

# BEST PRACTICES IN ACTION

Success Strategies from  
High-Performing Charter School Campuses





## Summary

This report summarizes findings from a study of high-performing charter school campuses in the State of Texas and from the current literature on best organizational and instructional practices in Kindergarten–Grade 12 (K–12) charter school and non-charter school campuses. The study was funded by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) through the Expanding Opportunity Through Quality Charter School Program (CSP) grant from the U.S. Department of Education; however, the opinions expressed here are of the authors and may not represent the opinions of the funding agency.

The best practices described in this report reflect the talent and expertise of the campus leaders and educators who participated in this study. This report would not have been possible without the generous gift of their time.

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# Introduction

Successfully leading public charter school campuses is challenging work. Although they are publicly funded, have more freedom over their budgets, and have greater flexibility to implement their instructional program(s), charter school campuses often operate with less funding per student than other public campuses and without the supportive infrastructure of a central office.<sup>1</sup>

Simultaneously, they are held to the same governance and (often more stringent) accountability standards as other public campuses.<sup>2</sup> Charter school campuses also have more market-based accountability than their independent school district peers because they must meet family and community expectations to attract and retain students.

In addition to operating under tighter constraints with less funding, charter school campuses experience the same economic and workforce trends that impact traditional public campuses with educator shortages continuing to be of concern (shortages exacerbated in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic).<sup>3</sup> For instance, enrollment in traditional teacher preparation programs is declining, campuses have more teacher vacancies than they can fill, and increased numbers of educators are considering leaving the profession.<sup>4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9</sup>

For charter school campuses, teacher shortages are further complicated by the fact that their student bodies often have high percentages of students identified as being at risk of dropping out of school or requiring services to address their unique learning needs. Across Texas in the 2022-23 school year, regardless of school type, schools enrolled higher levels of students considered at risk than they had in the previous decade, with 62% of students identified as economically disadvantaged, 23% of students identified for emergent bilingual student (EB)/English learner (EL) services, and 12.7% of students identified for special education services.<sup>10</sup> However, Texas charter school campuses are serving higher percentages of students identified as economically disadvantaged than the state average (72% and 77% respectively among state-authorized and district-authorized charter school campuses), and doing so in a time during which finding teachers

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<sup>1</sup> Foreman & Maranto, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Bulkeley, 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Pelika, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education (USDE), 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Sutchter, et. al, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> USDE, 2021–22.

<sup>7</sup> Nguyen, et al., 2022.

<sup>8</sup> Bryant, et al., 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Craig, et al., 2023.

<sup>10</sup> Texas Education Agency, 2023a.

with the specialized skills and certifications to meet students' unique learning needs is increasingly difficult.<sup>11, 12, 13</sup>

Yet, even under these conditions, there are charter school campuses that are thriving and guiding students to high levels of academic achievement, while also creating environments that are welcoming and supportive of students and educators. Why is this the case? How are these charter school campuses able to “beat the odds?”

This guide provides a focused set of actionable best practices for creating environments where students can flourish academically and socially and that support teacher retention. Although some of these practices may have developed out of the unique circumstances within which charters operate, these practices are all flexible enough to be implemented in independent school district settings. This best practice guide is for all types of campuses.

## Participants and Methods

The best practices described in this guide emerged from the interplay among three key sources of information: (1) best practices identified in the charter school campus and broader education literature, (2) the highest ranked strategies among high-performing charter school campuses that participated in a statewide survey of charter school campus principals, and (3) qualitative and quantitative data collected from site visits to high-performing charter school campuses across Texas.

The process for developing this guide began with a thorough review of practices in the charter school campus literature that were associated with high levels of student achievement, especially for students from traditionally marginalized groups. The study team used findings from the literature to develop a Statewide Survey of Charter School Campus Principals. The survey asked campus leaders to rank the top five most impactful strategies they used across eleven areas of campus leadership and management (e.g., engaging the community, meeting the academic needs of students, recruiting teachers).<sup>14</sup>

The study team conducted a complex quantitative analysis to identify 30 campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.<sup>15</sup> The resulting list of high-performing charter school campuses was used to interpret the results of the statewide survey by comparing the responses of high-performing charter school campuses to other charter school campuses. The study team also used this list to select and then invite twelve high-performing charter school campuses to participate in site-based data collection which included principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and classroom observations. This site-based data collection allowed the study team to learn about the practices and strategies that

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<sup>11</sup> Texas Education Agency, 2023a.

<sup>12</sup> Texas Public Charter Schools Association, 2023b.

<sup>13</sup> USDE, 2021–2022.

<sup>14</sup> Appendix A includes a copy of the Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals instrument.

<sup>15</sup> Appendix B describes the detailed methodology for identifying high-performing charter school campuses.

contributed to exceptional student results. In total, 16 high-performing charter school campuses participated in this voluntary data collection. Five high-performing charter school campus principals participated only in the statewide survey, three participated only in site visits, and eight participated in both types of data collection.<sup>16</sup>

The practices that consistently appeared across these data and information sources are those featured in this guide:

1. [Establish a Mission-Centered Campus](#)
2. [Strong Leadership](#)
3. [Effective Parent/Guardian Communication and Engagement](#)
4. [Connections Inside and Outside the Campus](#)
5. [Strong Instructional Staff](#)
6. [Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy](#)
7. [Evidence-Based Curricula and Instructional Strategies](#)
8. [High Academic Expectations for All Students](#)
9. [Campus-wide Student Behavior Systems](#)
10. [Integrate Non-Academic Skills and Provide a Well-Rounded Student Experience](#)

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<sup>16</sup> Appendix C describes the demographic characteristics of the high-performing charter school campuses that participated in data collection that informed the development of this guide.

# Establish a Mission-Centered Campus

Successful charter school campuses have a clearly articulated mission that serves as a touchstone for all aspects of campus life. A strong mission reflects the highest aspirations of the campus community, provides a framework for decision-making, and permeates every aspect of campus culture.

## A strong mission is aligned to the needs and desires of the campus community.

Staff at successful campuses are aware of the needs and desires of their community and craft missions aligned to the community's highest hopes and aspirations. The high-performing charter schools in this study have campus missions that emphasize rigorous academic goals and standards for students, meeting the desire of parents and guardians to provide an education that will prepare their students to be successful following graduation.<sup>17</sup> Many high-performing charter school campus mission statements describe a focus on the whole student and their desire to develop students with "leadership and character," and who have the ability to "make a positive contribution to their local and global communities." These mission statements also describe the campus culture that surrounds the academic work: "a safe, caring, and collaborative atmosphere," "a culture of joyful rigor," and "a school centered around challenging and interactive learning experiences."

The mission of many of the high-performing charter school campuses in this study is to provide choices to students from marginalized groups and communities. Some parents and guardians may select a charter school campus because it is committed to preparing students who will be the first in their family to attend college. Others may select the campus because of its emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), or because their student will have the opportunity to earn a certification and be ready to begin a career right after high school graduation. Clear connections between the campus mission and the needs of the community result in mutually reinforcing benefits. When parents and guardians believe that the mission of the campus is responsive to their students' needs, the family and campus

*"If I were to give advice to someone opening a new charter campus, I'm going to say a clear mission and vision. You've got to know where you're going. If you don't have a clear mission and vision, you're not aiming at a target." - Principal*



<sup>17</sup> Kern et al., 2012.



community develop stronger ties, are more invested in promoting campus outcomes, and become stronger allies in supporting the mission of the campus.<sup>18</sup>

## The mission drives decision-making.

On successful campuses, the mission is central to all major decisions. The mission energizes the campus team and provides a framework to which the team holds itself internally accountable.<sup>19</sup> This process begins by hiring campus leaders who value the mission of the campus and commit to prioritizing the mission in every aspect of their work.<sup>20</sup> These leaders, in turn, hire other administrators and teachers who are passionate and well-qualified to execute the campus mission because of their experience, teaching skills, and content area expertise.

*“All the decisions that we make, all the outreach that we do, is in the best interest of the child for the child's education.”*

- Principal

The campus mission drives other types of decision-making as well. Several high-performing campuses in this study have committees that meet regularly to plan and prioritize campus initiatives, academic advancements, and community engagement efforts aligned with the campus mission and vision.

Effective principals bring the mission and vision of the campus to life by setting clear expectations for staff and students.<sup>21</sup> Principals hold teachers accountable for delivering high-quality instruction and support them in this work by protecting teacher planning time and providing the tools and strategies they need to be successful. Principals support high expectations for students by leveraging diverse opportunities to enhance student learning, such as scheduling tutoring before and after school to meet students' needs for additional instruction. Students on thriving charter school campuses are guided by clear behavior expectations that reflect principal and team commitments to antibullying policies and a culture in which students are expected to treat teachers with respect.



<sup>18</sup> Marino & Ranney, 2021.

<sup>19</sup> USDE, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Cannata, et al., 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Marino & Ranney, 2021.

## The mission is integrated throughout school culture.

On flourishing campuses, the mission is an integral component of daily life. When the mission is well-integrated into the campus culture, there are visible signs that constantly reinforce the larger vision and purpose of the campus. For instance, the hallways of a STEM college preparatory academy might be decorated with images that convey a mission to prepare students for future success, such as college banners and photographs of students engaged in STEM activities. The physical design of a fine arts academy communicates its mission through dedicated spaces for music, theater, and the visual arts. Students know the mission and can explain how what they are learning aligns with that mission. On campuses where leadership is valued, teachers are expected to integrate real world applications into the curriculum; students are expected to develop problem-solving, public speaking, and other essential skills needed to be an effective leader. Successful campuses have a defined niche they want to fill, and the staff wholeheartedly devote themselves to fulfilling that mission.

*"We stand by our mission statement. We stand by our student creed. It's meaningful. We don't just say it; we live by it." - Teacher*



## Example Priorities Reflected in Charter School Campus Mission Statements

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Mission statements at observed high-performing campuses had a variety of focuses, including:

- ✓ **Communicate high academic standards for all students.**
  - College preparatory
  - STEM-focused
  - Globally competitive
  
- ✓ **Focus on developing the whole student.**
  - Develop leadership qualities
  - Focus on joy
  - Foster extracurricular passions
  - Promote critical thinking and problem-solving
  - Focus on character development
  
- ✓ **Describe the campus culture.**
  - Provide a safe and caring campus environment
  - Contribute to local, national, and international communities
  - Respect the environment



# Strong Leadership

Strong principals and leadership teams are critical to the success of a charter school campus.<sup>22</sup> Effective leaders are motivational figures who communicate well with internal and external stakeholders, ensure the logistics of campus operations are running smoothly, and structure campus systems to allow teachers to focus on instruction.

## Principals are the face of the campus community.

The charter school campus principal holds a distinct leadership role as the primary internal and external spokesperson for the campus. They are the leader who embodies and communicates the campus mission to current and potential students, parents and guardians, staff, and the broader community. Strong principals are highly visible and available to parents and guardians and communicate with them regularly. Principals are also the main representative of the campus to the outside community. They play a critical role in establishing partnerships with businesses, non-profit organizations, and other educational institutions to enhance current programming and to provide students with connections to community support and learning opportunities.

In addition to this outward-facing role, principals must also be available and attuned to the needs of the people inside the building, including students, teachers, and other staff. Successful principals are the driving force behind the high-performing campuses we visited, bringing energy and enthusiasm to the work by encouraging their teachers, motivating their students, and engaging with community stakeholders. Effective principals we saw differ in how much direct support they provide to teachers, but they consistently have an open-door policy in which teachers can come to them with challenges, keeping the campus pulse through informal and formal opportunities for teachers to provide feedback, conducting classroom walkthroughs, and responding promptly to teacher and student needs. When teachers feel that their needs are respected and addressed, they are more likely to come to their principals with challenges they are facing. Savvy principals know that if they fail to address issues brought to their attention or if teachers feel uncomfortable coming forward with challenges, teachers will be less likely to turn to them when they need help.

*“It’s really about who is your leader that’s going to be the face of the campus. That someone is communicating with the parents and scholars. They have that energy and that dynamic presence to be engaging, to be accepting of everybody. They know the walks of everybody’s lives and don’t judge but are really able to relate to others.” - Principal*

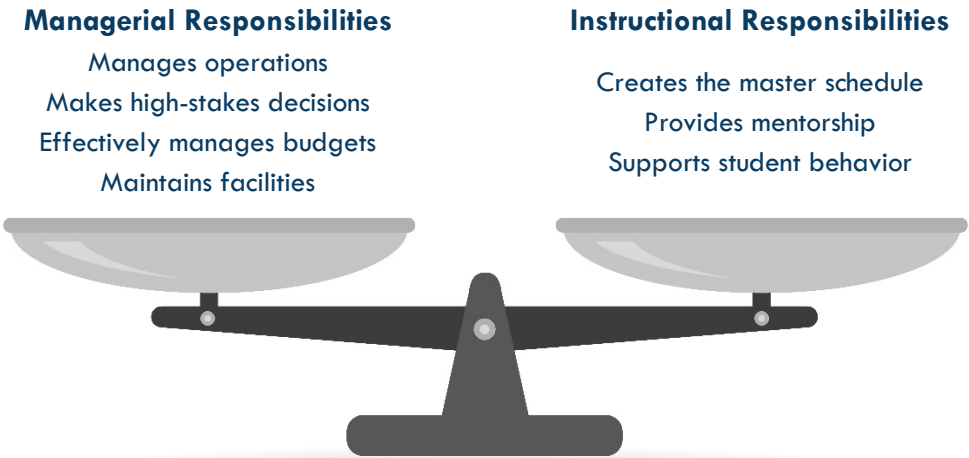
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<sup>22</sup> Marino & Ranney, 2021.



