inclusionary criteria might involve considering additional schools that feed a low-performing middle or high school. Exclusionary criteria might include schools that commenced a turnaround intervention within the past three years, or schools with recent years of high student academic growth.

Step 2A should produce a list of schools or simply regions within a city which need dramatic intervention. This list is shared with operators in Step 4: Recruit to encourage them to participate in Step 5: Approve. On the recommended timeline, Step 2A occurs 18 months or more before the new school opens. The list of schools is narrowed in Step 2B, taking into consideration the latest student test data that emerges in the late summer as well as other measures identified in **Figure 4** on page 24.

Limitations of the 5 Percent Threshold for Identifying Schools

Many state accountability systems established through ESEA flexibility waivers identify the lowest-performing 5 percent of schools as a target for turnaround intervention. Many states and districts use this, but it can limit authorizer flexibility to initiate a restart strategy that best meets a community’s needs. Most significantly, the 5 percent threshold may exclude other low-performing schools (in the bottom 10 or 20 percent) that feed enrollment in the bottom 5 percent. For example, a restart for a middle school in the bottom 10 percent may be critical to improving the bottom-5-percent high school it feeds. In this case the 5 percent threshold may restrict an authorizer’s options for initiating comprehensive turnaround interventions.

Role of Charter Boards to Self-Identify Restart as a Turnaround Intervention

A report from the NewSchools Venture Fund and Public Impact on charter-to-charter restarts highlights examples where the governing boards of low-performing charter schools have voluntarily identified themselves as needing to go through a restart. Charter restarts should not be last-ditch efforts to avoid closure, but should be a strategy that responsible boards and authorizers initiate when needed. The boards' decisions to pursue restarts were motivated by the desire to preserve school assets and better serve their students and families.

For this to be a viable approach to school identification, authorizers must establish strong, transparent accountability frameworks that provide governing boards with an incentive to choose a restart when school performance clearly puts them at risk for closure and non-renewal. It also requires the authorizer to develop systems to effectively evaluate and approve restart decisions. For more information about charter school self-identification for restart and the role of the authorizer, see the report [here](#).

interventions, their use may also subject authorizers to criticism about the decision process. Authorizers can best mitigate controversy by inviting community input during the Envision step on school identification criteria and by clearly communicating the factors behind school identification decisions.

Step 2B should produce a list of schools that an authorizer intends to match with pre-approved restart providers. The matching process is described in Step 6: Match an Approved Provider to a Specific Restart School.



Step 2B: Finalize schools for restart intervention and operator matching

Within the list of eligible lowest-performing schools, authorizers must determine which schools are best suited for a restart, rather than closure, transformation, or turnaround interventions. Ideally, Step 1: Envision already defined the criteria and process to select the most appropriate school intervention strategy.

Those criteria rely on measures that may include qualitative and subjective criteria; see Figure 4 (page 24) for sample criteria. Although these types of criteria can be essential for making smart decisions about restart and other turnaround

FIGURE 4. RESTART SCHOOL IDENTIFICATION PROCESS: ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS AND SAMPLE MEASURES

IDENTIFICATION STEP	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SAMPLE MEASURES
Identify subset of restart-eligible schools (Step 2A)	Are schools performing below a minimal threshold of academic performance for 3 or more years?	■ State accountability framework, or other publicly recognized school performance index for multiple years' worth of data
	Do schools meet any exclusion criteria that should eliminate restart as an intervention?	■ Status as an alternative placement school (such as drop-out recovery) ■ Specific high levels of student academic growth in the past 1 to 2 years ■ Recent entry into intensive turnaround intervention status
Finalize schools for restarts and operator matching (Step 2B)	Does school need to remain open in order to provide enough seats in the public school system?	■ Total number of students in public school system versus total school capacity without the restart ■ Projected student enrollment versus seat capacity for the geographic region of the city
	What percentage of students can be absorbed into higher-performing public school within reasonable distance to students' homes?	■ Total number of students enrolled in the school versus total number of available seats in higher-performing schools near students' homes
	Can the school maintain financially viable levels of enrollment?	■ Current and projected level of student enrollment compared to a minimum threshold to achieve break-even operating costs immediately or in two or three years ■ Potential number of eligible students that reside in the catchment areas for the school versus break-even enrollment threshold ■ Current per-pupil cost (including facility maintenance, utilities, and other overhead expenses) versus comparable schools in the region ■ Cost analysis of closing the failing school and consolidating services to nearby schools
	Can the school facility provide an adequate learning environment?	■ Estimated capital investments necessary to provide a facility that is competitive with other school options in the community ■ Financial health of the school (for charter restarts); such as available fund balance to support facility renovations, equipment
	Is there an adequate supply of restart operators to provide high-quality options in a school-operator matching process?	■ Number of potential restart operators based on authorizer recruiting/approval efforts
	Does a restart intervention work with the k-12 feeder pattern in a manner that is likely to support student achievement and create stability of education options in the community?	■ Pros/cons for recruitment of high-performing high school restart operators ■ Pros/cons to consolidate community engagement efforts in a targeted community by selecting multiple neighborhood schools ■ Pros/cons on stability and efficiency of existing feeder patterns
	What broader impact will a school restart or closure decision have on the neighborhood?	■ Long-term history of the existing school in serving the same neighborhood for many years and the importance of the school to the fabric of the neighborhood community (especially relevant for closure versus restart decision)

IDENTIFY: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Ideally, the authorizer solicited community input on the criteria for identifying restart schools as part of Step 1: Envision. If not, then authorizers should consider a smaller-scale community conversation to establish the criteria that will be used to identify schools for restart. Since the general criteria in Step 2A are often set at the state level (such as a school in the bottom 5 percent), the community conversation typically focuses on the criteria that will be applied in Step 2B to narrow from the list of eligible schools to specific schools for restart (as opposed to an alternate intervention).

Communicate School Identification Decisions and Next Steps

At both steps of the identification process, authorizers should implement a detailed communication plan to announce schools, so the community can understand the next steps in the restart process and get engaged in it. This is especially important for Step 2B, when identification decisions are finalized—which can be a flash point in the process, as the restart suddenly feels real. The following guidelines apply to the communication strategy now, as well as future steps in the process:

- Be organized around the *why*: to improve outcomes for students
- Identify *who* communicates the information to *whom*, *when* information is shared, and *what* are the key messages for specific groups
- Include a detailed list of the interested parties, such as parents, staff, elected officials, advocacy organizations, and members of the media, who need targeted communication and outreach about school identification decisions
- Share information in a variety of ways, including flyers sent home with students, automated phone messages, newsletter announcements, community bulletin notices, door-to-door visits, letters, and emails
- Plan to communicate in multiple languages, both written and in-person, if needed
- Establish spokespeople among parent leaders (if possible) to help explain the decision

Recovery School District (RSD) Criteria and Decision Process for Restarts and Closures

Between 2010 and 2014, the Louisiana Recovery School District (RSD) made decisions to close or restart 34 New Orleans schools that were under RSD jurisdiction—including charter schools and schools directly operated by the RSD. The RSD used a two-step process to identify schools for restart, which aligns with this guide's recommendations. The Step 1: Envision threshold criteria is based on the state's A–F school grading system, and Step 2 is based on criteria to determine the optional intervention strategy (closure, restart, internal turnaround) based on factors such as the relative performance of schools, capacity of public schools to meet student enrollment levels, student access to other high-quality schools, and supply of willing and qualified operators.

Based on experience, the RSD has determined that outright school closure—in addition to restarts—can be an effective and positive strategy for improving school options, as long it pays adequate attention to transparency and equity, and in situations where the authorizer can offer priority enrollment for students into higher-performing schools.

Learn more about the RSD's school identification and intervention decision process [here](#).

- Clarify the process's next steps, including what opportunities exist for parents, students, staff, and community members to get information
- Clarify the impact on employment status for the current school's employees
- Establish clear expectations for staff, students, and families to stay focused on the current students' education

Communicate Nonnegotiables About the Restart Process

Authorizers must effectively communicate what the restart identification decision means for students and families. Families, students, and staff will be understandably anxious about the changes and the uncertainty about the outcomes of the restart process. The authorizer should help ease this tension by communicating a clear set of nonnegotiables about the students that the future school should serve, such as:

- Guaranteed enrollment for existing students in the future school, supplemented by priority enrollment in another higher-quality school in the neighborhood
- Enrollment preferences or expectations for the future school to serve students from a specific area, such as the current school's enrollment zone
- Continued service to current special student populations, including English language learners (ELL) and students with disabilities. There may be options concerning *what* serves the students—such as the future school or the district/LEA—but service to the students may be nonnegotiable
- Openness of the process to a variety of school operators, including charter operators





3 ENGAGE SCHOOL COMMUNITY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESTART PROCESS

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Students and their families are most affected by restart decisions and thus need to be actively engaged in the process.
- Families are more likely to send their children to the restart school if they are allowed to contribute to the vision for it.
- Families and students want and deserve to be heard, and they already know many of the things that could be better in their schools.
- An engaged school community can help create conditions for a smooth restart transition process.



ENGAGE: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The Engage step builds upon the broad, citywide community conversation that began in Step 1: Envision. In this step, authorizers should work directly with school communities, including current and future families and students, staff, community leaders, and organizations actively supporting the school. The Engage step mirrors the Identify step and is therefore also split into two parts (3A and 3B) as noted in the **recommended timeline**. The first part of community engagement work starts as soon as the authorizer has announced the list of eligible schools for restart. The second part of the work commences as soon as specific schools are confirmed for restart.

Authorizers should:

- Establish a clean break between the identification of the low-performing school that will close and the high-performing restart school
- Support school communities in establishing high expectations for student performance at the future school
- Provide guidance, training, and resources for the school community to participate in later steps of the restart process
- Carefully work with community members to get feedback and input without handing over final decision-making

Because these schools all need significant improvement of some sort, authorizers should publicize which turnaround interventions, including restart, it will consider, and how it will make decisions. Community input on a vision for the future schools can provide information about school improvement priorities that are incorporated into steps 4 and 5, operator recruitment and approval. Then, when the authorizer identifies a final list of confirmed restart schools in Step 2B: Identify, it can shift to engaging the community on its priorities for a restart operator and helping the community increase its knowledge and skills to participate in Step 6, matching school and operator.

Defining who represents the school community is a challenging component of this work. Although families of current and future students are the most important

audience, authorizers should work with many individuals and organizations who care about the school's success.

Guiding Principles for School Community Engagement

Doing engagement right depends on the political and social environment of the community, and the role that the school community plays in later steps of the process, such as when operators are approved and matched to specific schools. But authorizers should all follow some basic principles:

Principle #1: Communicate and commit to an engagement process. Authorizers must say what they are going to do and do what they say. Failure to follow through on commitments can generate community opposition and frustration among potential restart operators. Authorizers should tailor their approach to the roles and responsibilities of school community groups in decision-making based on the local context. Some authorizers may focus on providing clear, timely information about the process and decisions, while others will also create a mechanism for community groups to make recommendations about operator matching decisions. Regardless, authorizers should explain up front how the community's opinions and preferences will affect decisions. Furthermore, the authorizer should seek to confirm that the community members truly understand the process. Surveys, comment cards, and other means of gathering feedback can check for this understanding throughout the process.

Principle #2: Clarify outputs. The authorizer should define a set of expected outputs from the engagement process that *could* include:

- A vision of student success at the school (for example, the knowledge, skills, and personal attributes that will be prioritized for students)
- Recommendations regarding elements of the school's history and legacy that the community wants preserved, such as mascots, names, and events
- Community priorities for special programs, such as before-school and after-school care, sports, tutoring, and wraparound supports

- Feedback on the criteria that will be used to approve restart operators (Step 5: Approve) and to match operators and schools (Step 6: Match)
- Feedback reports on the restart progress and school performance as measured by the accountability framework (Step 7: Accountability)

Regardless of the outputs identified, the authorizer must continually explain and reinforce how community input will contribute to the process. Make promises only if they can be kept—and if that means an authorizer can make no promises, state that clearly and repeatedly.

Principle #3: Encourage solutions, not opposition. Solicitations for community input should focus on the future state of the school, helping community members imagine and support something better for their students. The process can solicit input about priorities for the future school, but should not invite school community members to advocate for the status quo when it comes to the identified school. During the application and matching process, operators should be told what those priorities are, so they can directly address them.

Furthermore, the engagement process should *not* create an opportunity for the school community to restrict the types of organizations that operate a school (such as “we don’t want charters”).

Principle #4: Prepare community to participate in and support the match process.

Authorizers or others must provide sufficient guidance and training so community groups and whole-school meetings contribute productively to the process. Authorizers may not have the capacity or credibility to directly provide assistance, but they should invest in resources as needed to ensure that these groups have adequate assistance. Common areas of support include:

- Recruitment and selection of members for school community groups
- Access to facilities and resources to conduct school community forums and meetings of interested groups
- Meeting facilitation support (such as providing recommended agendas, or skilled and credible facilitators)

- Exposure to high-performing schools and innovative school models through school visits and case studies
- Guidance on specific steps, such as training on the use of evaluation rubrics or how to interpret school performance reports

Many authorizers and operators alike stress the importance of exposing community members to high-performing schools that serve similar students. To make these visits (in person or virtual) successful, look for opportunities to have parents from the visiting and hosting schools interact directly. Find ways for visiting parents to speak with students in the host school. Provide parents with some sort of template on which to record impressions and questions from these visits.

Principle #5: Work with organizations that have credibility with communities.

Authorizers may have a credibility gap with school communities participating in a restart process, often from real or perceived conflicts of interest if the authorizer oversees the existing low-performing school and also decides on the restart operator. Authorizers may also not have employees with enough time or skills to work with the community. Authorizers should then consider having someone else work with community groups and lead whole-school meeting forums. The authorizer should still be present and actively engaged in the dialogue with community.

Philadelphia School Advisory Councils

Since the Renaissance Schools restart initiative began in the 2009–10 school year, the School District of Philadelphia’s community engagement strategy has used school advisory councils at each school to identify improvement priorities and provide school-operator matching recommendations. Philadelphia has many resources to guide and support these councils, but has found it difficult to support them as required by district policies and expectations. Learn more and see the resources [here](#).

Structural Options for School Community Engagement

Authorizers should use a variety of means to collect community input, including:

Whole-School Meetings or Forums. This approach focuses on convening any and all families and community members who would like to be involved in a series of meetings that take place throughout the restart process. Meetings are typically larger and conducted as a forum, although we recommend including small-group times within these meetings to collect more targeted feedback and reduce opportunities for disruptive grandstanding for and against the restart. Attendees may be asked to complete surveys to share their views, either at or subsequent to the meeting. These forums can also provide opportunities for a designated school community group and/or restart operators to hear from the whole school community.

School Community Group. A community group, with 10 to 25 members depending on its mandate, should consist mainly of parents and guardians of students who would be eligible to attend the new school. Members may also represent community interest groups or others who operate programs in the school. In forming a school community group, authorizers should seek to make the group as representative as possible. In some cases, volunteers will come forward who accurately represent the different populations served in a specific school site or region of the city. In other cases, authorizers will need to ask individuals to participate because they represent specific segments of students. If the existing parent association or parent council serves as a starting point, be sure to add members who represent new perspectives such as future parents, parents who were not traditionally involved in the parent association, and leaders of organizations that work with the school.

Community Leader Engagement. Authorizers should also work closely with community leaders who have power, influence, and credibility with the school community, such as elected officials, advocacy organizations, community-based organizations, and clergy. Authorizers should focus on sharing details of proactive communication about the restart process and work to build support for the decisions and decision-making process. Authorizers should create a “map” that identifies key leaders, their level of support and opposition, and strategies to build support.

A Model for Community Collaboration in Colorado

A partnership among the Colorado Department of Education, The Colorado Education Initiative, and The Learning Accelerator created a toolkit that helps school districts understand the importance of community collaboration as a key to innovation. The Community Collaboration for School Innovation toolkit shows districts how to pull the community in and get its guidance, rather than pushing information onto it. The free guide includes case studies from Colorado school districts, video tutorials, and templates, and aims to accelerate school improvement efforts that reflect community priorities. See more [here](#).

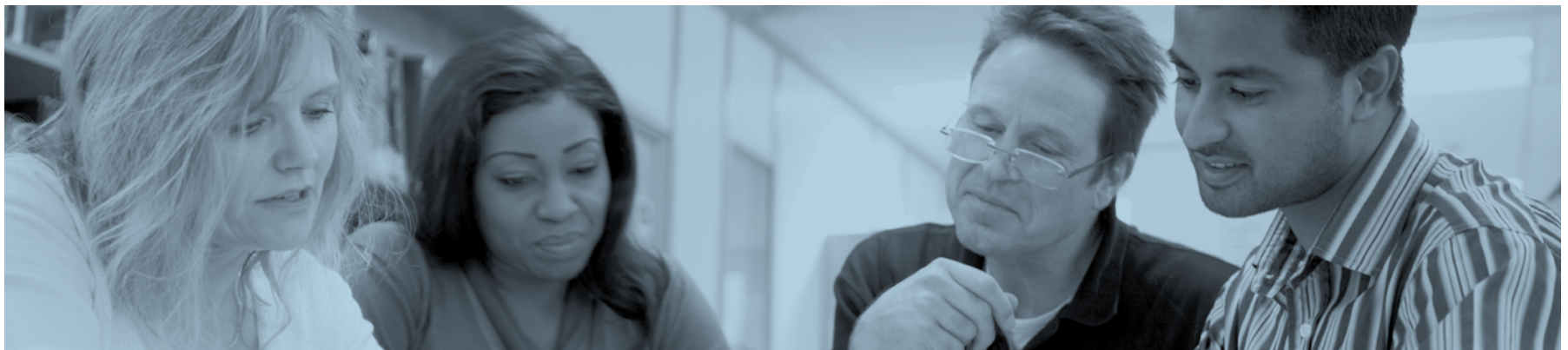




4 RECRUIT HIGH-QUALITY PROVIDERS ALIGNED TO NEEDS

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Recruiting and cultivating talented leaders and high-performing school operators is essential to the success of restarts and the ability to scale up this approach.
- A limited number of operators have successfully undertaken school restarts. Not all of them are willing or able to conduct additional restarts. Developing a strategic approach to high-quality operator recruitment helps address the key challenge of supply.
- Authorizers cannot take a “build it and they will come” approach, but must take steps to create the policy conditions that support successful restarts, and create an authorization process that provides operators with adequate information, time, and resources.
- Authorizers may need to work with other organizations such as charter school or school leader incubators that can help build operator supply.
- Authorizers may need to cultivate an appetite for restart among successful new-start charter operators in the community and/or connect them with support organizations and resources to embrace a school restart.