# Leadership teams allow teachers to focus on instruction.

Regardless of their size, all charter school campuses are complex organizations, and successful principals and leadership teams must be proficient in managing the business side of the campus. This includes managing operations, making high-stakes decisions, dealing with emergencies, and balancing the simultaneous and sometimes competing needs of a diversity of stakeholders.<sup>23</sup> Strong organizational management skills, like developing a safe environment, effectively managing budgets, and maintaining facilities are linked to better academic outcomes for students and higher teacher and parent satisfaction.<sup>24</sup> New principals and principals opening a new charter school campus benefit from a reliable internal team to help with daily and strategic needs.<sup>25</sup>



The leaders of the high-performing charter school campuses in this study balance the managerial parts of their work with their responsibilities as instructional leaders. Principals and other administrators support instruction indirectly by developing systems and structures that facilitate strong instructional practices and by interacting with teachers. The effective administrative teams in this study use a master schedule to create regular, extended times for critical activities such as: individual planning, professional learning communities, or working with a curriculum staff or instructional coaches. These teams are intentional about creating manageable teacher schedules that signal the administrative team values teachers' time. Effective leadership teams also directly support teachers by providing mentorship and feedback to help them improve.<sup>26</sup> Teachers in this study value

<sup>23</sup> USDE, 2004.

<sup>24</sup> Grissom & Loeb, 2011.

<sup>25</sup> Cannata, et al., 2013.

<sup>26</sup> Hughes & Silva, 2013.

*“I think just making sure teachers understand that we are there. We will be there. We are going to be right there with them every step of the way to make certain that teacher is equipped with all the necessary tools and strategies that they're going to need to be successful in that classroom.” - Principal*

classroom observations that occur frequently, are informal, and that include an immediate follow up conversation, ideally the same day.

Providing support for teachers to focus on instruction also includes attending to systemic and direct support for student behavior issues. Leadership teams on the visited high-performing charter school campuses implement campuswide behavior support systems, and sometimes provide dedicated spaces (e.g., “cooldown” rooms) or dedicated staff (e.g., behavior counselors) to relieve teachers of some of the more extreme behavior management issues. Principals also take a direct role in supporting teachers by building positive relationships with students who need extra attention and by engaging parents and guardians as partners in addressing challenging behaviors.



# Characteristics of Strong Leaders

Strong campus leaders are...

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| <b>Visible</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Greet parents and students during drop off and pick up so families know who they are.</li><li>✓ Visit with local community partners and advocate for the campus.</li><li>✓ Attend local leadership events and market the campus.</li><li>✓ Walk the hallways and greet teachers and students so they see the principal as a familiar face.</li></ul> |
| <b>Open</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Have an open-door policy and encourage teachers to share their challenges.</li><li>✓ Schedule times for parents to share their thoughts and concerns.</li></ul>  |
| <b>Responsive</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Provide teachers with the resources they need as soon as possible.</li><li>✓ Follow through on promises made to teachers, parents, or guardians.</li><li>✓ Be prepared to make difficult decisions and respond quickly to emergencies.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Organized</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Develop an administrative team that can support campus operations.</li><li>✓ Build a network of other experienced principals and district support.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Supportive</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>✓ Provide instructional support or delegate so teachers receive training when needed.</li><li>✓ Have a system to deal with student behaviors or deal with the students directly.</li></ul>   |

# Effective Parent/Guardian Communication and Engagement

Because principals of successful charter school campuses understand that families have choices about which campus their student attends, they strive to provide exceptional customer service to parents and guardians. An emphasis on communicating regularly and providing numerous opportunities for engagement is central to the customer service model. Research shows that campuses that invest in parent and guardian participation are more successful in engaging students and that higher levels of involvement can lead to greater student achievement.<sup>27, 28</sup>

## Communication platforms are appropriate to the community.

Effective communication with parents and guardians is rooted in an understanding of the most appropriate means of communication for each community – the mode that is most likely to engage the intended audience.<sup>29</sup> Platform choices include traditional methods (e.g., mail, newsletters, events, radio/television advertisements) and digital methods (e.g., social media, email, podcasts, websites). Some communities prefer paper copies of newsletters and face-to-face communication, while other campuses leverage digital platforms, knowing that parents and guardians read text or email messages or use social media such as Facebook or Instagram. There is no single method that will work best for all schools. Instead, it is important that campus leaders and teachers communicate in ways that meet the needs of their families.

*“My administration team and I provide a general session once a month on a Friday on Zoom. We allow parents to ask general questions that they're worried about, such as the parking lot. We've grown so much as a campus that our parking lot has been an issue at times regarding how we manage the traffic. Whatever the issue is, they're able to bring up and have a discussion, ask questions instead of letting it stew.” - Principal*

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<sup>27</sup> Marino & Ranney, 2021.

<sup>28</sup> Catsambis, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> McKenna & Miller, 2013.



## Campus-wide systems are in place for regular and emergency communications.

High-performing charter school campuses we visited have systems in place to ensure that parent/guardian communication is meaningful, timely and accessible. These campuses create digital or paper newsletters with information about campus-wide and grade-level information for parents and guardians. These general communications help keep parents and guardians connected to the campus and apprised of upcoming events and deadlines. General communications also share campus and student success stories and information about campus community projects.

*“We are always communicating with parents. Every other week there is a grade-level instructional newsletter for parents about what children are inquiring into.” - Principal*

Campus leaders can also streamline communications by developing a comprehensive calendar of events prior to the start of the year and sharing it with parents and guardians. If the calendar is thorough and the campus adheres to the dates set, then parents have a single reference document containing much of the information and dates they will need. Campus leaders who devote significant time to building out the comprehensive calendar find that it pays off during the campus year; activities and dates are already specified, improving the speed and ease of decision-making.

In addition to general communications, it is important for campuses to develop systems that quickly and reliably communicate emergency information to parents and guardians. These communications are typically sent by phone, email, or text to immediately communicate urgent information regarding cancelations, weather-related disruptions, and other emergencies. Some campuses message parents and guardians the day before all major events as a reminder, while other campuses focus on providing multiple avenues for parents to access the information themselves.

## Avenues are provided for parent and guardian input and engagement.

Principals at accomplished charter school campuses know that parents and guardians need to feel heard and know that their concerns are important to their student’s teachers and campus administrators.<sup>30</sup> Creating systems and opportunities to gather input from the parent and guardian community helps charter administrative teams fulfill this need. The high-performing campus systems we saw include regular opportunities for “lunch” or “coffee” with the principal, digital or physical suggestion boxes, or home visits from the teachers or administrators, during which parents and guardians can ask questions and raise concerns. These charter school campuses also make time to

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<sup>30</sup> Mac Iver et al., 2021.

communicate with parents and guardians about the aspects of their instructional model that make the campus unique. “Curriculum” and “student showcase” events highlight student achievements and provide parents and guardians an opportunity to better understand how the campus approaches instruction.

Many parents and guardians value the opportunity to serve the campus community directly. Campuses can leverage parent/guardian time and energy by creating clear systems for family engagement. Formal structures such as parent-teacher organizations provide opportunities for parents and guardians to volunteer for or participate in campus events. Parents and guardians also attend events to see their student engaged in learning or performances. Volunteer opportunities and events that draw parents and guardians to the campus are particularly valuable for creating the sense of community that engages families and deepens their commitment to the campus’s success.

*“When we offer the ability for those parents to come into our building, engage with us, see what their students are doing, and then actively help us make that event happen for their kids. They connect with other parents who are like-minded, and they truly feel connected to this community.” - Principal*

## Teachers regularly communicate with parents and guardians about their students’ progress.

*“Taking time to explain to parents, especially for students who are struggling, that they’re part of that process. Assessments are shared with parents and we offer sessions including virtual sessions or in-person sessions to educate parents on our curriculum.”*

*- Principal*

Classroom teachers have a vital role in communicating with students’ families.<sup>31</sup> Because they interact with students every day, teachers are best positioned to keep parents informed about students’ academic progress. Campus leaders facilitate teacher communication with parents by scheduling time for this work and by setting expectations for teachers to regularly share progress updates, grades, and examples of student work with parents and guardians. This commitment to parent/guardian communication is especially important for students from traditionally marginalized communities who may be less trusting of campuses or who are less familiar with the campus curriculum and the demands of a rigorous instructional program.<sup>32</sup> Acknowledging the concerns, aspirations, and cultural backgrounds of parents and guardians is an important step in establishing positive, trust-based relationships.

Teachers should strive to communicate with parents and guardians by using language and terminology that is easily understandable, accessible, and resonates with diverse cultural backgrounds.<sup>33</sup> This can be achieved through various channels like newsletters, emails, text

<sup>31</sup> Smith et al., 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Oberfield, 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Chappel & Ratliffe, 2021.

messages, or face-to-face meetings to provide regular updates on classroom activities and student progress. Teachers should be aware of and accommodate cultural differences in communication styles and norms. Teachers can foster trust and understanding by creating inclusive environments where every family feels valued. For instance, hosting family engagement events that honor cultural traditions or inviting parents and guardians to collaboratively engage in classroom projects that reflect their cultural heritage can help foster a sense of belonging and engagement.



## Things to Consider When Developing Systems for Parent Communication

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Campus leaders who want to engage their parents and guardians should...

- ✓ **Choose methods of communication that match their community's preferences.**
- ✓ **Communicate in languages that are prevalent in the community.**
- ✓ **Provide general communication on all major events.**
  - Consider creating a comprehensive calendar with scheduled dates.
- ✓ **Create systems to share emergency information or last-minute changes.**
- ✓ **Offer virtual and in-person information sessions about the curriculum or special topics.**
- ✓ **Provide many avenues for parents and guardians to provide their input.**
  - Offer a variety of opportunities for parents to share their concerns, such as regular "Coffee with the Principal" events.
  - Create digital feedback forms that can be completed throughout the year.
  - Survey parents and guardians regarding their feedback on the progress of the campus.
- ✓ **Provide volunteer opportunities for parents and guardians or events to bring them to campus.**
- ✓ **Establish expectations and supports for teachers to regularly communicate with parents and guardians about their students' progress.**





# Connections Inside and Outside the Campus

For charter school campuses to be successful, they need to provide more than just high-quality academic instruction. The campuses in this study enhance the impact of their instructional programs through collaborations with community partners or through internal collaborations to provide students with unique opportunities and the sense of being part of a tight-knit community.

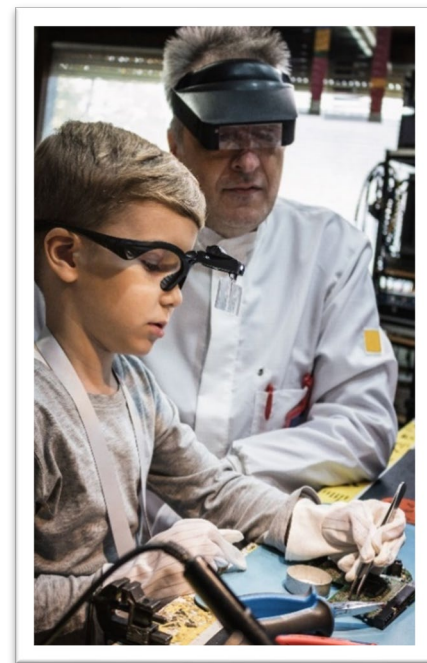
## Campuses collaborate with community partners to enhance the student learning experience.

Partnering with local businesses, organizations, or colleges and universities opens the campus to a variety of opportunities they otherwise could not provide on their own. These partnerships can take many shapes. Some partnerships align specifically with the mission of the campus, like a college preparatory campus partnering with colleges and universities to offer dual credit courses. Some partnerships address the needs of the community, like providing wraparound services for students' family members. Other partnerships enrich the student learning experience by offering opportunities for students to contribute to the community through service learning.<sup>34</sup> These partnerships strengthen a campus's ties to the surrounding community and help attract new students and families.

Moreover, these real world connections increase student engagement, attendance, and the relevance and meaningfulness of students' educational experiences.<sup>35</sup> Community partnerships can provide financial support, resources, or fundraising assistance through events, sponsorships, and donations so that small campuses can offer extracurricular activities that the staff cannot provide on their own.

Community partnerships also help connect charter school campuses with other educational institutions like peer charter school campuses or families. This networking can foster knowledge sharing, resource exchange, and collaboration on educational initiatives. Community partnerships with local sports clubs or organizations can benefit charter school campuses by providing sports coaching, equipment donations, and/or access to facilities. Collaborations with museums, art galleries, and cultural

*"Because we are STEM school and most of our students can graduate with networking and software degrees, we're looking for partners that can help support that vision." - Principal*



<sup>34</sup> Browning, 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Wohlstetter, et al., 2004.

institutions enrich charter school campus students' experiences through field trips, art programs, and performances.

## Staff are highly collaborative.

Because charter school campuses are often independent or part of a relatively small network of campuses, staff collaboration is necessary to maximize internal resources. Staff in these charter school campuses wear many hats, oftentimes leading clubs, supporting campus-wide student initiatives, and serving as leaders on their respective campuses. In the campuses in our study, teachers work with students from more than one grade level or work with colleagues across the campus on various initiatives. Experienced teachers oftentimes provide support to new teachers or collaborate on new curricula or initiatives that span grades and subjects. In these high-performing charters, the variety of roles that each staff person performs and the interconnection of relationships that form as a result, strengthen staff ties to each other and to the campus. These connections are further enhanced when teachers and other staff anchor their collaborations to serving the campus mission.

*"I believe that something that attracts teachers is that we are a pretty tight-knit family here. I know that when I applied to be here, it was going to be a much smaller environment. It's a more family-oriented environment. My friends are here, my coworkers are my friends, and I think that attracts people. You want to feel comfortable where you're working." - Teacher*

*"Leadership divides up all the students into different family groups. In my family group, I have three kindergartners, two first graders, and three older students. It's K through 12. You stay with that same family group the entire time you are here. We meet one Wednesday every quarter." - Teacher*

## Small communities exist within the campus.

Small communities within charter school campuses enhance social ties among students and between students and staff.<sup>36</sup> This sense of being an important part of a campus community results in students who feel empowered and are more academically successful.<sup>37</sup> Small charter school campuses have an obvious advantage in creating a tight-knit community, but larger campuses with hundreds of students achieve the same student experience by creating smaller communities within the campus. These "teams" or "tribes" provide students with the sense of connection and agency that can occur more naturally in a smaller campus. Small and large campuses alike create structures that reinforce a sense of membership and belonging through regular opportunities for fun and social connection, such as through cross-grade level clubs, friendly

competitions between groups, or opportunities for older students to guide and mentor younger ones. Students who progress through each grade also begin to feel a sense of ownership, and teachers note that the stability is reassuring for students.