RECRUIT: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Although operator recruitment is here as a distinct step, recruiting and cultivating high-quality restart operators is an ongoing, multiyear endeavor. Authorizers can play both direct and indirect roles to build up the numbers of leaders and organizations with the desire and ability to implement restarts successfully. Authorizers should develop a multiyear strategy for operator recruitment that includes three elements:

- Creates supportive restart operating conditions
- Cultivates a pipeline of high-quality restart operators
- Includes an invitation or “call” for school operators to communicate capabilities and desire to implement school restarts in the community

Charter Operator Recruitment in Louisiana

In Louisiana, a coalition of organizations including the Recovery School District, Louisiana Department of Education, Jefferson Parish Public School System, New Schools for New Orleans, and New Schools for Baton Rouge worked together to recruit high-performing charter school organizations to operate schools in Louisiana. The coalition held a Future Schools Summit in January 2013 that brought in outside charter school organizations, and provided a forum to highlight Louisiana’s favorable conditions for school operators and opportunities to open new and restart schools. The collaboration also produced operator recruiting and marketing materials for a coordinated process of recruiting and cultivating high-quality charter school organizations. Learn more [here](#).

Establish Supportive Restart Operating Conditions

Authorizers should work with state and local policymakers to establish conditions that support operator success. This is a long-term endeavor that extends well beyond the process steps in this guide, but is a critical component of a restart operator-cultivation strategy. Authorizers should work to continuously improve and promote conditions that make restarts an attractive replication strategy for high-performing operators. Many of these conditions reflect policies in NACSA documents on charter school replication, such as *Replicating Quality: Policy Recommendations to Support the Growth of High-Performing Charter Schools and Networks*. NACSA emphasizes investments in CMO incubation and accelerator funds, and differentiated application and renewal application processes for high-performers. But several conditions apply especially for attracting and supporting operators willing to take on the challenge of restarts:

- **Adequate time for operators to respond and plan.** A well-designed restart authorization process will lead to greater success in recruiting local and national operators. The process must provide operators with sufficient time and information to evaluate restart opportunities, respond to an authorizer application, and prepare for restart transitions. Restart operators interviewed for this guide frequently cited the lack of sufficient time between their selection and the school’s opening as one of the biggest impediments to success, and a key factor in deciding whether to apply for and proceed with a restart opportunity. By committing to a timeline that provides operators with at least eight months to focus on the transition, authorizers will increase the number of operators willing and able to participate. The process timeline in **Figure 2** on page 14 illustrates a model sequence of steps that enters a transition and planning period after a December decision to match the restart operator with the identified low-performing school.
- **Transparent and fair accountability systems.** Step 7: Accountability highlights characteristics and advantages of a differentiated restart accountability system. Such a system can help support operator recruitment efforts.
- **Special education funding and support.** Many low-performing schools have high concentrations of students with disabilities and special needs. To create

the conditions for a successful restart, authorizers should ensure that incoming restart operators have fair access to the full breadth of financial resources and human services needed to serve these students. Sometimes the authorizer will need to work with a school district to ensure that targeted federal funds flow through to the restart operator. Or the authorizer may broker arrangements to ensure that specific student services are delivered by the local school district or by an outside service provider. If an incoming restart operator does not yet have experience working with students with more severe types of learning disabilities, the authorizer might further negotiate a transition period of a year or more where the students receive specialized services through a joint effort of the existing program team and the restart operator.

- **Multi-site authorization.** Operators considering a restart in a community new to them typically prefer somewhere they can open multiple schools over time to achieve economies of scale. Given the need to include community input on operators, authorizers can't promise future restart schools. But authorizers can remove uncertainty from the approval step of the process by granting operators multi-site authorization, contingent on meeting performance expectations over time. Multi-site authorization can also open opportunities for operators to build scale through new school openings. NACSA provides specific recommendations for multi-school authorization; learn more [here](#).
- **Expanded access to startup and turnaround funding.** Authorizers should pursue several strategies to increase public and private grant funding for restarts, including:
 - Ensure that state allocations of Title I funding set aside for comprehensive school support and interventions allow matched restart operators to receive funds during the “planning year” of the restart and ideally subsequent years as well.
 - Ensure that U.S. Department of Education Charter Schools Program startup funding can be combined with other Title I school intervention funding for restart operators (for district-to-charter and charter-to-charter restarts).

- Pursue local and national philanthropic support for restart startup costs and investments that support restart operators, such as human capital investments and advocacy.

- **Access to facilities and funding for facility upgrades.** District authorizers that own and manage facilities should establish clear policies that support incoming restart operators with high-quality school buildings. Statewide or independent authorizers should exert influence and actively negotiate on behalf of incoming restart operators to gain access to facilities. In a charter-to-charter restart, authorizers of all types can help negotiate a mutually beneficial arrangement between the closing school and the incoming restart operator to ensure that the facility continues to serve students in the community.
- **Opportunity to enroll students to ensure program integrity and fiscal sustainability.** When the closing school serves a specific geographic boundary or enrollment zone, authorizers should evaluate whether enough students reside in that boundary to support the success of the school. If the boundary or zoned enrollment is insufficient to fill classrooms, authorizers should try to ensure that additional students can “choice in” to the restart school. If an authorizer is having trouble recruiting operators because of an enrollment boundary, then the authorizer should consider whether the boundary could be adjusted in subsequent years and still meet the needs of the community. In many cases, operators see having a boundary as advantageous since it gives them a baseline or default enrollment.

Cultivate a Pipeline of High-Quality Restart Operators

Well before inviting operators to apply, authorizers should assess how many potential high-quality restart operators exist locally and develop a recruitment strategy accordingly. Recruitment efforts can be ongoing and should intensify at least four months before an invitation to apply.

In some cases, authorizers should work with other organizations to analyze existing operators and do some of the actual operator recruitment work. The recruitment

strategy should reflect learnings from any recent successes or failures in local restarts and the community support for those restarts. At a minimum, authorizers should consider the following variables when assessing restart operator capacity:

- 1. Local Experience.** Operators who have run or are now running a school in the same city (or sometimes same state) can be considered to have local experience. This brings many advantages, including structures to recruit local educators, connections with local communities and support organizations, academic models aligned to state standards, and knowledge of local politics and the public education landscape.
- 2. Restart Experience.** Operators who have undertaken a school restart before have experience with the challenges of school turnaround. The many important lessons learned through that experience can help ensure that the school model is well suited to students who start out far behind and that the operator's approach to parent and community engagement focuses on building trust.
- 3. School Experience.** Operators who have the existing infrastructure to run schools with demonstrated results can be considered to have school experience. Many authorizers prefer to work with restart operators who are already running schools; likewise, few operators propose to open their very first school as a restart. However, some people may combine enough skills and experiences to simultaneously create a new operator and undertake a restart successfully.

Very few places in the country have an existing supply of operators with high degrees of experience in all these variables — local, restart, and school experience. Therefore, authorizers have an opportunity to develop recruitment plans that address local strengths and gaps. For example, an authorizer may have many operators with local experience who are running successful schools but who have not undertaken a restart. The authorizer may then create a two-pronged strategy: 1) attempt to support or encourage local operators to gain the skills and ability to undertake a restart and 2) reach out to national operators who have a record of success in a restart that serves students with similar demographics and needs. Recruiting non-local operators will affect community engagement throughout the process,

so authorizers may need to focus on creating multiple opportunities for community members to become familiar with these operators well before making high-stakes decisions to match these operators to a school.

Recruiting Restart Leaders in Massachusetts

Restart interventions in Springfield, Mass., will operate under a governance structure and operating conditions that resemble both restart and turn-around models. Because there aren't enough restart operators, the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, a new city-state governing entity for the lowest-performing schools, is recruiting and developing leaders to conduct a restart under its Founders Fellowship program. Learn more [here](#).

Authorizers should also evaluate how local resources and organizations can support or even implement an authorizer's recruitment strategy. Even authorizers with access to resources that could fund these recruitment activities often struggle to meet their obligations to objectively approve restart operators and hold them accountable, while simultaneously investing resources in current and future operators. The operator recruitment plan should consider the roles that new and existing third-party organizations can play to increase the supply of operators. Organizations such as New Schools for New Orleans, New Schools for Baton Rouge, Teacher Town in Memphis, the Philadelphia School Partnership, Empower Schools, NewSchools Venture Fund, and the Charter School Growth Fund have played critical operator cultivation support roles for the restart authorizers evaluated for this guide. Key functions for local organizations can include:

- 1. Human Capital Development Programs.** Some prospective school leaders and teachers have access to local or national professional development programs that focus on school turnarounds. An authorizer can improve its own recruitment efforts by understanding these training programs and being able to share information about their resources with operators who are new to school restarts.

- 2. Local or National Philanthropy.** Authorizers should maintain connections to local funders who have an interest in school turnarounds, looking for opportunities to connect them with promising operators that are new to restarts or to the area. Authorizers should also look for national funders who can provide both experience and resources for school restarts.
- 3. Local Leaders.** Authorizers should try to get elected officials and community leaders to play an active role in recruiting local and national school restart operators.
- 4. School Incubator and Support Organizations.** Authorizers should explore whether any local organizations can lead the operator recruitment efforts and/or invest in new school incubation and support services. Support organizations can establish multiple tiers of operator investments, including grants for organizations and leaders to plan and prepare for restart opportunities, startup grants to directly fund new restarts, and capacity-building grants and services that allow operators to strengthen the elements of their school operating model deemed critical for future restart opportunities, such as leadership development or expanded curriculum. Separating recruitment and school support

from authorizing can create a cleaner, more efficient recruitment process. However, the authorizer must coordinate with the support organization to maintain a shared understanding about the scale and scope of the need for school restart work.

Tennessee Charter School Fund: Expanding the Supply of Restart Operators through School Incubation and CMO Expansion

The Tennessee Charter School Fund used federal grants and private philanthropy to fund the Tennessee Charter School Incubator and a separate, Tennessee-specific CMO investment fund. The Tennessee Charter School Fund was instrumental to the growth of the state's charter sector between 2010 and 2015. Several of the charter school operators in the Achievement School District received critical funding and technical assistance from the incubator and investment fund. Learn more [here](#).



Release an Invitation to Restart Operators Before the Application Process

Authorizers can bolster the recruitment process by releasing a public invitation for qualified operators to submit letters of interest to open as turnaround/restart providers before the formal application and approval process. Depending on the timing of the school identification step(s), the authorizer may or may not be prepared at this point to release specific school names, as opposed to a general region or area of the city. Separating the initial invitation, or “call,” from the formal application release can provide an earlier mechanism for recruiting operators and measuring potential operator supply.

An invitation to operators should include the following elements specific to a restart:

- General information about the policies and practices conducive for restart operators
- Details about when the application will be released and the expectations for interested operators throughout the application process
- If specific restart schools have not yet been confirmed, an explanation in the invitation of how and when the identification step will take place, with what criteria
- High-level student demographic data of eligible restart schools (those identified in Step 2A: Identify) so that operators can begin to determine whether they are a good fit
- If available, detailed information about the needs of students in the specific schools that will be restarted (of identified schools in Step 2B: Identify)
- Community priorities for the school from Step 1: Envision and Step 3: Engage
- Clearly stated policy expectations, if they call for restart operators to serve an enrollment boundary or accept students throughout the year
- Grant funds or supplemental funds available to support school restart efforts, such as access to discounted or free facilities
- Nonnegotiables, if any, related to phase-in/phase-out restarts versus whole-school restarts

RECRUIT: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Building Momentum with the Community

Consensus from community engagement and dialogue should be included in the invitation to charter operators to apply for restart opportunities. Ideally, representatives from the school community group established in Step 3: Engage assist in sharing the “call” or making invitations. If appropriate, the group’s members could be listed in an appendix.

To maintain momentum with the community, the authorizer should send several updates once the “call” is released, and consider inviting one or more members to participate in the application review (see Step 5: Approve).

Denver’s “Call for Quality Schools” to Recruit Potential Restart Operators

Denver releases a “Call for Quality Schools” each December. The document profiles school performance in different regions of the city to illustrate where new schools should go if they want to provide a better option for underserved students, without taking a stand on charter versus district-run schools. It also profiles parts of Denver that need new schools due to population growth. It sometimes includes specific school restart needs, as in this guide’s Step 2B: Identify, and other times includes more general restart needs as in Step 2A: Identify. See a sample [here](#).



5 APPROVE SCHOOL OPERATORS MEETING QUALITY CRITERIA

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- The prospects for a restart's success depend largely on the quality of the operator.
- Identifying the unique aspects of restart in the application approval process will improve chances that the restart succeeds.
- Clear, published criteria for school approval ensure that all parties (parents, students, staff, and applicants) understand what is expected so they can participate in the process.



APPROVE: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Separate Steps to Approve and Match

Many authorizers have found it useful to tease apart two decisions in the operator selection process: 1) approving an applicant on its merits, and 2) matching an approved applicant to a specific school site for restart. Separating the decisions has several advantages:

- Application receipt, review, and approval can take place during the usual window for all charter applications, and this window generally occurs at least one year prior to opening, potentially giving the school operator additional time to plan and hire before the restart
- It provides additional opportunities for community engagement and time for community members to become more familiar with the operators
- Establishing a list of approved operators before matching them can decrease the time between school identification and school matching, providing additional time for restart operators before opening
- Authorizers can consider a consolidated application from an operator with an established record who proposes to open more than one restart campus over time, at sites not yet determined; this creates efficiency for both the authorizer and operator while also addressing one of the key challenges of an inadequate supply of qualified restart operators
- Providing additional time for matching can allow for the release of additional academic data which may affect the decision

Modifications to Standard Approval Criteria for Restart

In evaluating applicants, authorizers should modify their standard quality criteria to reflect the capabilities and experience necessary for restarts. Modifications should address the following operator attributes:

- Ability to conduct school restarts and any existing record of performance in restarts
- Ability to serve students with greater needs and/or disabilities
- Flexibility to serve students from a neighborhood boundary or enrollment zone
- Record of effectively engaging communities in support of a school restart or turnaround; and/or experience and ability to actively engage parents in the school program
- Willingness to add local representatives to its governing board if it does not yet operate in the state and/or city of the intended restart
- Evaluation of specific multi-school capacity if the operator plans to oversee more than one campus, such as:
 - Overall financial sustainability and health of the organization beyond a single campus
 - Capacity or investments in central services that benefit more than one campus
 - Ability to support rapid growth in staff and services at multiple sites
 - Evidence of strong systems for academics, school culture, and operations that improve likelihood of successful replication.

ASD Multi-Step Approval and Matching Process

The Tennessee Achievement School District uses a multistep operator approval and matching process to allow for early recruitment of restart operators and to ensure operators' commitment to and capacity to meet the needs of eligible restart schools. Phase 1 involves evaluating prospective charter operators against quality criteria to approve them to open future schools. The ASD refers to the next phase as the school transformation process, in which pre-approved charter operators are matched to schools that will be closed and restarted. Learn more and see examples of ASD tools for applications and the match process [here](#).

Massachusetts Preapproval of Restart Operators

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) plays an important role in recruiting and approving restart operators for the state's lowest-performing schools and districts. DESE uses an open, competitive bidding process to maintain a list of vendors that are approved as high-quality providers of educational support services for low-performing schools, including school turnaround operators that lead school restarts. Districts can use this list when selecting restart operators for low-performing schools identified through the state accountability framework. In addition, DESE will use this list of providers when selecting restart operators to run the lowest-performing schools or districts that fall under state receivership. The Massachusetts DESE approach represents a unique collaboration between the SEA and LEAs, in which the local district makes restart school-operator matching decisions, and the SEA assists (and ultimately approves) the operator recruitment and approval process. Learn more [here](#).

Approval Process for Operators that Replicate Proven Models

Consistent with the **NACSA Principles and Standards** for school approval, authorizers should consider the following practices when evaluating operators with an established school who are seeking to replicate:

- Differentiate the application and approval process for operators with a demonstrated record of success to encourage replication
- Provide a conditional approval for operators that apply for more than one site; make the opening of the future sites conditional upon the performance of the first one or two schools, recognizing that it takes two or more years to show noticeable progress in student proficiency, although value-added measures of student growth can often show progress in the first year
- Consider additional due diligence in the review process to visit existing school sites, if applicable



APPROVE: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Community Engagement in Approval Process

Consider what role parents and the school community could play in the application review and approval process. Some authorizers include a parent representative on the application review committee. Others arrange for an external review member from a neighborhood community organization. NACSA recommends including an external reviewer on all charter application review committees, to help authorizers ensure fidelity to published standards.

At a minimum, the authorizer should share information with the public about the application process and explain how and when decisions will be made on applicants. If potential restart operators are just a subset of total applications received, then the authorizer should be explicit in all press releases and other communications that many different types of applications are accepted simultaneously, and the number of applications received is not tied to decisions about which schools will be restarted.