<sup>36</sup> Malloy & Wohlstetter, 2003.

<sup>37</sup> Hamre & Pianta, 2001.

# Things to Consider When Developing Systems for Building Connections

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Campus leaders who want to develop connections within the campus and with the community should...

- ✓ **Foster connections with community partners.**
  - Build ties with local colleges or universities to offer dual credit courses, recruit tutors or student teachers, or utilize other resources.
  - Connect with local businesses for fundraising, networking, and real-world application opportunities for students.
  - Establish ties with large corporations for financial support, resources, opportunities for students, or other unique opportunities.
  - Develop relationships with other community partners that align with the mission and vision of the campus.
  
- ✓ **Create small communities to build a sense of belonging.**
  - Provide cross-grade level opportunities, such as a buddy system between older and younger students.
  - Create “families” either of cross-grade students or with same-age peers.
  - Maintain those partners or “families” as long as the student attends the campus.
  - Encourage teachers to get to know students outside of their grade level.
  - Provide cross-grade level clubs.
  
- ✓ **Communicate early in the recruitment process that teachers will be expected to wear many hats, including potentially running a club, supporting other teachers, or collaborating on a school initiative.**



## Strong Instructional Staff

Teachers are the cornerstone of any campus, but they play an especially important role on campuses with high rates of students identified as economically disadvantaged.<sup>38</sup> The campus administrative teams responsible for recruiting and hiring effective teachers face an increasingly difficult time due to current workforce and economic trends. In this context, administrators often must choose between waiting to fill open positions with passionate, experienced candidates or hiring less experienced teachers immediately. When principals choose the second option, they must then provide training and supports to enhance the teachers' instructional practice as quickly as possible.

### Principals prioritize hiring passionate, energetic teachers whose values align with the campus mission.

More than any other attribute, principals of the high-performing campuses we visited cite the importance of hiring teachers passionate about teaching and/or passionate about their subject area. On campuses with high rates of students identified as economically disadvantaged and a large percentage of students classified as being at risk of dropping out, teachers often work long hours and have additional responsibilities like tutoring students before or after school. Teachers who are passionate about their work and improving the lives of students from marginalized backgrounds have the energy and dedication needed to meet these additional requirements.<sup>39</sup> Their enthusiasm, in turn, drives students' enthusiasm and motivation for learning.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to hiring passionate teachers, high-performing charter school campuses in the study hired teachers whose values aligned to the vision of the campus. Teachers whose pedagogical philosophies align to the mission of the campus are more likely to stay at a campus, and long-term retention of teachers has been shown to have a positive impact on student success.<sup>41</sup> For example, teachers who agree with implementing campus-wide behavioral supports will be more likely to stay at a school that implements positive behavioral intervention and support (PBIS) than a teacher who would prefer to institute their own form of classroom management. Hiring passionate,

*"The most important strategy in the daily operations of the campus is the hiring and retaining teachers and staff that are passionate about the campus mission. Because once you have those, the daily stuff runs a lot better." - Principal*

<sup>38</sup> Garcia & Salinas, 2018.

<sup>39</sup> Crosswell & Elliott, 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Quick & Conrad, 2013.

<sup>41</sup> Marino & Ranney, 2021.

*“I think that [the] coaching program helps all the time. They're always checking on us. Especially for the first-year teachers, they come in once a week and watch half of a class or so, and then they send us Glows and Grows. They communicate things that we might need to work on or things that they notice that we've implemented from the week before correctly.” - Teacher*

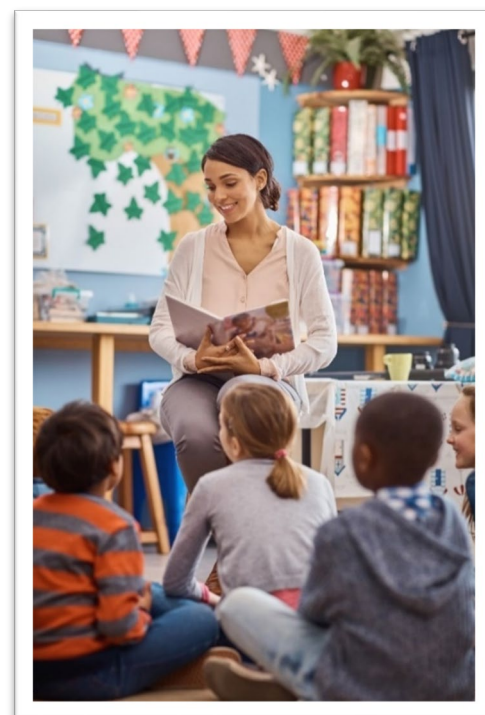
motivated teachers who believe in the core tenants of the campus has the additional benefit of attracting like-minded teachers to the campus through word-of-mouth.

## Principals hire teachers with proven effectiveness and provide intensive support to new teachers.

Principals must use a variety of strategies to recruit teachers. Principals at the high-performing charter school campuses in this study use traditional strategies to find high-quality candidates, such as participating in their charter management organization's hiring fairs. They also rely on more creative approaches to staffing their building, including targeting retired teachers for part-time positions and rearranging their master schedule to cover classes until they can find a highly qualified candidate. For

many administrators, the most effective means of recruiting high-quality teachers is leveraging the current teachers' networks and word of mouth. Current teachers who believe in the campus mission and who can speak directly to the quality of the work environment and administrative support are often the campus's best recruiting tool.

When the principals of high-performing charter school campuses in this study cannot fill positions with experienced teachers, they instead focus on hiring less experienced teachers who are passionate about the campus mission, enthusiastic about teaching, and willing to learn. Successful principals build comprehensive support systems for their new hires, such as summer training sessions, regular coaching from the principal or instructional coach, or strategic professional development throughout the first years of the teacher's career. Mentorship from more experienced colleagues is a powerful tool for rapidly enhancing the new teachers' skills in the classroom.<sup>42</sup> These partnerships give the new teachers opportunities to see how veteran teachers approach classroom management and instruction and provide experienced teachers opportunities to reflect on their practice. The investments result in stronger, more effective new teachers and increased teacher satisfaction and retention.<sup>43, 44</sup> Charter school campuses that implement frequent coaching and feedback opportunities for teachers then have higher student outcomes.<sup>45</sup>



<sup>42</sup> Fletcher & Strong, 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Hughes & Silva, 2013.

<sup>44</sup> Marino & Ranney, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Gleason, 2017.



## Hiring for Student Impact

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Campus leaders who want to develop a strong instructional team should...

- ✓ **Hire teachers who are passionate about the mission of the campus.**
  - Hire teachers willing to stay before or after school to help students.
  - Hire teachers willing to learn new strategies to meet students' needs.
- ✓ **Hire teachers whose pedagogical philosophies align with the campus.**
  - Effective teachers believe all students can achieve.
  - Successful teachers agree with the behavior system in place on the campus and feel they can implement it.
- ✓ **Provide new teachers with coaching and frequent opportunities for feedback.**
  - Administrators or instructional coaches frequently visit classrooms and provide timely, constructive feedback.
  - Administrators or experienced teachers mentor new or inexperienced teachers.
- ✓ **Encourage current teachers to recruit like-minded colleagues to the campus.**



# Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy

Many teachers feel exhausted by the increasing demands of teaching students with both significant unfinished learning and behavioral challenges.<sup>46</sup> Teachers on the high-performing campuses in this study, however, meet these challenges with enthusiasm and are energized about teaching and supporting all their students. These campuses benefit from practices that support teacher professionalism and autonomy and see an improved professional climate as a result.

## Teachers have the flexibility to adjust instructional strategies.

Key to supporting students' academic growth is the teacher's ability to differentiate and rapidly shift instruction as needed to meet students' needs.<sup>47</sup> Many teachers on the high-performing campuses in this study believe they have the tools and skills to help their students be successful and their administrators' permission to teach as they see fit. Teachers who are granted the latitude to differentiate their instruction and respond as needed witness success among their students, which creates a positive feedback loop that encourages teachers to persist in teaching. Examples of adaptations that teachers make include speeding or slowing the pace of the lessons, providing targeted re-teaching to select students, and adjusting activities to increase the appeal to their students.

## Teachers are encouraged to solve problems as a team.

Effective teachers often cite peer support as critical to their success.<sup>48</sup> While administrative support is important, teachers (especially new or struggling teachers) benefit from having a network of colleagues they can turn to for daily concerns.<sup>49</sup> On small campuses, teachers can easily connect with peers, but on larger campuses, pre-determined teams such as grade-level or subject-area teams can provide the necessary structures for feedback and collaboration. These

*"I think it's our passion for giving students not just any education, but the education they deserve, the caliber and the quality of education they deserve. That's what I think really brings a lot of teachers here. It's a different setting here. It is most definitely the feeling of enthusiasm and passion and drive, but being able to produce your best teacher self, inside of that delivery of an elite education is a wonderful thing. I've worked at a lot of campuses where you can't be your best teacher self. You're confined to a box, and at this campus, we're not confined to a box." - Teacher*

<sup>46</sup> Unfinished learning refers to the academic achievement gap attributed to the impact of COVID-19 school disruptions.

<sup>47</sup> Hughes & Silva, 2013.

<sup>48</sup> Keiler et al., 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Gawlik, 2018.

*“We’re always looking for material that makes us better. I can even request a new curriculum. If it is in the budget, then we get it and we start applying it. If the curriculum works, then we let the administrators know we should be using it regularly. Our curriculum is always expanding, but not because it’s more work. It’s expanding to give us more options to better deliver the content that we are assigned to that year.” - Teacher*

opportunities to create solutions unique to the campus reflect the greater flexibility and autonomy granted to charter school campuses in making instructional decisions.<sup>50</sup> Teacher teams can collaboratively solve problems that may, at first, appear to require administrator support. One of the administrators in our study asked teachers to develop a solution to a scheduling challenge that worked best for them as a team. At other campuses, teachers are tasked with selecting and preparing professional development according to campus needs.

Solving problems specific to the team both encourages teachers to collaborate with peers and provides meaningful, actionable, and mutually acceptable solutions to teachers’ challenges. Additionally, on campuses where principals encourage teachers to problem solve, the principals have more time to support struggling teachers or connect with families and students.

## Teacher leadership opportunities are provided and teachers’ input is valued for campus-wide decisions.

Instead of singlehandedly managing all aspects of campus life, principals on the high-performing campuses provide opportunities for teachers to be instructional leaders on their campuses. On these campuses, teachers are empowered to create and lead professional development, create or modify curriculum or instructional materials for team use, mentor new teachers, or lead initiatives designed to engage the campus and community. By creating opportunities for experienced, successful teachers to mentor new or struggling teachers, the campus benefits in multiple ways. Their seasoned teachers deepen their skills as instructional leaders and may find new dimensions of satisfaction in their work. Less experienced teachers learn from direct guidance and from opportunities to observe skilled teachers. By building integrated opportunities for teacher leadership, successful campuses foster a collaborative community where teachers feel valued and respected as professionals, thus contributing to a more positive professional climate for all staff.

Teachers appreciate when administrators value their expertise and opinions, especially regarding campus-wide decisions such as choosing a

*“At all school levels, we have representatives called the Cadre Reps. The elementary teachers talk to their Rep. Middle campus teachers talk to their Rep. High campus teachers talk to their Rep. Then we have meetings, and those guys tell us what’s going on. What are the needs? What are we doing well, what do we need to improve on? What are the problems? And that’s how we keep our finger on the pulse of what’s going on in our campus. And that works really well.”*

*- Principal*

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<sup>50</sup> Berends, 2015.

new curriculum.<sup>51</sup> When teachers have a voice in making decisions that impact their work, they are more likely to buy-in and implement those decisions. Additionally, including teachers in decision-making is a powerful way to show teachers they are valued. When campus administrators ask for and honor teacher input, the conditions for creating overall job satisfaction and a more collegial work environment are optimized.



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<sup>51</sup> Quick & Conrad, 2013.

## Creating Environments That Honor Teacher Professionalism and Autonomy

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Campus leaders who want to honor their teachers' autonomy should...

- ✓ **Allow experienced teachers to differentiate their instruction.**
  - New or inexperienced teachers may require support from administrators before they are prepared to fully differentiate their instruction.
- ✓ **Ask for teams of teachers to solve issues they are facing, and honor and implement their solutions when possible.**
- ✓ **Encourage teachers to create teams or networks of colleagues across the campus to solve challenges.**
- ✓ **Provide leadership opportunities for teachers.**
  - Lead or develop professional development for other teachers.
  - Develop or help select curricula.
  - Lead initiatives designed to improve the campus, especially initiatives aligned with the mission.





# Evidence-Based Curricula and Instructional Strategies

Teaching involves a complex set of activities that requires a combination of skill and the right curriculum and tools. Teachers must use evidence-based curricula and instructional strategies, create a positive classroom climate, and implement flexible strategies to support students who need more individualized support to master course content.

## Teachers have evidence-based curricula.

On well-run campuses, teachers have all necessary curricular materials and lesson plans at their fingertips every day to meet their students' needs. The curricula are evidence-based, meaning that content and instructional strategies are grounded in research. Because teachers have the requisite materials, the time developing lessons or collecting examples, materials, and resources for teaching a lesson is greatly diminished. Their saved time is instead spent maximizing student learning, oftentimes teaching bell-to-bell. High-quality curricula break material up into appropriate lessons, include reviews of past content, provide multiple opportunities to access complex ideas, and provide many opportunities for students to practice new skills.<sup>52, 53, 54</sup> High-quality curricular materials are also flexible enough for teachers to adapt to meet individual student needs. Under the best of circumstances, the materials include interventions for students who need re-teaching and accelerated materials for students who require more challenges. There are a few exceptions to this rule among the study campuses, some of which expect teachers to develop their own instructional materials. These campuses are organized to provide teachers with additional planning time to meet this requirement.