6 MATCH AN APPROVED PROVIDER TO A SPECIFIC RESTART SCHOOL

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- The experience and competency of an operator should align with the specific demographics and needs of the students to be served.
- This is a critical step in the community engagement process and presents an opportunity for the authorizer and school district to establish lasting support for the new school.
- Community members need access to potential restart operators to learn about their programs; in turn, the operators need to learn about the wants and needs of the school community.



MATCH: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

The matching step invites operators to be considered for placement at a specific school that has been identified for restart. Ideally, schools to be closed and replaced with a new restart school are identified by the end of September the year before (see the [recommended timeline](#)). The matching process should kick off at that point with an open invitation to qualified school operators to be considered in a competitive process to become the restart operator of an identified school. An authorizer will, preferably, have preapproved qualified operators during the spring (steps 2A, 3A, and 4) or even from a prior year's application and approval cycle. However, it is possible to collapse the application, approval, and match processes into one simultaneous process if necessary.

Matching Criteria & Application

The first step in the matching process is to publicly share the closing school's student needs. The matching process runs concurrent to engaging the community on the matching decision (described in both Step 3B: Engage and the community engagement section of Step 6: Match). Authorizers should clearly explain all expectations for school operators at the outset of the matching process, including:

- Any requirements for operators to participate in community forums or gatherings and the schedule for them
- Student enrollment expectations and options, such as taking on a boundary for the long term or providing preference for existing students only in year one, and whether operators can enroll choice-in students along with preference or boundary students

The matching application should ask qualified school operators to submit a narrative and evidence for how they will address the following (when applicable):

- Experience serving the student demographics at the identified school, with particular focus on any potential at-risk populations such as high-poverty, high-mobility, non-native English speakers, or students with individualized education plans
- Ability to take on a whole-school versus phase-in restart

- Any modifications or customizations to the fundamental school plan, such as schedule, calendar, staffing, or curriculum, that will be necessary to address the school's specific student needs
- Willingness to accept students throughout the year as part of a geographic enrollment zone or boundary
- Approach to engaging with the community served by the closing school, including any connections and partnerships with the community (current or future) and plans to connect with the community throughout the process
- Approach to hiring and whether the operator will consider hiring existing staff and if so, under what criteria and process

Tennessee ASD: Match Application & Process

The Tennessee Achievement School District has always used a specific application for operators who seek to match with a school that has been identified, per our Step 2B: Identify. The match application does not ask an operator to restate its entire school model. Rather, operators identify specific changes or enhancements they intend to enact based on the specific needs of the students in the identified school. Learn more about the match application and process [here](#).

The matching application should not ask the school operator to restate any aspect of its program which would remain the same as what was previously submitted in the general application and approval cycle. Instead, the operators should be focused on changes or additions to their program that will enable them to best serve the students at the identified site. Matching applications should be collected promptly—four to six weeks after release—to give the authorizer and community time to consider them.

Match Application Review & Decision-Making

The authorizer has the primary responsibility to accept and review match applications against the established criteria. Authorizers should seek authentic input and dialogue from the community in making the match decision. Without the community's support, the restart school will often fail in the long term, so it is important to provide more than lip service to the community dialogue (see more in "Match: Community & Communication Recommendations."

The restart operator also has several key responsibilities during the match application review process:

- Present a clear vision for how its model will meet the needs of the community's students
- Introduce the potential future leaders of the school, if identified already
- Actively participate in the community input process, as established by the authorizer
- Honestly consider requests or ideas that emerge from the community in the dialogue, and explain clearly why those requests can or cannot be accommodated

After the authorizer has reviewed the match applications and collected community input, the authorizer will make a recommendation to a school board or independent governing board about which restart operator to match with each closing school. The board will vote to approve or deny the match recommendation.

Baton Rouge RSD's Engagement Work during Match Process

The Baton Rouge Recovery School District invites parents and community members to forums to meet potential charter operators. This is in addition to having an Achievement Zone Advisory Board. Learn more about Baton Rouge's community engagement process and its forum feedback tool [here](#).

MATCH: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Input vs. Inform

The matching conversation is one of the most important components of the community engagement process for a school restart. The authorizer should decide up front the degree to which community members will provide input that influences the match decision. In the input approach, community members have an opportunity to weigh in on which of the restart applicants best meet their needs. In the inform approach, the focus is on sharing clear information about how the match decision will be made, such as who makes it and using what criteria. This guide encourages authorizers to seek as much community input as possible to build relationships between the restart operator and the community, and to provide the operator with useful information about the community's needs. If the authorizer cannot collect meaningful input from the community, then it should clearly articulate this and present as much information about the process as possible. Even when an authorizer embraces community input, the authorizer should communicate clearly per the guidance provided in "Informing Community Approach," page 44.

Collecting Input Approach

Collecting input from the community is not the same as suggesting that the community makes the decision. From a policy and statutory perspective, most jurisdictions explicitly confer decision-making rights to an elected or appointed public board or to a local or state superintendent. It would be misleading to suggest that the community makes the final decision; however, the decision-makers can and should consider community input. In the matching discussion with the community, authorizers should set up clear processes supported by rubrics and tools that provide community members with criteria and guidance. Authorizers could collect input through:

- **Organized focus groups or review panels.** In this approach, a subset of representative parents, community members, and students form a focus group to review the submitted match applications. In addition, the group may meet with the

applicant operators for a presentation and question/answer session. The group is responsible for developing a set of recommendations that may rank the applicants in order of preference, or simply identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of each applicant without making choices. The recommendations would go to authorizer staff members and/or be presented directly to the decision-makers, such as the elected or appointed board.

- **Open-comment forums or presentations with dialogue.** For the forums, some authorizers have found that hosting a series of smaller meetings can be more effective than one large meeting. These might include a forum for the students and families who will someday go to the school and a separate forum for the students and families who attend it now and would be eligible to return. Many strategies may help manage a balance of talking time, such as submitting questions on cards, prepping members of the existing parent association with questions in advance, and collecting general impressions as exit tickets.
- **Surveys or written petitions.** It may make sense to distribute a survey to eligible returning/enrollment families seeking input about the type of school that they would like to see opening. Or the survey may address specific extracurricular activities that parents particularly value, such as sports or clubs, or services that they need, such as care before and after school. Or the authorizer can work with operators to collect petitions signed by community supporters and/or letters of support from community organizations.
- **Public comment to decision-makers.** Nearly all elected boards have a standing mechanism for members of the public to provide comment at their meetings. While this is a technical mechanism to collect input, it is often intimidating to parents and can attract a limited subset of interested people. It is also often scheduled too close to the actual vote to be a useful mechanism to influence the recommendation.

Regardless, authorizers must be clear with community members up front about *how* their input will influence the ultimate recommendation and decision. Sending a consistent message that the community does not get to make the decision, but can influence it with feedback, will help maintain the integrity of the process.

DC Public Charter School Board: Role for Sitting Charter Board in Match Process

In charter-to-charter restarts that have taken place in Washington, D.C., the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB) has empowered boards of low-performing charter schools to initiate the operator match process. In this approach, DC PCSB provides a list of high-quality restart operators to the board of the low-performing charter school. DC PCSB then encourages the board to take a leadership role in the process to recruit and match with an operator to restart the school. Learn more about charter-to charter restarts and charter boards [here](#).

Informing Community Approach

Regardless of the degree to which the community provides input on the match decision, it will be important to share thorough information about the decision-making process. Many of the same tactical strategies outlined above may be possible with a different frame around what is discussed and the purpose of the meeting. To best inform the community about the upcoming decision, consider the following:

- **Organize community spokespeople.** If the closing school's parent association is supportive, work with its members to serve as ambassadors to the community about the match process. The restart operator applicants may already have a set of parents and community members who are willing to speak on behalf of the school, and these groups may be able to share information with other affected parents.
- **Share information in a variety of ways.** To ensure that accurate and consistent information about the process reaches parents and community members, communicate through multiple modes. It is not enough to post a few items on websites and send home a flyer to the student households. Consider also using automated

phone messages, newsletter announcements, postings in community bulletins, door-to-door visits, letters, emails, and other outreach. Ensure that communications sent home from the closing school are consistent and aligned to the messaging about the match process.

- **Connect with community leaders.** As part of a thorough effort to share information, authorizers should target outreach to community leaders, reaching out to everything from neighborhood groups to churches to social services providers. Make sure that these leaders understand why and how new schools are being approved to serve as replacement for closing schools, and where parents can get more information.

Camden's Approach to Engaging Community

The Camden City School District and the New Jersey Department of Education collaborated to open “Renaissance Schools Projects” in Camden, N.J. Renaissance schools are contract schools operated by high-performing charter management organizations. The school district handles the school identification and operator matching process, subject to state DOE approval. Camden focused on informing and engaging communities on restart decisions through community meetings, door-to-door outreach, and tight coordination with local community leaders. Camden incorporated community input on matching criteria into the operator request-for-proposal process, rather than soliciting input on final matching decisions. It focused its outreach efforts on communicating with and gaining support from community leaders. Learn more [here](#).

Once the Match Decision is Made, Communicate!

Regardless of whether the authorizer embraces an input or inform approach, it is critically important to have a thorough communication strategy ready once the match decision is made. Similar to the communication recommendations for Step 2's school identification, this strategy should:

- Be organized around the *why*: to improve outcomes for students
- Address how the decision aligns with the goal of improving student outcomes and with the published criteria for making the decision
- Identify *who* communicates the information to *whom*, *when* information is shared, and *what* are the key messages for specific groups
- Enable close coordination between the authorizer, matched operator, and current school operator to support consistent and timely information to school communities
- Include a detailed list of the interested parties, such as parents, staff, elected officials, advocacy organizations, and members of the media, who need targeted communication and outreach about restart matching decisions
- Plan to communicate in multiple languages, both written and in-person, if needed

In addition, the communication plan should use the two strategies outlined above under “Informing Community Approach” of organizing community spokespeople and sharing information in a variety of ways. The communications must address anticipated questions from parents such as:

- How will the enrollment process work? Do students default to the new school? If not, what form needs to be completed? What if parents want to attend a different school?
- Will any of the teachers in the existing school continue? Will parents have any input into the hiring process for the teachers?
- Who will the principal be?

- Will the school day schedule change? Will busing be available? Will before-school and after-school care continue (or commence)?
- Will students have to wear uniforms? How much do they cost?

These are detailed questions that the chosen school operator should be prepared to answer. The operator should share answers with the authorizer in advance to ensure that all have access to this information, and the authorizer and operator should agree on an approach for the operator to share this information directly with parents at the existing school.

Operator Perspective: UP Education's Communication Tool

UP Education Network has developed a particularly thorough student enrollment and family and community relations guide. This tool includes sample press releases from the operator and supports leadership of the restart school throughout the match and transition steps. See the tool [here](#).





7 ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONTRACTING FOR RESTART SUCCESS

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- A differentiated approach to school accountability acknowledges that restarting a failing school is more complicated and challenging than opening a new school; well-designed restart accountability systems will hold the incoming operator accountable for the academic *growth* of students, regardless of starting point.
- Establishing appropriate accountability metrics will ensure that school operators have sufficient time to demonstrate progress and that authorizers have a mechanism to intervene when the restart has failed to produce good results for students. In a restart, these metrics aren't always wholly academic at the outset.
- Establishing a differentiated accountability system gives parents clearer information about whether the new school is making expected progress versus the same information about students being far behind that they've already seen.



ACCOUNTABILITY: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Outline Realistic and Sufficiently Aggressive Performance Expectations

One of the most challenging questions to answer is “how much and how fast is enough?” when it comes to school turnarounds. Since the introduction of supplemental funding for the lowest-performing schools, state and local education agencies and school operators have sought to understand what’s possible, at what rate, in a successful turnaround effort. It’s especially important to students and families who have already been failed once (or twice, or three times) by prior schools to have transparent information about the pace of improvement in the new school.

Many researchers have sought to confirm whether specific turnaround efforts in cities and/or states have yielded statistically significant improved academic outcomes. Several of these studies do not separate out the intervention approaches, instead looking at students’ results overall for turnarounds, transformations, and restarts. In the academic research, when positive results are identified, they are often stated in terms of standard deviations from a matched control group—not a measure that is practical as part of an accountability framework.

All agree, however, that turning around failing schools is hard and takes time. In this section, we recommend that authorizers and operators establish a differentiated performance framework to use in a school restart (and ideally, used for all school turnaround or transformation activities as well). **The differentiated framework is not about lowering the bar;** rather, it adds nuanced measures of progress that reflect the real challenges of school turnarounds, adjusting the weights of different measures to ensure that student growth is the primary focus in the restart’s early years. This guide does not include numeric benchmarks or specific academic performance outcomes as recommendations. Rather, we focus on a set of guiding principles and key questions for districts and operators to use in context-specific discussions about both academic and operational expectations.

DC Public Charter School Board Performance Framework

In Washington, D.C., the charter authorizer is independent of the school district and uses a performance framework that already prioritizes student growth over absolute proficiency. In addition, the accountability system does not assign a tier or rating to a school in its first year of operation. In this context, this authorizer does not see the need to customize expectations for school restart operators. Learn more about the framework [here](#).

Guiding Principle #1: Focus on Growth

The operators and authorizers we spoke with in preparing this guide generally agreed that student growth should be weighted more heavily than absolute proficiency as measured by a standardized test. But how much growth should be weighted (some say as high as 100 percent in the early years), and for how long it should be considered more important than proficiency, met with less consensus. Some authorizers already measure school performance using a framework that heavily weights growth, while others have no consistent performance framework for schools, period. Among growth measures, it’s important to consider the following:

1. **Value-Added Measures.** When possible, it’s better to establish *how much* a student in a restart grew academically compared with a similar student elsewhere in the city, state, or nation. This assumes that students are taking the same standardized assessment across a large sample and that the assessment can show growth and/or improvement even when a student is below grade level. “Adaptive” standardized assessments can more accurately measure growth from different starting points because they modify questions to get harder or easier as a student answers correctly or incorrectly. All things being equal, one should expect to see “above average” growth in students who are served well by a school restart compared with matched students.

- 2. Change in Proficiency is Not the Same as Growth.** Many school districts and states track the number of students moving from one performance band to the next on a standardized assessment. This is not an ideal measure of student growth. The performance bands typically involve somewhat arbitrary distinctions among test cut scores. Using this measure creates an incentive for schools to focus on those students who may be on the cusp of moving up a performance band.
- 3. Disaggregated Data by Student Demographics.** Many cities and states are embracing school performance frameworks that create distinct measures to ensure that at-risk students are being served well. On principle, these jurisdictions want to ensure that the performance of certain student subgroups is not obscured by the performance of traditionally well-served groups of students. Disaggregation may occur along the lines of race, ethnicity, native language, special education status, and/or poverty. Such a disaggregated analysis helps clarify how well the most disenfranchised students are being served and ensures that schools are not penalized in comparison with schools that may serve distinctly different groups of students.
- 4. Prioritize “Catch-up” Growth.** Most students in a restart school are likely to be below or significantly below grade level in core subjects. To address the critical importance of catching these students up, some accountability frameworks further analyze student growth by subsets of students who are below and/or significantly below grade level. Where possible, growth targets are set such that these students outperform their matched peers and, further, that they gain more ground than just the expected year’s worth of progress. From an operator’s perspective, ensuring that the accountability framework adequately values this aspect can be key in terms of recognizing a restart’s real progress and success.

Colorado Student Growth Model

The state of Colorado has established a strong system for comparing student growth among matched peer groups. The matching process involves considering multiple years of test scores for each student and grouping similar students together to provide a percentile rank for each student’s test score growth. This growth percentile aggregates across the entire state and factors into the statewide performance framework for schools and districts. This approach could work on a nationwide level with PARCC or other tests. Learn more [here](#).

Data Challenges for High Schools

Standardized assessment options in high school make it harder to measure growth as easily as in K–8. Math standards become content-specific and are not cumulative from year to year. States vary in their assessment protocols for literacy in 9th and 10th grades. College entrance exams generally provide a “point in time” analysis. Some assessments, like NWEA MAP, could assess growth, but they are not universally employed, and authorizers should be cautious about prescribing interim assessments that may layer on additional testing requirements and/or infringe on charter autonomy. Student growth in high school can also be approximated by comparing high school assessment results with students’ eighth-grade assessment scores. While it remains important to weight growth measures in a high school restart, it may be difficult to do so given these assessment limitations. Furthermore, some argue that because college- and career-readiness necessitates reaching a minimum benchmark, achievement measures must carry appropriate weight to judge a high school a success.

Guiding Principle #2: Phase In the Measures of Absolute Proficiency

Despite debating how and when, most operators and authorizers agree that the ultimate goal is to have students reach proficiency in order to maximize their options for college and career. Given that, some argue that a school restart should show improvement in the degree of absolute proficiency over time. Many of the authorizers and operators interviewed for this guide considered three years to be the minimum before absolute proficiency measures should be weighted more heavily in a performance framework used for accountability. Rather than solely including absolute proficiency measures and indicators, consider the following approaches to refining proficiency measures in a restart performance framework:

1. Similar School Comparisons Based on Student Demographics. Compare academic proficiency rates among schools that serve similar types of students, and incorporate these measures into the restart performance framework. Ideally, cohorts of similar schools are identified based on student demographics, including: poverty, often as measured by students qualifying for free and reduced-price lunch; special education designation; English language learners; and student mobility (if available). If academic proficiency in a restart is compared to proficiency rates at schools serving similar percentages of at-risk students, by year three it is reasonable to expect that the restart school is performing at or above the proficiency level of its similar schools. Metrics that measure relative school performance among similar schools should be balanced over time with metrics that measure absolute proficiency, per the discussion that follows.