*"We have systems in place from our curriculum coordinators and the leadership so that we can support teachers to make the process of preparing a lesson a little bit more streamlined. That way they can focus on their strategies and not be so stressed out and more prepared. Stronger initial instruction is going to take place." - Principal*

<sup>52</sup> Rosenshine, 1995.

<sup>53</sup> Bransford et al., 2000.

<sup>54</sup> Swanson, et al., 1999.



*“With my at-risk students, I really try to use the data. Let's say we cover a TEKS and I have my clipboard. Once I model the overarching part of our lesson, and once I check for understanding and I have the whole class share out, then when they get started, I do what's called clipboard cruising. I walk around and that's how I'm able to gauge and have those one-on-one conversations. I typically group my students according to what TEKS they're missing. I know when I am teaching as I'm walking around, it's more tailored and focused instruction versus just teaching the whole class all the same thing all the time.” - Teacher*

## Teachers use evidence-based instructional strategies.

On high-performing campuses, teachers use evidence-based instructional strategies to make content meaningful and accessible to all students. These teachers create positive classroom climates where it is safe for students to ask questions, share their own perspectives, make mistakes, and learn from feedback on their work and through direct instruction. In addition, teachers at successful charters maximize learning time by teaching bell-to-bell. Evidence-based instructional strategies include:

- Reviewing past material at the start of a lesson and incorporating regular reviews of past material;<sup>55</sup>
- Breaking complex concepts into smaller steps, sections, or concepts (i.e., chunking);
- Following an “I do,” “We do,” “You do” strategy in which new skills or concepts are modeled with step-by-step instructions or a think aloud, students are provided opportunities to practice a skill with teacher guidance, and students are provided opportunities to practice independently.

The high-performing campuses we visited have administrative teams and teachers who often use data from formative assessments (i.e., low-stakes and ongoing) and summative assessments (i.e., taking place at the end of a unit or lesson) to determine which students to include in small groups or to identify for individualized instruction.<sup>56</sup> Campus administrators and instructional coaches can assist teachers in this decision-making by leading sessions that dig into common assessment data, demonstrating ways to interpret data and identify meaningful

trends, and determining appropriate instructional changes based on those data.<sup>57</sup> As teachers become more comfortable interpreting data on their own, they will examine data more frequently and become better at modifying their instruction if the data show that students are not mastering the course material as expected.<sup>58,59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> USDE, 2019.

<sup>56</sup> Rix, 2012.

<sup>57</sup> Garcia & Salinas, 2018.

<sup>58</sup> Quick & Conrad, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills.

## Students who require additional support have access to intervention services.

Effective charter school campuses have systems in place to support all learners. In the post-COVID period, the number of students with significant unfinished learning have resulted in a large percentage of students who need targeted support. The high-performing campuses in our study put systems in place to address these increased student needs, with all staff working from the shared belief that when students receive targeted intervention, they can achieve grade-level success. Well-developed response teams include interventionists, special education support staff, EB/EL support staff, counselors, and administrators ready to respond when data show student mastery of material is not on the expected trajectory.<sup>60</sup> A strong foundation of collegial relationships between staff prevent general education teachers from feeling defensive or reluctant to seek assistance when they realize that they cannot adequately meet a student's needs on their own.

*"We meet the students where they are. No matter where you come from, whatever your socioeconomic background is, it does not matter here. If you are a second grader who's unable to read, that's okay. We don't single you out. We don't make you feel any different. Your work may look different, but you'll never know that."*

- Teacher



<sup>60</sup> Hughes & Silva, 2013.

# Checklist for Instructional Success

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Campus leaders who want to implement quality curricula and instructional strategies should...

- ✓ **Invest in evidence-based curricula that provide teachers with necessary support to adapt their instruction to students' needs.**
  - If teachers are expected to develop or adapt their curricula significantly, provide them with ample planning time and administrative support.
- ✓ **Implement small-group instruction in general education classes.**
- ✓ **Collect and use data purposefully.**
  - Make data collection easy, either by having computer-based assessments or exit tickets.
  - Train teachers on how to interpret data and tweak their instruction based on student needs.
  - Provide teachers time to analyze data and adapt their instruction.
- ✓ **Build a comprehensive support team with interventionists, counselors, behavioral specialists, and special education teachers.**
- ✓ **Develop a positive school culture where teachers know they can ask colleagues for help.**



# High Academic Expectations for All Students

The foundation of successful campuses is a culture of high expectations for all students. Regardless of the socioeconomic status of students served or the variety of organizational and instructional approaches across the campuses in this study, there was one common theme: Through rigorous expectations, all students can succeed.

## There is a culture of high expectations.

The high-performing campuses in this study have a palpable energy in which principal enthusiasm, teacher motivation, and student engagement are mutually reinforcing. The leadership team's belief that students are going to achieve is a powerful tool in helping students see themselves attending college or being successful post-graduation.<sup>61</sup>

Administrative teams use a range of strategies to establish and maintain cultures of excellence. Hiring talented, passionate educators and giving them autonomy over their work is of critical importance. Many of the campuses in this study implemented "no-excuse" policies, and administrators regularly celebrated their students' and staff's achievements by publicly acknowledging accomplishments in campus newsletters and daily announcements or by providing rewards or prizes for high daily attendance or high grades.<sup>62</sup>

Successful campus teams take the time to clearly define success and take steps to ensure students, parents, and guardians understand the rigorous expectations at their campus.<sup>63</sup> Many principals take care to communicate these expectations clearly and early in the process of recruiting new students. Presentations for prospective and new students' families help ensure that parents and guardians are aware of campus academic expectations. Students are expected to take an active role in their education by giving their best effort every day and challenging themselves to grow as future leaders and members of society. Once campuses earn the reputation in the community as a rigorous campus with high student achievement, recruiting students becomes easier. The principals

*"We have high expectations for our students. We expect our students to be beginner leaders in pre-K and we build from that. We set our foundation, and we stick to the foundation. Each year the foundation grows to where they are independent. We expect them to be independent thinkers, critically think on their own to where they are able to take ownership of their education."*

- Teacher

<sup>61</sup> Gong & Toutkoushian, 2024.

<sup>62</sup> Quick & Conrad, 2013.

<sup>63</sup> Quick & Conrad, 2013.



at high-performing campuses in this study often cite word of mouth as the most effective student recruitment strategy.

*“Making an effort to differentiate is critical. We have a wide range of learning and learners, so offering opportunities for those students to demonstrate mastery is important. If there’s someone who still needs that additional support, then you pull them for a small group.”*

- Teacher

## All students have the tools necessary to achieve at high levels.

In addition to creating a culture of rigorous expectations, effective campuses ensure that all students have the opportunity and tools needed to achieve those high expectations. Instead of dividing the instruction and providing high-quality instruction and opportunities to only a select few, successful campuses put systems in place to guarantee that all students can achieve their highest potential.<sup>64</sup>

Many of the high-performing campuses we visited structure their master schedules to keep class sizes small so that teachers can effectively differentiate their instruction.<sup>65</sup> Reducing group sizes and grouping students who have similar learning needs allow teachers to individualize instruction and provide more

opportunities for each student to participate and receive immediate feedback, two instructional strategies that have been shown to increase student outcomes.<sup>66, 67</sup>

Small class sizes also make it easier for teachers to monitor their students’ academic progress and to communicate regularly with parents and guardians to celebrate successes and alert them if their students’ performance slips. Smaller classes and smaller campus communities also contribute to a shared sense of ownership and create expectations that all teachers are responsible for all students, reducing the risk of students falling through the cracks.

Successful campuses often provide additional instructional time outside of their regular classes. Extending the instructional day has been shown to help improve student learning.<sup>68</sup> Many campuses offer tutoring sessions and homework help, either as required interventions or as optional sessions that students can attend before or after school. Although this additional instruction can sometimes extend the school day for teachers, teams at these campuses see it as their responsibility to provide the extra learning opportunities students need to meet the campus’s rigorous expectations.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hughes & Silva, 2013.

<sup>65</sup> Begeny et al., 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Fuchs et al., 2017.

<sup>67</sup> Angrist et al., 2013.

<sup>68</sup> Gleason, 2017.

<sup>69</sup> Dobbie & Fryer, 2013.

# Creating a Culture of Success for All

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Campus leaders who want to establish high expectations for all students should...

- ✓ **Communicate expectations to parents, guardians, and students early in the student recruiting process.**
- ✓ **Clearly define what “success” looks like and celebrate students when they achieve it.**
  - Acknowledge when students are accepted into colleges or universities.
  - Celebrate student extracurricular accomplishments in public, such as in a newsletter, through morning announcements, or by displaying trophies.
  - Provide prizes or verbal acknowledgements for high attendance, academic success, or specific behaviors.
- ✓ **Include teachers in celebrating student accomplishments.**
- ✓ **Encourage teachers to use small-group and differentiated instruction to meet every student’s academic needs.**
- ✓ **Offer before- and after-school tutoring.**



# Campus-wide Student Behavior Systems

Following the COVID-19 pandemic disruptions to education, campus teams are faced with a greater number of students with challenging behaviors. The experienced educators in this study reported that more of their students are experiencing anxiety, have social skills gaps, and have greater need for emotional and social support. In response, campuses rely on clear student expectations and reinforce appropriate behavior to create a positive learning environment for all students.

## Student behavior expectations and consequences are clear and consistent.

Successful charter school campuses set high expectations for student behavior. The high-performing campuses in this study rely on campus creeds, student handbooks, codes of conduct, or behavior contracts to communicate these standards to parents, guardians, and students. Consistent implementation of these standards is crucial to success; to be effective, standards must be the same across campus, within classrooms, and for all student groups. Many of the high-performing campuses in this study serve grade levels that cross traditional elementary, middle, and high school grade ranges (e.g., Kindergarten–Grade 8), so younger students see appropriate school behavior modeled by older students.

Equally important are the systems teachers and administrators use to address inappropriate behavior when it does occur. A clearly communicated, predetermined set of consequences for students' infractions reduces inconsistencies between classrooms and reinforces beliefs that consequences are fairly implemented for all students.<sup>70</sup> The high-performing campuses frame student consequences as ways to improve student behaviors by teaching mutual respect, empathy, and accepting responsibility for the consequences of their actions. All administrators and teachers must be aligned in their enforcement of student behavioral expectations and consequences, and the administrative team must be ready to provide additional training and coaching to teachers who are inconsistent in how they hold students accountable.

*"We have a very structured environment where our procedures and routines are across the board, from prekindergarten to eighth grade, so students and teachers are on the same page. For me, that's our climate, it provides for fewer behavior issues and more structured environments so that learning can take place." - Teacher*

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<sup>70</sup> Bradshaw et al., 2010.

*“If you're doing well, we're recognizing you're doing well, and that's how you're building up points. We don't ever take points away. If you do wrong, we don't take points away. We only give points. We don't use it as a negative behavioral reward. It is just a positive reward system.” - Principal*

## Positive student behavior is reinforced.

Campuses with campus-wide behavior systems are more likely to have positive student outcomes and are more effective at decreasing discipline referrals.<sup>71, 72</sup> Although there was no single, preferred behavior management system among the high-performing campuses in this study, what they have in common is that they rely on consistent language and expectations in every classroom and across the campus.

Some of the visited high-performing campuses implement ticket or point systems, in which students earn a reward for positive behaviors like following classroom rules, showing respect for other students, or persisting through a difficult task. Students then use their tickets or points to enter in classroom or campus-wide raffles, or they can trade them directly for prizes. Effective behavior management systems also give students intangible rewards like verbal recognition in the classroom and more public celebrations of student accomplishments in campus newsletters or assemblies.



<sup>71</sup> Christofferson & Callahan, 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Emmer & Stough, 2001.

# Developing Systems to Support Student Behavior

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Campus leaders who want to create campus-wide student support systems should...

- ✓ **Develop systems that clearly outline expectations and consequences for not upholding those expectations.**
- ✓ **Ensure that consequences are administered fairly and consistently across teachers and administrators.**
- ✓ **Set expectations early with teachers that they should be implementing the behavior systems consistently in their classrooms.**
- ✓ **Dedicate time and space in the classrooms and common areas to practice appropriate behaviors.**
- ✓ **Reward positive behaviors through praise, physical personal awards, and/or classroom or school-wide rewards.**





# Integrate Non-Academic Skills and Provide a Well-Rounded Student Experience

Although the campuses in this study were identified for their academic success, their missions do not apply to academics alone. Successful campuses emphasize the development of non-academic, essential skills – building character, developing leadership skills, shaping citizens of the world – as much as they emphasize academic success.

## Students develop essential, non-academic skills.

The high-performing campuses in this study prioritize the development of non-academic skills as much as academic ones. They do this by weaving into the curriculum opportunities to practice problem-solving, creativity, and teamwork, and by teaching about important character traits. Campuses serving older students focus on developing the essential skills that will be necessary for students as they pursue higher education or enter the workforce. They practice teamwork, collaboration, and communication skills by working with peers in the same ways that professionals work with their colleagues. Successful campuses create environments where students treat others and their campus with respect, and where it is safe to take risks and challenge themselves in new ways. Campus teams also look for opportunities to integrate the development of leadership skills into the daily life of the campus, such as pairing older students with younger students through mentor programs or having student representatives lead tours for prospective students.