2. Phase In the Weighting or Percentile Performance of Absolute Proficiency Measures. Many argue that in the first year of a restart, absolute proficiency measures should not count toward an accountability rating. By the third year, authorizers generally advocate for weightings of 20 percent to 45 percent while some school operators are still reluctant to go that high. By the fifth year, most agree, absolute proficiency should account for 35 percent to 55 percent of an accountability rating. This recommendation assumes that schools that continue to serve a very high percentage of truly at-risk students, particularly high schools, are evaluated on an alternative education framework that adjusts the

measures and relative weightings. Another approach to phasing in expectations is to gradually introduce a measure of the percentile rank of the school among all schools in the district or state. This aligns to the expectation that restart schools should demonstrate increasing levels of proficiency and performance over time.

3. Disaggregate Data by Student Demographics. Similar to the growth measures, it is valuable to set targets for absolute proficiency and then evaluate whether those targets were met among specific student groups. If these measures are phased in over time for a restart, it may also be helpful to consider comparative proficiency measures that look at the percentage of at-risk students who are proficient in the restart school versus other schools. There is consensus that the proficiency targets themselves **do not** change for the disaggregated groups of students. Rather, evaluating this data is important to ensure that schools serve students equitably, and comparative data can help confirm real progress in a restart.

Tennessee ASD's Performance Expectations for a School Restart

The Tennessee ASD has developed a school performance framework designed specifically for restart. Over time, the expected value of the school's percentile rank increases, reflecting expectations for improved student proficiency. Learn more [here](#).

Guiding Principle #3: Differentiate by Grade Levels Served

Different assessments measure students at different grade levels, and there are often different expectations for growth and proficiency as well. High school performance frameworks must consider scores on college entrance exams such as the ACT and SAT as a key indicator, since these are fundamental benchmarks for success in college and career. However, a high school that inherits students who

are two to three levels behind grade level may not be able to reach the same level of absolute academic achievement, so performance frameworks should be flexible enough to encourage serving at-risk high schoolers. This grade-level differentiation in performance-based accountability should exist in both restart and non-restart schools. In elementary school, the assessments for the first years of education, such as pre-K to second grade, differ from the standardized assessments available in third grade and beyond. However, it's just as important to measure and track student progress in the early years. For these considerations, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach, with different expectations based on the assessment data available. Restart schools should be assessed by transparent metrics and given adequate credit for the progress that is made at the outset of the restart. In this sense, all the other guiding principles still apply, but the key recommendation is that the performance frameworks themselves adjust to reflect the grade levels served.

Guiding Principle #4: Ensure That Students Have Equitable Access

If a restart is supposed to serve a historically underserved group of students, then authorizers must use metrics to evaluate and show that the incoming provider is actually serving the targeted students—the students of the closed school—and hold them accountable for this. This is true not only in year one, but also in subsequent years, particularly if the restart school serves a boundary or geographic area. In evaluating whether a restart is providing equitable access to students, consider:

- 1. Re-enrollment Rates.** Particularly in the restart's first year, it's important to evaluate the percentage of eligible students from the closed school that actually enroll in the newly opened school, including enrollment of student subgroups such as special education and ELL. The expected re-enrollment rate may depend on whether the newly opened school actually receives any "default" enrollment, such as through a boundary or other enrollment mechanism. Beyond the first year, re-enrollment continues to be a valuable indicator about two key questions: are parents generally satisfied with the school, and is it serving all students, not counseling out students?
- 2. Attendance and Persistence Rates.** While attending school does not guarantee a great education, not attending school generally guarantees a weak education.

Many jurisdictions across the nation use attendance data in their school performance frameworks. For a restart, school operators often focus first on changing the school culture, and improved attendance rates are an early indicator of progress. Student persistence extends beyond attendance to look at whether students transfer and/or drop out of a school during the year. Of course, some students transfer simply because their family moves, which does not reflect the school's performance. However, abnormally high numbers of intra-year transfers and/or dropouts can signify that something is going wrong at the school.

- 3. Discipline Data.** Several states now stipulate the types of offenses that merit suspension and/or expulsion, and some states monitor suspension data as part of a statewide performance evaluation. The notion that kids should stay in school, whenever possible, is widely shared by operators and authorizers alike. However, the degree of acceptable "out of school time" is widely debated. For restarts, consider a trend analysis that compares the suspension/expulsion data from the closed school to the newly restarted school. Over time, the expectation is that suspension and expulsion rates will decline, if they were in fact unusually high at the former low-performing school. In the first year, these rates may actually increase given challenges in shifting the school culture. Furthermore, consider analyzing this data for disproportionality by race or ethnicity, as compared to prevailing discipline rates in a broader cross-section of schools.

Guiding Principle #5: Make Data Digestible

Parents, students, and community members deserve to know in an easily comprehensible way whether their school is making progress. Likewise, operators deserve sufficient time to show progress with a group of students that the system has previously failed. Balancing these interests requires establishing a nuanced system that serves both purposes: school-based accountability for performance and empowering parents to make informed choices for their children. Many jurisdictions develop a publishable report card for schools that rolls up a lot of data to a more publicly digestible format. Parents get clear explanations on how to use the report cards, which are available in print and online. Underlying the public report card is still a high degree of nuanced analysis that ensures that schools are graded fairly. For a

restart, it's especially important that the incoming school not be painted as "failing" right out of the gate. A differentiated restart performance framework ensures that the report card can give credit where credit is due for the challenging task of school turnarounds.

Guiding Principle #6: Establish a Tiered System of Response

As with all school-based accountability, authorizers should make data-driven decisions for sanction and/or intervention according to a clear framework that schools understand up front. Not all performance measures are equally important. Furthermore, the weight of certain measures can and should vary over time, as noted in the guiding principle for academic proficiency measures. Authorizers should ensure that a clear system exists to notify operators when they have missed a performance benchmark. Additionally, authorizers should consider a full body of evidence before contemplating any strict sanction or possible revocation. The severity of an authorizer sanction should reflect the severity with which students are affected by an operators' failure to provide adequate educational services. What authorizers should do when the operator fails to meet a performance expectation is not specific to restarts, but is adjusted to reflect their specific challenges.

Beyond Accountability: Clarifying Roles, Expectations, and Funding in the Contract

The charter agreement or school operating contract is the primary mechanism to confirm understanding about the conditions, rights, and respective responsibilities of the authorizer and school operator. To support a smooth, clear transition process, authorizers should move quickly to settle final contract terms and MOUs (memoranda of understanding) as soon as possible after the operator matching process.

In addition to the standard best practices for a charter contract, the contract for a school restart should address:

- Rights that the incoming school operator will have during the transition period (before opening) to meet with parents, students, and staff, and communication protocols to reach these audiences
- Responsibilities and process for mediating conflicts between the closing school, new operator, and authorizer
- Process for the new school operator to obtain full and complete student records from the closing school
- Agreements pertaining to educational and social-emotional services for students with severe needs (as opposed to mild/moderate)
- Terms to purchase student services from the school district, if applicable, such as psychology, social work, nursing, occupational therapy, and physical therapy
- Facility use/lease terms, including who will pay for what now and in the future for building maintenance, janitorial services, utilities, and capital improvements, and how the incoming operator's needs and input will factor into decisions about capital improvements
- Delineation of who owns assets in the school building, such as curriculum materials, furniture, and equipment, and clear guidelines about which remain in the building and transfer to the restart operator.

The contract should also clearly articulate the equitable access to resources and funding for the school operator including restricted federal funds, local funds, mill levies and all other public sources of funding. Specific to restart, the authorizer and operator should agree on how the school may access applicable state education agency school improvement grants and/or charter school program start-up grants.

ACCOUNTABILITY: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Partnership with Community

The community has a clear, vested interest in the transparency and accuracy of the performance framework that is used to measure a restart's progress and success, so authorizers and operators should talk openly and frequently about the performance framework's rationale. Ideally, the dialogue in the Step 1: Envision will have included measurable goals for student performance that address both academics (such as test scores) and proxies for positive school culture (such as attendance, satisfaction, and attrition).

If the parties are in the midst of developing a new performance framework to use with school restarts, then they should actively engage the community through focus groups to discuss the metrics and target performance levels that will demonstrate

a restart's progress. If the framework already exists, then both parties play a role in explaining it to the existing family members to ensure that they understand up front how the school's progress will be measured.

The authorizer has a primary responsibility to share key information with the community about:

- When and where the annual performance reports will be published
- Informational meetings or resources for the community to better understand the performance reports
- Expected standards for school performance in a restart
- Privacy of individual student-level data

Additional recommendations regarding how the community can monitor progress are included in subsequent steps of this guide.





8 TRANSITION & PLANNING ACTIVITIES

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- The transition period can make or break a school restart in terms of gaining the trust and support of students and families and assembling a high-caliber team to staff the school.
- Done well, the transition will maintain stability at the closing school and ensure that students make as much academic progress as possible and gain interest in and enthusiasm about the restart provider.
- Done poorly, the transition creates a chaotic environment for parents and students, and affords opponents the opportunity to undermine and even potentially overturn the school restart decision.