*“We have an ambassador program. When we have guests that come on campus, the student ambassadors will introduce themselves and talk to people or show them around campus and provide tours.”*

*- Principal*



## Students have a well-rounded experience reflective of an inclusive campus culture.

*“We allow our students to create their own extra-curricular activities and a lot of our clubs are student-run, student-led, and student-founded. They’ve been maintained for years because they pass it on to the next person. That’s been something that’s really positive for us.”*

*- Principal*

Some larger charter school campuses can offer a full range of extracurricular opportunities, such as University Interscholastic League, clubs, and athletics, but smaller campuses or those that do not have abundant financial resources must find creative ways to develop a well-rounded student experience. These high-performing campuses in the study often engage community partners to provide volunteer and service-learning opportunities for students or encourage students to take the lead in developing their own special interest clubs.

Successful campus teams know that to achieve high rates of student attendance, engagement, and student success, they must create cultures in which all students are accepted and treated as valuable members of the community. Setting this tone starts with the principal and administrative team but is ultimately the shared responsibility of teachers and students themselves. These campuses celebrate students for their achievements, but also encourage a growth mindset in which students come to see struggle as part of the learning process.<sup>73</sup> On these campuses, it is an expectation

that students show respect for teachers and each other, and in so doing create a place where students and staff look forward to coming every day.



<sup>73</sup> Dweck, 2006.

# Practices That Create a Well-Rounded Student Experience

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Campus leaders who want to provide a well-rounded student support system should focus on...

✓ **Real world integration.**

- Integrate real-world applications into the curriculum.
- Ask students to exhibit their learning in authentic ways.

✓ **Character development.**

- Provide direct instruction on character traits.
- Recognize students who embody the desired character traits.

✓ **Growth mindset.**

- Provide time during the school day for reflection and discussion of what it looks like to have a growth mindset about learning.

✓ **Student-led activities.**

- Allow students to develop and lead their own extracurricular activities and clubs to inspire engagement and give students leadership opportunities.

✓ **Community engagement.**

- Provide opportunities for students to give back to the wider community through service-learning projects.
- Take students into the community and bring the community to the campus to expand access to the arts, natural sciences, STEM, and career exploration.



## Conclusion

These are challenging times in public education. Fewer people are entering the teaching profession through traditional pathways, and many in the profession are considering leaving the work.<sup>74, 75</sup> At the same time, the unique educational needs of the student population continue to grow.<sup>76</sup> Creating school environments where adults and students thrive may seem like a daunting task, yet the high-performing campuses in this study provide a model for the perspectives and practices needed for success.

### **Successful campuses are mission centered.**

The campuses in this study served students from affluent communities and students from communities with high rates of economic disadvantage. They included campuses with both large and small populations of students identified for EB/EL and special education services. Nevertheless, what they have in common is that they are highly attuned to the needs of their communities, they develop a mission and vision for their work that is aligned to those needs, and they anchor all decisions to their mission and goals for their students.

### **Successful campuses create communities that honor teachers' professional skills and autonomy.**

The high-performing campuses in this study take great care to hire highly skilled, experienced teachers and teachers who are newer to the profession but who are passionate about the school's mission and willing to learn. Once those teams were in place, administrators gave their teachers the latitude to solve problems as a team, to adjust instructional approaches as they saw fit, and to create engaging learning opportunities for students inside and outside the classroom.

### **Successful campuses create cultures of respect for adults and students.**

High-performing campuses do not leave school culture to chance. Through their curriculum and instructional practices, the campuses in this study teach students the character and leadership traits they want students to exhibit and teach them to think about their academic and non-academic challenges as productive struggles. The administrators and teachers in these schools also model respectful behavior and create school cultures in which mutual respect, kindness, and accountability for one's actions are the norm.

### **Successful campuses implement systems that ensure academic success for all.**

High levels of student success are built on the foundation of high academic standards and the belief that all students can succeed. By implementing high-quality curricula and evidence-based instructional practices, and by developing supportive structures to intervene when students are struggling, these campuses live their mission-centered values of success for all students.

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<sup>74</sup> Bryant, et al., 2023.

<sup>75</sup> Texas Education Agency, 2023a.

<sup>76</sup> USDE, 2023.

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# Appendix A: Study Instruments

## Principal Interview Protocol

**Texas Education Agency  
Charter School Program – High-Quality Charters  
Principal Interview Protocol**

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has contracted with McREL International and their research partners at Gibson Consulting Group to study best practices across charter schools. As part of this project, we are interested in learning from organizational leaders, principals, and teachers about the organizational and instructional practices of your charter school.

Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview. It is a critical part of this data collection and analysis effort! This interview should take approximately 60–75 minutes to complete.

### **Confidentiality Policy**

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You can opt not to answer any question or stop participating in the interview at any time. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law. We would like to record these interviews so that I can transcribe them and continue to learn from your responses. We want to be clear that only members of the Gibson and McREL research and evaluation team will have access to your interview recordings and transcripts.

Data collected through principal interviews will be aggregated and included in a written report that we will submit to TEA. In our reporting of results, you will not be identified by name or school.

Do I have your permission to record the interview?

*(If yes, start the recorder and proceed with the interview. If no, the interviewer will take detailed notes throughout the interview.)*

### **Instructions for Interviewers**

Interviewers should either have copy of the principal's responses to the statewide survey or should have sent ahead the list of strategies listed on the survey and have a copy available for the interview. All 10 constructs will include 1 question that follows up on the principal's survey responses. These can be rephrased to not be repetitive, but all should follow the same structure.

## Introductions

1. Please state your name(s), how long you have worked at this charter school and how long you have worked for this charter organization.

## Community Engagement

2. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [Include top 2 ranked answers of short answer response from spring 2023 survey] were important to community engagement at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for your community?\*

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to community engagement at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for your community?

3. Does your school engage with community partners to improve student learning, for example, local museums, social service organizations, etc.?
  - a. If so, how?
    - i. What types of partners do you work with? How long have you worked with these partners?
    - ii. Would you describe these partnerships as formal or informal partnerships? How does that shape your relationships with these partners?
    - iii. In what ways do you feel these partnerships benefit the school and contribute to its success?
  - b. If not, [CHOOSE ONE OF THE OPTIONS BELOW BASED ON PRINCIPAL'S ORIGINAL RESPONSE TO Q3]
    - i. Why are you not engaging with community partners?
    - ii. How do you envision engaging with community partners in the future?

## Parent/Guardian & Family Engagement

4. Let's talk about parent and family engagement. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [Include top 2 ranked answers of short answer response from spring 2023 survey] were important to parent/guardian and family engagement at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for engaging the parents and families of your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to parent and family engagement at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for engaging the parents and families of your school?

5. How would you describe the engagement of parents/guardians and families at your school?
  - a. Have you faced any unique challenges in communicating, engaging, or working with the families at your school?
    - i. Have you been able to overcome those challenges? If so, how?

- ii. If not, what resources or tools do you think would help you overcome those challenges?

### **Student Recruitment**

6. I want to pivot now to talking about students, starting with student recruitment. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [Include top 2 ranked answers of short answer response from spring 2023 survey] were important to student recruitment at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for recruiting and enrolling new students at your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to student recruitment at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for recruiting and enrolling new students at your school?

7. Now I'd like to ask you specifically about the use of social media, technology, and other forms of media to target and recruit students that you think would be a good fit for your school.
- a. How have you used social media, technology, and other forms of media to recruit students?
    - i. If you have not used social media, technology or other forms of media for targeting and recruiting, why not?
    - ii. If you have, which types of media have been the most effective recruiting tools in your community and why? Which have been less effective and why?
  - b. How do you imagine using social media, technology, and other types of media in the future?

### **Student Retention**

8. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [Include top 2 ranked answers of short answer response from spring 2023 survey] were important to student retention at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for retaining students at your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to student retention at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for retaining students at your school?

9. Once you have recruited students to your campus, to what degree has it been a challenge to retain students?
- a. Why do you think that is (or is not) a challenge at your campus to retain students?
    - i. Have you been able to overcome those challenges? If so, how?
    - ii. If not, what resources or tools do you think would help you overcome those challenges?

## Teacher Recruitment

10. I want to pivot now to talk about your teachers. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [Include top 2 ranked answers of short answer response from spring 2023 survey] were important to teacher recruitment at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for recruiting teachers to your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to teacher recruitment at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for recruiting teachers to your school?

11. Has hiring highly-qualified teachers been a challenge for you this year?

- a. If yes, were you able to overcome that challenge? How so?
- b. If not, why do think this wasn't a challenge for you when it is for so many other schools?
- c. What are the most important teacher qualifications or attributes when you are looking for new hires?

## Teacher Retention

12. Please describe what teacher turnover is like at your school. Have you been able to retain at least half of your teachers over the past five years, to the best of your knowledge? (If principals are new, they can speak to teacher turnover during their time at the school.)

13. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [INCLUDE TOP 2 RANKED ANSWERS OR SHORT ANSWER RESPONSE FROM SPRING 2023 SURVEY] were important to teacher retention at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for teacher retention at your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to teacher retention at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for teacher retention at your school?

## Improving Academic and Non-Academic Outcomes for Students

14. Now we would like to talk about the students at your school. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [INCLUDE TOP 2 RANKED ANSWERS OR SHORT ANSWER RESPONSE FROM SPRING 2023 SURVEY] were important to improving students' academic outcomes at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for supporting students academically at your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to improving student academic outcomes at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two



strategies have worked well or might work well for supporting students academically at your school?

15. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [INCLUDE TOP 2 RANKED ANSWERS OR SHORT ANSWER RESPONSE FROM SPRING 2023 SURVEY] were important to improving students' non-academic outcomes at your school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for supporting students at your school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important to improving student non-academic outcomes at your school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for supporting students at your school?

16. What are some typical barriers your team may need to address to help students achieve their full potential?

### **Starting up a New Charter**

17. Thank you for sharing about your students. I want to talk now about the early days of this charter school. Were you a school leader or working at this school when it was first opening?

- a. If yes, what do you remember were some of the greatest initial struggles you faced?
- b. If not, have you heard from others what some of the original struggles were in opening this school?

18. [Skip this question if the respondent was not at the school when it was first starting] In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [INCLUDE TOP 2 RANKED ANSWERS OR SHORT ANSWER RESPONSE FROM SPRING 2023 SURVEY] were important to when first opening this school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies were important when this school was opening?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important in starting a new charters school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well for your community?

### **Operational Questions**

19. In the statewide survey you completed, you noted that [INCLUDE TOP 2 RANKED ANSWERS OR SHORT ANSWER RESPONSE FROM SPRING 2023 SURVEY] were important to running this school. Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies are important to operations of this school?

OR (If survey has not yet been completed)

On the provided list of strategies, which two do you believe are most important in the daily operations of this school? Can you tell me about why you think those two strategies have worked well or might work well for operations of your school?

20. Can you describe for me who makes up your daily operations team – who is in charge of making sure the school is able to run smoothly every day?

**Final Reflection**

21. Is there anything that I have not asked about that you feel is a best practice that your school implements, and other charter schools would also benefit from implementing?

## Teacher Focus Group Protocol

### Texas Education Agency Charter School Program – High-Quality Charters Teacher Focus Group Protocol

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has contracted with McREL International and their research partners at Gibson Consulting Group to study best practices across charter schools. As part of this project, we are interested in learning from experienced teachers about the organizational and instructional practices of your charter school.

This teacher focus group is a critical part of this data collection and analysis effort. It should take approximately 45–60 minutes to complete.

#### Confidentiality Policy

Your participation is voluntary. You can opt not to answer any question or stop participating in the focus group at any time. Because the focus groups will have multiple participants, we cannot ensure complete confidentiality. We will ask the participants to not share what is said during the focus group. We will be taking notes to record responses as well as recording this focus group so we can transcribe them and continue to learn from your responses. We want to be clear that only members of the Gibson and McREL research and evaluation team will have access to your interview recordings and transcripts.

Data collected through this focus group will be aggregated and included in a written report that we will submit to TEA. In our reporting of focus group results, you will not be individually identified by name or school.

Do I have everyone's permission to record the focus group discussion?

*(If yes, start the recorder and proceed with the interview. If no, the interviewer will take detailed notes throughout the interview.)*

#### Introductions

To get started, let's go around and state your name, the number of years you've been teaching at this school, as well as at all schools combined, and the grade or subject area you are currently teaching.

These initial questions address the way staff, students and the parents see your school community.

1. I would like you to think of one word or phrase to describe your school climate; after that I will ask you to explain what you mean by that word or phrase.
  - a. Tell me what you mean by [...] (phrase used to describe)?
2. Is there anything about the school's educational philosophy that you believe attracts staff, students, and parents to the school?
3. Is there anything about the leadership of your school that you believe attracts staff, students, and parents to the school?

## Instruction on High-Quality Instructional Materials and Practices

Thank you for sharing your thoughts on how stakeholders see your school community. I would like to next talk about curricula, instructional materials, and assessments used by your school as well as instructional practices.

4. What is it about the curricula, instructional materials, and assessments at your school that you believe positively impacts student achievement? How do you know?
  - a. *Follow up prompts: Ask specifically about each one if not fully addressed in the conversation.*
5. How would you describe your **campus' approach to instruction**? What shared approaches across classrooms and teams lead to the positive results you have with students?
  - a. *Follow up prompts: Are there shared approaches to pedagogy, classroom management or other classroom routines that set the stage for learning? Are there any unique flexibilities you have as a charter school to implement these practices?*
6. In what ways do your instructional practices address the needs of students with learning gaps, for example, students with disabilities, economically and educationally disadvantaged students, at-risk students, or newly enrolled students from low-performing campuses?
  - a. *Follow up prompts, If needed, provide examples like small group instruction, pull-out time with interventionists, project-based learning, etc.*
7. How do you **monitor student learning** and **respond** when students aren't demonstrating the learning you expect?
  - a. *Follow up prompts: Are there certain tools you use? In what ways are these tools useful or valuable? How do you know when you've been successful at improving student learning? Are there any unique flexibilities you have as a charter school to implement these practices?*
8. What is unique about the way you **organize yourselves and the school day** that drives positive outcomes for students? These could be ways you approach the master schedule, teaming, or other organizational structures, for example.
  - a. *Follow up prompt: Are there any unique flexibilities you have as a charter school to implement these practices?*
9. In what ways does your campus team work together to **continuously improve its instructional practice**?
  - a. *Follow up prompts: Are there certain tools you use? What are your processes for giving and receiving feedback? Who is involved (Peers? Administrators?) Are there any unique flexibilities you have as a charter school to implement these practices?*
10. What supports are in place for a teacher who may be struggling to implement high-quality instruction in their classroom?
  - a. *Follow up prompts: In what ways are those supports helpful? How do you monitor teacher's growth and improvement? Are any of these supports unique to your school?*

1. Our final question is more open-ended. **What else can you tell us about the practices on your campus that you believe lead to positive learning outcomes for students?** What are some important practices that we haven't yet discussed?

Thank you for your time in talking with me today about your school. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to hear about the school from those of you who are actively involved in the instruction and working with students every day.

## Statewide Survey Instrument

### Texas Education Agency CSP Evaluation: Statewide Charter School Principal Survey Instrument

*Why am I receiving this survey invitation?* The Texas Education Agency (TEA) has contracted with McREL International and their research partners at Gibson Consulting Group to study best practices across charter schools in Texas. TEA is conducting an online survey of all charter school principals to better understand organizational and instructional practices in place. You are receiving this survey invitation because you have been identified as the school leader for a charter school campus serving students in 2022–23 school year.

The survey consists of questions related to the implementation of various practices at your school. The survey will take approximately 20–30 minutes to complete. You may save the progress you make on the survey, return to complete additional questions, and submit it at a later time. Please read each question carefully and review all choices before making your selections.

*Why should I participate?* This survey is designed to help TEA better understand promising practices in charter schools across Texas. Your participation is voluntary, but greatly appreciated.

*Who can I contact for questions or support in completing the survey?* Should you have any questions regarding the study, or your rights as a participant in the study, please contact Lisa Jones by phone at (303) 632-5517 or by email at [lmjones@mcrel.org](mailto:lmjones@mcrel.org). If you experience technical or substantive issues with survey content during completion, please direct your questions to Gracie Petty by phone at (336) 705-0830 or email at [gpetty@gibsonconsult.com](mailto:gpetty@gibsonconsult.com).

*Are my responses confidential?* Yes. Your identity and the information you share is completely confidential, to the extent permitted by law. Only the evaluation team will have access to your responses. Survey results will be aggregated in all reports prepared for TEA.

By clicking on the Next button below and taking the survey, you consent to let the evaluation team use your responses and comments anonymously in evaluation reports prepared for TEA.

*Statement of Consent.* If you agree to participate in the survey, click on the “NEXT” button below.

### Directions

For all questions that ask you to rank options, please drag and drop the top five most impactful strategies into the corresponding boxes (where 1 = most important, 2 = 2<sup>nd</sup> most important, 3 = 3<sup>rd</sup> most important, 4 = 4<sup>th</sup> most important, and 5 = 5<sup>th</sup> most important). **Please only place one strategy in each box.**

If there are any strategies that you use that are in your top five most impactful but are not listed here, please provide them in the available “Other” categories below and include them in your ranking.



**Please complete this survey for (Insert LEA and Campus Name)**

1. Are you currently the principal/school leader for this charter school campus?
  - Yes (Go to Q3)
  - No (Go to Q2 and survey terminates after Q2)
2. (If Q1 response is No. Note: Survey will end after the respondent provides the name and email of the correct campus administrator) If known, please include the name and email address for the current principal/school leader of this campus.
  - Name
  - Email Address

**Community Engagement**

3. Please select and rank the top five most impactful approaches your school has used to engage the larger community.
  - Holding strategic meetings to better understand the needs of the community
  - Conducting comprehensive needs assessment to understand the educational needs of the community
  - Attending community events to provide information about your school
  - Conducting door-to-door school awareness and student recruitment campaign
  - Hosting community events at the school
  - Ensuring the mission of your school is aligned with the needs of the community
  - Hiring/involving local community members and business members to support educational opportunities for students enrolled at your school
  - Engaging in community mapping to brainstorm all the community leaders and education stakeholders who might have an interest in their charter school's development
  - Maintaining consistent visibility of school leaders in the community
  - Providing effective communications related the history of your school at public events
  - Establishing an effective system for communicating with parents/guardians
  - Other, please specify
  - Other, please specify
  - Other, please specify

## Family Engagement

4. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used to engage parents/guardians and students (particularly students at-risk of dropping out or leaving).
  - Hosting open house events at the school
  - Providing regular email communications to all parents/guardians
  - Providing school newsletters and flyers regarding upcoming events and school success stories
  - Engaging parents/guardians as participants in school fundraising events
  - Encouraging parent attendance at student performances or athletic competitions
  - Attending parent meetings, conferences, and open houses
  - Offering parent volunteer opportunities
  - Providing regular individualized teacher-parent communications about their student's academic growth
  - Offering after-school events for parents/guardians to interact with their children
  - Hosting events for students and families (e.g., Fall Festival or Talent Show Nights)
  - Encouraging an active Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)
  - Other, please specify
  - Other, please specify
  - Other, please specify
5. Which was the most successful strategy that your campus has used in the last 12 months to engage either the community at large or families and students at your school? Why do you think it was successful?

## Student Recruitment

6. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used to recruit students (particularly students at risk of dropping out).
  - Encouraging word of mouth from current students and families
  - Utilizing social media
  - Sharing the educational philosophy or charter mission with families
  - Hosting open house events or campus tours
  - Hosting community events
  - Investing in specialized programs (e.g., STEM)
  - Creating targeted messaging on your website

- Recruiting at local institutions or events (e.g., having a tent or table at the local food bank or soccer game)
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Student Retention

7. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used for retaining students (particularly students at risk of dropping out).
  - Requiring family members to sign a commitment or contract aligned to the school's mission and policies
  - Providing academic supplies (e.g., backpacks, school supplies)
  - Providing necessities (e.g., breakfast, free lunch, shoes, jackets)
  - Providing extended daycare either in the morning and/or in the afternoon
  - Providing increased academic support for students at risk of dropping out
  - Providing opportunities for extracurricular activities
  - Delivering on student academic growth throughout the year
  - Providing opportunities for student feedback throughout the year
  - Providing opportunities for family feedback throughout the year
  - Scheduling summer retention events (e.g., graduation ceremonies, orientations for rising grades)
  - Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  - Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Which was the most successful strategy that your campus has used in the last 12 months to recruit or retain students? Why do you think it was successful?

### Staff Recruitment

9. In general, is recruitment of highly-qualified teachers a challenge for your school?
  - Yes
  - No

"If yes, skip to Q11. If no, skip to Q10".

10. **If no:** Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies in recruiting teachers for your school.
  - Providing competitive district pay
  - Offering signing bonuses to teachers

- Covering expenses related to relocation from other areas of the state
- Providing incentive pay based on school and student performance metrics
- Offering high levels of administrative support
- Offering high levels of instructional support
- Offering smaller class size
- Collaborating with your local independent school district (ISD) to recruit
- Offering alternative school schedules, such as four-day work weeks
- Collaborating with your charter management organization (CMO) to recruit
- Relying on word-of-mouth advertising from current staff
- Creating and posting online advertisements
- Offering student loan repayment programs
- Requiring staff to sign a commitment to the school's mission and policy
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

11. **If yes:** Please select and rank the five greatest challenges of recruiting teachers to your school.

- Teachers are not applying
- The pay at your school is not competitive with other school districts or employers
- Applicants are not aligned to the mission and values of the school
- Applicants do not meet your expectations for teaching experience or pedagogical knowledge and skills
- Applicants do not meet your expectations for content knowledge or skills
- Geographical reasons (e.g., school is remote, teachers don't want to commute)
- Challenges due to district or charter HR (e.g., delay in processing paperwork)
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

### Staff Retention

12. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used for retaining staff at your school.

- Providing competitive district pay

- Providing regular salary increases
- Providing bonus pay
- Providing opportunities for career advancement
- Offering high levels of administrative support
- Offering smaller teacher-student ratios
- Providing regular feedback to teachers
- Implementing incentive-based pay
- Providing residencies or additional training to early career teachers
- Reducing the administrative duty burdens on staff (i.e., lunch duty)
- Providing requested supplies and materials
- Providing opportunities for teacher collaboration (PLCs, etc.)
- Providing mentorship for teachers
- Providing support to address negative student behavior
- Providing professional development opportunities
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify

13. Which was the most successful strategy that your campus has used in the last 12 months to recruit or retain your teachers? Why do you think it was successful?

#### **Improving Academic Outcomes for Students**

14. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies or tools your school has used for supporting the academic needs of students (particularly students at risk of dropping out).

- Providing small-group instruction in class
- Maintaining small teacher-to-student ratios
- Providing differentiated Tier 1 instruction
- Implementing strategies to improve student attendance
- Providing targeted pull-out instruction by interventionist
- Requiring a set amount of nightly homework
- Collecting and utilizing weekly assessment data to make instructional choices
- Implementing evidence-based curricula
- Offering extensive opportunities for student-led discussions

- Implementing project-based learning
- Utilizing culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and lessons
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify

### **Improving Non-Academic Outcomes for Students**

15. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies or practices your school has used to support the non-academic needs (e.g., attendance, behavioral and social emotional learning) of students, (particularly students at risk of dropping out).

- Implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)
- Providing administrative support to teachers related to student behavioral issues
- Maintaining explicit anti-bullying policies
- Providing leadership opportunities for students
- Providing engaging extracurricular opportunities for students
- Implementing school-wide behavioral expectations for shared spaces (e.g., hallways, cafeteria)
- Implementing school-wide reward system for positive behavior (e.g., tickets or bucks that can be “spent” on rewards, lotteries for prizes)
- Defining and integrating school-wide leadership or character traits into classrooms and shared spaces
- Explicitly teaching social and emotional skills either in classrooms or in school-wide venues (e.g., assemblies)
- Collecting and tracking student behavior data to reduce challenging behavior
- Offering engaging afterschool programming for students
- Hiring a behavioral support specialist to provide push-in or pull-out services as needed
- Providing material assistance to students (i.e., school supplies, meals, clothing)
- Providing wraparound services (e.g., counseling, case management, crisis care)
- Communicating leadership or character traits to families
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify



16. Which was the most successful strategy that your campus has used in the last 12 months to improve student outcomes (particularly for students at risk of dropping out)? Why do you think it was successful?

### Setting Up a New Charter

17. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used for successfully opening your charter school.

- Ensuring community support is in place
- Using effective student recruitment strategies
- Facilities planning
- Fundraising
- Ensuring alignment between the education philosophies of teachers and the school
- Receiving strong guidance and support from charter management organization or local independent school district (ISD)
- Receiving strong financial management support
- Identifying and executing an effective instructional model
- Purchasing high-quality instructional materials and curriculum
- Ensuring the school has adequate support staff for teachers
- Partnering with local community organizations for fundraising opportunities
- Partnering with local community organizations to provide student and family support
- Developing a clear mission and vision statement for the charter school
- Developing a committed leadership or administration team
- Selecting the right school leadership team for the school and the community
- Gathering input from the community and local families
- Hiring high-quality teachers and staff
- Having support from the Texas Education Agency
- Adopting high quality curriculum and providing related teacher training
- Developing and implementing sound fiscal policies and procedures
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify
- Other, please specify

## Operations

18. Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies used for operating your school.

- Aligning major decisions to the mission statement or educational philosophy
- Establishing a strong leadership team
- Hiring and retaining teachers and staff that are passionate about the school's mission
- Hiring and retaining teachers and staff that are well-qualified to provide instruction to students (i.e., have experience, pedagogical and content knowledge)
- Establishing strong teacher supports and coaching
- Utilizing data to inform school-wide decisions
- Developing school-wide policies and procedures (e.g., attendance policies)
- Maintaining the school's financial management systems
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_
- Other, please specify \_\_\_\_\_

19. Which was the most successful strategy that your campus has used either in starting up the school or in the daily running of the school in the last 12 months? Why do you think it was successful?

## Background Questions

20. What is your highest level of educational attainment?

- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- PhD
- EdD
- Other (Please describe.)

21. How many total years have you been a principal at this or any public school campus?

- Less than one year
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11 to 15 years
- 16 to 20 years

- More than 20 years

22. Before you became a principal, how many total years of K–12 teaching experience did you have?

- I had no prior teaching experience
- Less than one year
- 1 to 2 years
- 3 to 5 years
- 6 to 10 years
- 11 to 15 years
- 16 to 20 years
- More than 20 years

## Description of CLASS® Observation Instrument

The CLASS® observation tool is an instrument designed to assess classroom quality, with a focus on the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom environment. The tool examines activities and interactions under the domains of emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support for Kindergarten through Grade 12 and student engagement for Grades 4 through 12. Trained observers rate dimensions of instructional quality on a 1 to 7 scale where scores of 1 to 2 are considered in the low range, scores of 3 to 5 are considered in the mid-range, and scores of 6 to 7 are considered on the high range of the scale. Dimension scores are then used to calculate overall ratings in four CLASS® domains. The dimensions that comprise each domain vary somewhat across grade level instruments (Table A.1.).

**Table A.1. CLASS® Dimensions that Comprise Each Domain by Grade Level Instrument**

| CLASS® Dimensions Comprising Each Domain by Grade Level Instrument |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| CLASS® Domain  | Lower Elementary<br>Grades K–3  | Upper Elementary<br>Grades 4–5   | Secondary<br>Grades 6–12   |
| Emotional Support  | Positive Climate<br>Negative Climate*<br>Teacher Sensitivity<br>Regard for Student Perspectives | Positive Climate<br>Teacher Sensitivity<br>Regard for Student Perspectives   | Positive Climate<br>Teacher Sensitivity<br>Regard for Adolescent Perspectives  |
| Classroom Organization   | Behavior Management<br>Productivity<br>Instructional Learning Formats                           | Behavior Management<br>Productivity<br>Negative Climate*   | Behavior Management<br>Productivity<br>Negative Climate*   |
| Instructional Support  | Concept Development<br>Quality of Feedback<br>Language Modeling                                 | Instructional Learning Formats<br>Concept Understanding<br>Analysis and Inquiry<br>Quality of Feedback<br>Instructional Dialogue | Instructional Learning Formats<br>Concept Understanding<br>Analysis and Inquiry<br>Quality of Feedback<br>Instructional Dialogue |
| Student Engagement   | N/A   | Student Engagement   | Student Engagement   |

Source. Teachstone® Inc.