TRANSITION: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Per the recommended timeline, the transition process should commence concurrent to the contract negotiation process and as soon as the school match decision is announced. Authorizers can play both direct and indirect roles in the transition process; how much they are involved depends on such things as the type of authorizer (such as district, independent, statewide); its capacity and staffing; the relationship between the authorizer and the school community; and the relationship between the authorizer and restart operator. For instance, if the school district is the authorizer, it will have significant control over the transition process and the level of communication and coordination between the closing school and the restart operator. If the authorizer is an SEA or a state turnaround district, the authorizer may not have the same direct local control and instead may focus on clarifying and monitoring the roles and responsibilities of the restart operator.

“In some ways our most nuanced work happens before the school opens its doors.”—Scott Given, CEO of UP in Massachusetts

Make a Public Shift From Evaluator to Partner

To support the successful opening of the school, authorizers should consider shifting from careful evaluation and decision-making to becoming a true partner with the restart operator. Once the decision is made, all parties involved in the process should come together to support it. In addition to the items already discussed in the Match and Accountability sections, the authorizer should support the restart operator by:

- Ensuring that all contract rights are enforced, as articulated in Step 7: Accountability, so that the restart operator gains access to designated assets and a properly maintained facility
- Ensuring that operators are free to communicate with families from the moment that the decision is made until the restart operator opens its doors, and likewise

work with the central administration overseeing the closing school (if applicable) to ensure that communication efforts are not undermined

- Ensuring that families receive ample information about the enrollment process in the restart school (per recommendations in Step 6: Match)
- Confirming with the appropriate oversight authority, if not the authorizer itself, that the principal and staff of the closing school receive clear information about the process, support during the year, and incentives to complete the school year, perhaps through bonuses. In addition, ensure that the oversight authority communicates clear expectations for staff behavior during the transition
- Requesting the release of student-level academic data as early as possible to the incoming restart operator for planning and staffing (this is permissible under FERPA given the incoming school’s vested interest in the educational progress of eligible returning students)
- Confirming that student records are complete, up to date, and ready to transfer to the new provider (especially critical for high schools: early access to course information that ensures transcripts can be correctly translated in the new school)
- Releasing optimistic communications to the press about the progress of the transition process and the potential success of the restart operator

See additional community specific recommendations in the following subsection.

Maintain Authorizer Responsibility to Monitor Progress

Despite the shift to a partnership with the operator, the authorizer retains a fundamental responsibility to ensure that the operator is making progress toward opening a fully staffed and safe school on time. The recommended practices here mostly align with the same practices for any new-start charter school. For example, authorizers should issue a clear checklist (with deadlines) of those items that must be completed and submitted to confirm that the school is ready to open (such as obtaining a certificate of occupancy by a specified date, or ensuring that insurance policies are in place). Or, for example, authorizers should monitor the operator’s

quarterly financial reports for the new school to ensure that any forecasted grants, revenue, or expenses are in line with what the operator predicted. In addition to the standard pre-opening monitoring of progress, consider the following restart indicators:

- Monitor the enrollment process on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to confirm whether families and students are enrolling in the new restart school; ideally, agree to target benchmarks for the enrollment progress with the restart operator, and verify that the operator is working in good faith to recruit and attract enrollment from the existing eligible students
- Ensure that the restart operator is acting in good faith to plan for and ramp up any unique program components that the operator will take over, such as a program serving students with severe special education needs or a partnership with a community-based health organization that may operate out of the same building
- Monitor that the restart operator is following the process articulated in its match application in terms of a fair and transparent hiring process for teachers and/or other key program components to which the restart operator committed

Authorizer Pre-Opening Checklist for Schools

The DC Public Charter School Board has a thorough pre-opening checklist and site visit protocol that it employs with each new school to ensure that the school is ready to open on time and successfully. The protocol is a thorough starting point; an authorizer might add items specific to a school transition, such as student record transfer or evidence of successful asset transfer to further support a restart endeavor. See the protocol [here](#).



TRANSITION: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Give Thanks and Collect Feedback

From the perspective of community engagement, the transition step is an opportunity to express appreciation for the community members who gave their time and input. Thank you's will ideally take the form of public recognition as early as the vote to match the restart operator to the school, and can continue during the transition phase with letters, emails, and comments at public events. To keep improving, the authorizer should solicit direct survey feedback from any community group or advisory council that was organized to provide input into the process. Collect feedback on everything from the structure, organization, and timeline to the specific communications and the tools used to collect feedback.

Restart Operator Leads Community Engagement During Transition

Once the announcement has been made about the match decision, the restart operator assumes responsibility for determining if and how the community groups that were formed earlier in the process continue under a new purpose or structure. Some operators find it useful to continue to work with the parents and community members who were active in the process as they seek to lay the groundwork for success in the school. The role and composition of such a group may evolve in the following ways:

- Membership may expand to include new parents of current and prospective students
- Committees may be formed that ultimately reflect the intended structure for ongoing parent engagement in the school

■ Members may be asked to:

1. Conduct outreach with other parents to ensure they understand the enrollment process
2. Use a transition checklist to provide feedback to the restart operator about progress
3. Provide input to hiring committees about ideal teacher candidates
4. Support tactical decision-making for the new school, such as colors/options for uniforms or food-service providers
5. Help coordinate welcome events, barbecues, or other gatherings to kick off the new school

UP Education Communication Protocol for Restarts

UP Academy follows a detailed communication protocol once the match decision has been made and the transition period commences. Learn more [here](#).

The restart operator may also need to do ongoing outreach with neighborhood councils, boards, or civic organizations that are closely tied to the school. Even if these organizations were not part of the community groups directly engaged throughout the process, it may be important to engage them now.



9 POST-OPENING SUPPORTS

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

- Restarts are difficult and complex; an authorizer can provide additional support to charter restart operators in their first few years by removing barriers that impede their ability to deliver a high-quality program.
- In any change process, it is important to identify and celebrate quick wins to feed the momentum of the change.
- Restart is high-stakes; if things are going really poorly, it may be necessary to act quickly based on established accountability metrics.



POST-OPENING SUPPORTS: PROCESS RECOMMENDATIONS

Provide Support, but Do Not Prescribe

As the new school is opening, the authorizer should support the operator and hold it accountable. In providing support, the authorizer should not prescribe actions or interfere with the operator's approach, model, or program. Rather, the authorizer has an opportunity to work with the school constructively by:

- Noting, publicizing, and celebrating the quick wins of the restart effort; very early quick wins may include:
 - Specific upgrades to the facility before opening
 - Meeting a re-enrollment target for students who attended the prior school
 - Overall expansion of enrollment
 - Early attendance figures for students in the school
 - New or sustained partnerships with community organizations
 - School-identified strengths, such as attributes of its new staff or progress on school culture goals
- Listening to the restart operator about any challenges it is facing and helping to remove barriers, such as:
 - Lack of staffing or supports for students with disabilities, if the school is not the LEA and is collaborating with the district for services
 - Facility challenges (particularly if the school district is landlord)
 - Access to adequate space for student sports, physical education, or recess

Many authorizers conduct a site visit during the first year of operations for any new school that opens in their jurisdiction. Typically, this is not tied to a high-stakes decision such as charter revocation or closure, but provides an opportunity to verify that baseline services are in place for all students (such as compliance with services to students with disabilities and ELL students). Some authorizers provide a degree of formative feedback based on their site visit. There are potential benefits and risks to this approach; some argue that an authorizer should not provide any feedback that might be construed as infringing on charter autonomy. A restart authorizer can consider whether a site visit in year one could or should be adapted to include any formative feedback on the restart's progress.

In most cases, the restart operator will have made arrangements to have trusted colleagues or consultants conduct a site visit during the first year and often again in subsequent years. There is not likely to be a role for the authorizer in this type of site visit.

Monitoring and Accountability

Per the recommendations in the Accountability section, the authorizer will ideally hold the restart operator accountable using a differentiated performance framework that reflects the challenges of school turnarounds. If this performance framework is thorough and transparent, then disputes and misunderstandings are much less likely to occur. As with all accountability processes, decisions and actions should be data-driven.



POST-OPENING SUPPORT: COMMUNITY & COMMUNICATION RECOMMENDATIONS

By August, when the restart school opens, the authorizer will have already shifted its focus to the next cycle of identifying schools for restart and organizing community engagement for those decisions. Per the recommendations in Step 8: Transition, the authorizer should have already collected feedback from members of community groups, advisory councils, or other structures. This feedback will have shaped changes to future community engagement.

In addition to improving the process, the authorizer should consider whether specific community members and/or parents should be invited to participate in future processes as well. If nearby schools are affected, this might make sense, but may seem disingenuous for schools in a very different part of town. Either way, these former members may be helpful in training the new members and/or in supporting citywide advocacy efforts for school improvement and restart.

The authorizer may also seek to reengage specific community members when it comes time for the next broad-based envisioning process as in Step 1: Envision. Community members with direct experience in the restart process can provide a valuable perspective to this broader conversation about the vision for student success.

The restart operator will continue to build sustainable community engagement systems, per the plans it set forth in their initial approval and match applications. As noted in Step 8: Transition, specific community members who were involved in interest groups or advisory councils may serve as strong founding members for ongoing parent engagement structures.

Go to www.schoolrestarts.org to download the process guide, review authorizer resources, and learn more about school restarts.