Note. \*Scores for the Negative Climate dimension are reverse coded; for example, a score of 1 reflecting the absence of negative behaviors was recoded as a 7.

## Appendix B: Methods

There were three main analytical components underlying the development of the best practices guide: 1) a literature review of best practices in charter school campuses; 2) the methodology for identifying high-performing charter school campuses in Texas; and 3) an examination of the best practices implemented at high-performing campuses as identified through a statewide survey of charter school campuses and site visits.

### Approach to the Literature Review

The best practices guide literature review was an iterative process framed around the foundational constructs that comprise the Texas Education Agency's (TEA's) Effective Schools Framework (ESF): strong campus leadership and planning, strategic staffing, positive campus culture, high-quality instructional materials and assessments, and effective instruction. Then, as the highest-level best practices were identified, additional research was explored to help the study team describe these practices in more detail. For example, the literature identified teacher autonomy as a best practice for teacher recruitment and retention; subsequently, the study team identified additional literature to help the authors describe the specific actions principals can take to facilitate teachers' autonomy in their work.

### Methods for Identifying High-Performing Charter School Campuses

The identification of high-performing charter school campuses used a combination of propensity score matching (PSM) and regression analyses. PSM allowed us to conduct a rigorous impact analysis for each campus of a high-quality charter (HQC) that controlled for pre-existing differences in demographic factors between students in the HQCs and those in the comparison traditional campuses, thereby isolating the impact of charter school campus functioning on student outcomes.<sup>77, 78</sup> Regression analyses allowed us to assess whether an individual HQC campus had a statistically significant impact on student outcomes by comparing mathematics and reading outcomes of its students to matched comparison students in traditional campuses. Campuses of HQCs that showed a statistically significant impact on these student outcomes were designated as high-performing charter school campuses and therefore were eligible for inclusion in the sample of site visits to 11 high-performing campuses. High-level steps of the analyses to identify high-performing campuses were as follows.

The first step was to acquire a list of 2022 HQCs from TEA, identified by County District Numbers (CDN), that have demonstrated success according to state criteria. Note that this list of Designated HQCs from TEA

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<sup>77</sup> According to the Every Student Succeeds Act, Title IV, Part C Section 4310(8), the term "high-quality charter school" means a charter school that— (A) shows evidence of strong academic results, which may include strong student academic growth, as determined by a State; (B) has no significant issues in the areas of student safety, financial and operational management, or statutory or regulatory compliance; (C) has demonstrated success in significantly increasing student academic achievement, including graduation rates where applicable, for all students served by the charter school; and (D) has demonstrated success in increasing student academic achievement, including graduation rates where applicable, for each of the subgroups of students, as defined in section 1111(c)(2), except that such demonstration is not required in a case in which the number of students in a group is insufficient to yield statistically reliable information or the results would reveal personally identifiable information about an individual student (Charter School Performance Framework: 2016 Manual, Texas Education Agency).

<sup>78</sup> Rosenbaum & Rubin, 1985.

is at the charter-level, and individual campuses within these CDN codes were included as HQC campuses in the subsequent analyses detailed below.

The sample eligible for PSM included 67 HQC campuses and 7,083 potential comparison campuses across the state after removing alternative instructional campuses and/or campuses with no STAAR participation from both groups and charter campuses from the comparison group. Each HQC campus was matched (using a 1 to 5 ratio) with replacement to traditional campuses based on campus-level demographics. Note that while a 1 to 5 match was the goal, some campuses achieved less than five adequate matches. The variables used for the school-level match are listed below (school-level variables specified for exact match in the PSM model are marked with an asterisk).

- Total school enrollment
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) school locale (major designations: 1 = city, 2 = suburban, 3 = town, 4 = rural)\*
- Serves elementary grades (Grades K–5)\*
- Serves middle grade (Grades 6–8)\*
- Serves high school grades (Grades 9–12)\*
- Percent students identified as economically disadvantaged
- Percent students identified as at-risk of dropping out of school
- Percent students identified as emergent bilingual students (EB)/English learners (EL)
- Percent students identified as eligible for special education services
- Percent African American students
- Percent Hispanic students
- Percent White students
- Percent Other Race students

Once a matched campus-level dataset was established, the study team requested student-level data for the HQC campuses and their matched comparison traditional campuses for a second round of PSM, which was conducted using student-level characteristics as follows (all student-level variables were specified for exact match in the PSM).

- Grade level
- Campus match (from previous school level PSM)
- Identified as economically disadvantaged (Yes/No)
- Identified as at-risk of dropping out of school (Yes/No)
- Identified as EB/EL (Yes/No)
- Identified as eligible for special education services (Yes/No)

Following the student-level PSM, two sets of student-level regression impact analyses were conducted for each HQC campus and their matched comparison traditional campuses using data derived from the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®), specifically Grade 3–8 STAAR Reading, Grade 3–8 STAAR Mathematics, STAAR Algebra I, and STAAR English I achievement data from the Spring 2022 testing period. The first set examined the impact of each HQC campus on students' mathematics (analysis 1) and English Language Arts (ELA) (analysis 2) performance overall compared to the matched traditional campus students. The second set of analyses allowed for an examination of the impact of each HQC campus on closing achievement gaps for educationally disadvantaged students compared to non-educationally disadvantaged students with regard to mathematics (analysis 3) and ELA (analysis 4) performance.

Prior to computing regression analyses to determine HQC campus impact, the following criteria for ranking campuses were set: HQC campuses found to have statistically significant impacts ( $p < 0.05$ ) on all four regression analyses would be considered first-tier high-performing campuses (Tier 1), whereas those HQC campuses showing fewer statistically significant impacts on student achievement would be assigned to lower tiers (i.e., three = Tier 2, two = Tier 3, and one = Tier 4). Results revealed that 30 HQC campuses had at least one statistically significant impact. None of the HQC campuses were found to have statistically significant impacts on all four regression analyses (Tier 1); one HQC campus had a statistically significant impact on three of the four regression analyses (Tier 2); 11 HQC campuses had a statistically significant impact on two of the four regression analyses (Tier 3); and 18 HQC campuses had a statistically significant impact on one of the four regression analyses (Tier 4). Based on these results, the study team invited the top 12 campuses to participate in site visits (one Tier 2 campus and 11 Tier 3 campuses).<sup>79</sup>

## Methods for Analyzing Responses to the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools

The Statewide Charter School Campus Survey included 10 items for which principals ranked the effectiveness of strategies provided on the survey in the areas listed below:

1. Most impactful approaches your campus has used to engage the larger community;
2. Most impactful strategies your campus has used to engage parents/guardians and students (particularly students at risk of dropping out or leaving);
3. Most impactful strategies your campus has used to recruit students (particularly students at risk of dropping out);
4. Five most impactful strategies your campus has used for retaining students (particularly students at risk of dropping out);
5. Most impactful strategies in recruiting teachers for your campus;
6. Most impactful strategies your campus has used for retaining staff at your campus;

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<sup>79</sup> The study team consulted with TEA to identify alternate campuses from the list to replace campuses in the original sample of 12 high-performing campuses that were not available for site visits. Ultimately, 11 high performing campuses were able to participate.



7. Most impactful strategies or tools your campus has used for supporting the academic needs of students (particularly students at risk of dropping out);
8. Most impactful strategies or practices your campus has used to support the non-academic needs (e.g., attendance, behavioral, and social emotional learning) of students (particularly students at risk of dropping out);
9. Most impactful strategies your campus has used for successfully opening your charter school campus; and
10. Most impactful strategies used for operating your campus.

For each of these items, principals ranked their top five strategies from (1) most important to (5) least important. Because respondents had more than five options available to rank, options that did not merit a top-five ranking were left unranked. Rank order scores will be calculated by assigning a rank of 1 a value of 100, 2 a value of 80, 3 a value of 60, 4 a value of 40, and 5 a value of 20. Unranked options will be assigned a value of 0.

Then, for each item, the study team took the average of the assigned values across all respondents who engaged with the rank-order question and calculated the average of these values. The resulting scores had a theoretical range of 0 to 100; a score of 0 indicated that none of the respondents ranked an item in their top 5, and a rank of 100 indicated that every respondent ranked an item as their most important strategy. Principals could add one “other” strategy under each topic area and include that strategy in their ranking. However, analyses showed that these additions were rare and unique to the principal who entered them, so they did not have any impact on the identification of the highest ranked strategies.

The study team examined the results of the ranking procedure in a tabular format that compared the top five strategies identified in each topic area for the principals of high-performing charter school campuses (N = 13) identified from results of the analysis described in the previous section to the top five ranked strategies for all other responding principals (N = 167). The study team made note of strategies that only appeared in the top five for high-performing campuses, other campuses, or for both groups as a way of discerning shared best practices overall and best practices that seem to be unique to high-performing campuses. These observations were another source of information that assisted the study team in identifying best practices for inclusion in the report.

## Methods for Analyzing Site Visit Data

### *Methods for Analyzing Teacher Focus Group and Principal Interview Data*

Researchers used the following procedure to analyze transcripts from the high-performing charter principal interviews, teacher focus groups, and open-ended survey items:<sup>80</sup>

1. Two coders reread an internal literature review to familiarize themselves with best practices for charter school campuses. One lead coder identified key codes that were applied to qualitative analysis.

One coder tagged all documents in *Atlas.ti*, identifying characteristics of interest (e.g., high-performing charter/other charter, campus size, grade levels served, range of the percentage of students who are identified as economically disadvantaged).<sup>81</sup>

- a. A table with campus characteristics was reviewed prior to the start of coding.
2. All interview, focus group, and survey data was coded thematically, beginning with all principal interviews, followed by all teacher focus groups, and all open-ended survey responses.
  - a. To establish reliability, all coders read one principal transcript independently; all coders then met to code the document together.
    - i. Coders used both *a priori* codes developed from the literature review, and developed additional codes that arose during the group coding.
    - ii. Both high-level as well as intermediate-level codes were identified, defined, and included an example and a non-example.
  - b. After the initial meeting, coders independently read and coded a second transcript and then returned as a group to discuss.
    - i. During the follow-up meetings, the group resolved any discrepancies.
    - ii. During the initial and follow-up meetings, coders developed a shared codebook which could be submitted for review.
    - iii. The process was repeated until all coders agreed on the codes chosen, understood the examples and non-examples provided in the codebook, and felt comfortable coding future transcripts independently.
  - c. This process repeated for the teacher focus group and survey analysis.
    - i. Although principal transcripts were coded initially, all coders coded both the principal interview, teacher focus group, and survey responses from the same

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<sup>80</sup> The five open-ended responses on the Statewide Survey of Charter School Campuses covered the following topics: 1) strategies used to engage the community or families and students; 2) strategies to recruit or retain students; 3) strategies to recruit or retain teachers; 4) strategies to improve student academic or non-academic outcomes; and 5) strategies for starting up the campus or in the daily running of the campus.

<sup>81</sup> These categorical tags permitted the study team to look for patterns of codes that were more prevalent in certain types of charter schools; although with a sample of 11 high-performing campuses, we expected to see very few clear trends.

campus for consistency. Survey responses from campuses that did not participate in high-performing charter school campus site visits were randomly assigned.

3. The analyses resulted in a count of codes for every theme. These counts helped the study team identify the practices for inclusion in the report that were most common among high-performing charters, that provide support for best practices identified in the literature, or that add to the practices identified in the literature. The coding process also allowed the study team to readily identify quotes that exemplified the most common themes.

### *Methods for Analyzing CLASS® Observation Data*

The study team collected classroom observations data from 11 high-performing charter school campuses during their site visits to these campuses. Trained observers from the study team used the CLASS® observation tool to collect these data. The CLASS® observation tool is an instrument designed to assess classroom quality, with a focus on the interactions between teachers and students in the classroom environment. The tool examines activities and interactions under the domains of emotional support, classroom organization, instructional support for Kindergarten through Grade 12 and student engagement for Grades 4–12. See Appendix A for more details on the CLASS® instrument.

Classroom observations occurred over 60- to 75-minute time periods in which observers conducted three or four observation cycles of 10 to 20 minutes of instruction. Trained observers rated dimensions of instructional quality on a 1 to 7 scale where scores of 1 to 2 are considered in the low range, scores of 3 to 5 are considered in the mid-range, and scores of 6 to 7 are considered on the high range of the scale. Dimension scores are then used to calculate overall ratings in four CLASS® domains. The dimensions that comprise each domain vary somewhat across grade level instruments. The study team examined the results using descriptive statistics to calculate average domain and dimension scores for each observed classroom as well as average ratings across elementary, middle, and high campus grades.

## Appendix C: Participating Charter School Campuses

Appendix C describes the high-performing charter school campuses that participated in the data collection informing the practices summarized in this guide. Campuses could have participated in the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools (N = 5), site visits only (N = 3), or both types of data collection (N = 8) in spring 2023.

**Table C.1. High-Performing Charter School Campuses That Participated in Data Collection**

| Campus Name   | Charter Type | First Year of Operation | Number of Students | Grade Levels Served | % Econ. Dis. | % African American/Black | % Hispanic | % White | % Asian | % Other Race/Ethnicities | % Special Education | % EB/EL |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------|---------|---------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Basis San Antonio- Shavano Campus <sup>c</sup>      | OE           | 2013                    | 976                | 6–12                | 9.8          | 5.0                      | 29.5       | 22.7    | 39.6    | 4.7                      | 1.7                 | 8.5     |
| Beta Academy <sup>c</sup>                           | OE           | 2015                    | 714                | 5–12                | 68.6         | 10.5                     | 78.9       | 6.6     | 3.1     | 1.2                      | 7.3                 | 18.8    |
| Chaparral Star Academy <sup>c</sup>                 | OE           | 1998                    | 354                | KG–12               | 6.8          | 4.0                      | 18.6       | 45.8    | 25.1    | 9.4                      | 2.5                 | 12.7    |
| Harmony School Of Innovation - Katy <sup>c</sup>    | OE           | 2016                    | 694                | 8–12                | 54.6         | 34.9                     | 19.6       | 16.9    | 24.9    | 3.0                      | 5.3                 | 14.1    |
| Harmony Science Academy - Sugar Land <sup>a</sup>   | OE           | 2008                    | 729                | KG–5                | 63.9         | 26.5                     | 14.4       | 14.5    | 43.4    | 1.6                      | 5.3                 | 33.3    |
| Houston Gateway Academy - Coral Campus <sup>a</sup> | OE           | 2009                    | 854                | PK–12               | 88.5         | 0.8                      | 98.0       | 0.8     | 0.1     | 0.1                      | 3.0                 | 45.1    |

*Table C.1 continues on the next page.*

Source. Texas Education Agency

Note. All data are as of fall 2023. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments. OE stands for open-enrollment charter. CU stands for a college/university charter. Econ. Dis. Stands for economically disadvantaged. The percentage of students in the “Other Race/Ethnicities” category is a sum of students who were identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Two or more race/ethnicities. EB/EL stands for students identified for Emergent Bilingual student /English Learner services. The superscript (a) indicates that the campus participated in the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools in spring 2023. The superscript (b) indicates that the campus participated in site visits in spring 2023. The superscript (c) indicates that the campus participated in the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools and site visits in spring 2023.

**Table C.1. High-Performing Charter School Campuses That Participated in Data Collection, continued**

| Campus Name   | Charter Type | First Year of Operation | Number of Students | Grade Levels Served | % Econ. Dis. | % African American/Black | % Hispanic | % White | % Asian | % Other Race/Ethnicities | % Special Education | % EB/EL |
|---|--------------|-------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------------------|------------|---------|---------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------|
| Imagine International Academy Of North Texas <sup>c</sup> | OE           | 2012                    | 1,386              | KG–12               | 9.0          | 16.3                     | 13.1       | 21.2    | 47.0    | 5.4                      | 5.3                 | 10.1    |
| NYOS - Magnolia Mccullough Campus <sup>a</sup>            | OE           | 2001                    | 809                | PK–8                | 35.2         | 14.5                     | 28.7       | 33.7    | 16.5    | 5.1                      | 7.8                 | 32.5    |
| Pioneer Technology (PTAA) Mesquite <sup>c</sup>           | OE           | 2016                    | 688                | 5–12                | 67.7         | 11.3                     | 76.2       | 10.8    | 0.6     | 1.1                      | 5.7                 | 43.9    |
| School Of Science and Technology Advancement <sup>a</sup> | OE           | 2016                    | 695                | PK–8                | 76.8         | 64.0                     | 23.7       | 7.1     | 2.0     | 2.5                      | 7.9                 | 32.9    |
| School Of Science and Technology - Discovery <sup>a</sup> | OE           | 2008                    | 560                | PK–8                | 68.2         | 9.3                      | 59.5       | 15.5    | 11.9    | 4.7                      | 10.7                | 18.4    |
| School Of Science and Technology Northwest <sup>c</sup>   | OE           | 2018                    | 703                | PK–8                | 27.9         | 15.8                     | 46.2       | 22.6    | 10.6    | 6.9                      | 8.1                 | 12.1    |
| Treetops School International <sup>b</sup>                | OE           | 1998                    | 323                | KG–12               | 20.4         | 7.7                      | 22.3       | 53.6    | 4.7     | 11.1                     | 6.8                 | 0.9     |
| Universal Academy <sup>c</sup>                            | OE           | 1998                    | 726                | PK–12               | 80.9         | 26.9                     | 63.2       | 1.7     | 5.9     | 1.9                      | 4.1                 | 50.1    |
| Vanguard Picasso <sup>b</sup>                             | OE           | 2012                    | 486                | PK–5                | 81.5         | 0.0                      | 99.2       | 0.6     | 0.2     | 0.0                      | 5.1                 | 57.2    |
| Westlake Academy <sup>b</sup>                             | OE           | 2003                    | 877                | KG–12               | 2.6          | 5.4                      | 15.4       | 50.9    | 21.1    | 9.1                      | 4.9                 | 2.2     |

Source. Texas Education Agency

Note. All data are as of fall 2023. Percentages may not sum to 100% due to rounding. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments. OE stands for open-enrollment charter. CU stands for a college/university charter. Econ. Dis. Stands for economically disadvantaged. The percentage of students in the “Other Race/Ethnicities” category is a sum of students who were identified as American Indian/Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Two or more race/ethnicities. EB/EL stands for students identified for emergent bilingual student (EB)/English learner (EL) services. The superscript (a) indicates that the campus participated in the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools in spring 2023. The superscript (b) indicates that the campus participated in site visits in spring 2023. The superscript (c) indicates that the campus participated in the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools and site visits in spring 2023.

## Appendix D: Responses to the Statewide Survey

This Appendix contains the rank order responses from the 13 high-performing campuses that participated in the Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals in spring 2023. Throughout the survey, principals were asked to rank the top five most impactful strategies across 10 domains, where 1 = most important, 2 = 2nd most important, 3 = 3rd most important, 4 = 4th most important, and 5 = 5th most important. Those ranks were then examined according to the procedures outlined in Appendix B, which resulted in average ranks ranging from 0 (lowest possible rank) to 100 (highest possible rank). Principals had the option to provide and rank additional impactful strategies, but none of the principals from high-performing campuses added additional strategies.

**Table D.1. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Approaches Their School Has Used To Engage The Larger Community**

| Please select and rank the top five most impactful approaches your school has used to engage the larger community.  | HP Charters Rank (N = 11) | Other Charters Rank (N = 163) | All Charters Rank (N = 174) |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Establishing an effective system for communicating with parents/guardians   | 98                        | 80                            | 81                          |
| Ensuring the mission of your school is aligned with the needs of the community  | 59                        | 48                            | 48                          |
| Hosting community events at the school  | 52                        | 41                            | 42                          |
| Conducting comprehensive needs assessment to understand the educational needs of the community  | 41                        | 40                            | 40                          |
| Maintaining consistent visibility of school leaders in the community  | 30                        | 32                            | 32                          |
| Engaging in community mapping to brainstorm all the community leaders and education stakeholders who might have an interest in their charter school's development | 23                        | 9                             | 9                           |
| Attending community events to provide information about your school   | 20                        | 29                            | 29                          |
| Holding strategic meetings to better understand the needs of the community  | 16                        | 21                            | 21                          |
| Providing effective communications related the history of your school at public events  | 16                        | 14                            | 14                          |
| Hiring/involving local community members and business members to support educational opportunities for students enrolled at your school                           | 11                        | 21                            | 21                          |
| Conducting door-to-door school awareness and student recruitment campaign   | 0                         | 17                            | 16                          |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

**Table D.2. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies Their School Has Used To Engage Parents/Guardians and Students**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used to engage parents/guardians and students (particularly students at risk of dropping out or leaving). | HP Charters Rank (N = 12) | Other Charters Rank (N = 164) | All Charters Rank (N = 176) |
|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Providing regular email communications to all parents/guardians   | 83                        | 52                            | 54                          |
| Hosting events for students and families (e.g., Fall Festival or Talent Show Nights)  | 67                        | 54                            | 55                          |
| Providing school newsletters and flyers regarding upcoming events and school success stories  | 63                        | 46                            | 47                          |
| Providing regular individualized teacher-parent communications about their student’s academic growth  | 46                        | 54                            | 54                          |
| Attending parent meetings, conferences, and open houses   | 27                        | 41                            | 40                          |
| Encouraging parent attendance at student performances or athletic competitions  | 23                        | 17                            | 17                          |
| Hosting open house events at the school   | 19                        | 25                            | 25                          |
| Engaging parents/guardians as participants in school fundraising events   | 15                        | 9                             | 10                          |
| Offering after-school events for parents/guardians to interact with their children  | 15                        | 22                            | 22                          |
| Offering parent volunteer opportunities   | 8                         | 20                            | 20                          |
| Encouraging an active Parent-Teacher Association (PTA)  | 8                         | 18                            | 17                          |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.



**Table D.3. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies Their School Has Used To Recruit Students**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used to recruit students (particularly students at risk of dropping out). | HP Charters Rank<br>(N = 13) | Other Charters Rank<br>(N = 162) | All Charters Rank<br>(N = 175) |
|---|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Encouraging word of mouth from current students and families  | 87                           | 77                               | 78                             |
| Hosting open house events or campus tours   | 87                           | 53                               | 55                             |
| Utilizing social media  | 58                           | 54                               | 54                             |
| Sharing the educational philosophy or charter mission with families   | 42                           | 45                               | 45                             |
| Hosting community events  | 27                           | 33                               | 32                             |
| Creating targeted messaging on your website   | 27                           | 28                               | 28                             |
| Investing in specialized programs (e.g., STEM)  | 23                           | 29                               | 29                             |
| Recruiting at local institutions or events (e.g., having a tent or table at the local food bank or soccer game)                                     | 21                           | 31                               | 30                             |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

**Table D.4. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Approaches Their School Has Used To Retain Students**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used for retaining students (particularly students at risk of dropping out). | HP Charters Rank<br>(N = 13) | Other Charters Rank<br>(N = 163) | All Charters Rank<br>(N = 176) |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Delivering on student academic growth throughout the year  | 87                           | 69                               | 70                             |
| Providing increased academic support for students at risk of dropping out  | 63                           | 71                               | 70                             |
| Providing opportunities for extracurricular activities   | 62                           | 42                               | 44                             |
| Providing opportunities for family feedback throughout the year  | 62                           | 37                               | 39                             |
| Providing opportunities for student feedback throughout the year   | 38                           | 30                               | 30                             |
| Providing necessities (e.g., breakfast, free lunch, shoes, jackets)  | 21                           | 30                               | 30                             |
| Requiring family members to sign a commitment or contract aligned to the school's mission and policies   | 12                           | 16                               | 16                             |
| Providing extended daycare either in the morning and/or in the afternoon   | 10                           | 18                               | 18                             |
| Providing academic supplies (e.g., backpacks, school supplies)   | 2                            | 19                               | 18                             |
| Scheduling summer retention events (e.g., graduation ceremonies, orientations for rising grades)   | 2                            | 19                               | 17                             |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

**Table D.5. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies For Recruiting Teachers**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies in recruiting teachers for your school. | HP<br>Charters<br>Rank<br>(N = 4) | Other<br>Charters<br>Rank<br>(N = 31) | All<br>Charters<br>Rank<br>(N = 35) |
|---|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Providing incentive pay based on school and student performance metrics                           | 81                                | 40                                    | 44                                  |
| Offering high levels of administrative support  | 75                                | 69                                    | 70                                  |
| Providing competitive district pay  | 50                                | 44                                    | 45                                  |
| Creating and posting online advertisements  | 50                                | 20                                    | 24                                  |
| Offering high levels of instructional support   | 44                                | 52                                    | 51                                  |
| Offering smaller class size   | 25                                | 49                                    | 46                                  |
| Offering alternative school schedules, such as four-day work weeks                                | 25                                | 4                                     | 6                                   |
| Requiring staff to sign a commitment to the school's mission and policy                           | 19                                | 1                                     | 3                                   |
| Relying on word-of-mouth advertising from current staff   | 6                                 | 52                                    | 47                                  |
| Offering signing bonuses to teachers  | 0                                 | 0                                     | 0                                   |
| Covering expenses related to relocation from other areas of the state                             | 0                                 | 6                                     | 5                                   |
| Collaborating with your local independent school district (ISD) to recruit                        | 0                                 | 7                                     | 6                                   |
| Collaborating with your charter management organization (CMO) to recruit                          | 0                                 | 5                                     | 4                                   |
| Offering student loan repayment programs  | 0                                 | 0                                     | 0                                   |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments. There were four responses to this item. This item was offered only to principals who answered “no” to the question, “In general, is recruitment of highly-qualified teachers a challenge for your school?”

**Table D.6. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Greatest Challenges Recruiting Teachers to Their School**

| Please select and rank the five greatest challenges of recruiting teachers to your school.           | HP Charters Rank<br>(N = 9) | Other Charters Rank<br>(N = 135) | All Charters Rank<br>(N = 144) |
|--|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| The pay at your school is not competitive with other school districts or employers                   | 100                         | 64                               | 66                             |
| Applicants do not meet your expectations for teaching experience or pedagogical knowledge and skills | 83                          | 61                               | 63                             |
| Applicants do not meet your expectations for content knowledge or skills                             | 67                          | 59                               | 59                             |
| Teachers are not applying  | 61                          | 72                               | 72                             |
| Applicants are not aligned to the mission and values of the school                                   | 28                          | 25                               | 26                             |
| Challenges due to district or charter HR (e.g., delay in processing paperwork)                       | 28                          | 26                               | 26                             |
| Geographical reasons (e.g., school is remote, teachers don't want to commute)                        | 6                           | 25                               | 23                             |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments. There were nine responses to this item. This item was offered only to principals who answered “yes” to the question, “In general, is recruitment of highly-qualified teachers a challenge for your school?”

**Table D.7. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies Their School Has Used To Retain Staff**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used for retaining staff at your school. | HP Charters Rank<br>(N = 13) | Other Charters Rank<br>(N = 166) | All Charters Rank<br>(N = 179) |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Providing opportunities for teacher collaboration (e.g., PLCs)   | 52                           | 24                               | 24                             |
| Offering high levels of administrative support   | 40                           | 9                                | 11                             |
| Providing regular feedback to teachers   | 40                           | 17                               | 18                             |
| Reducing the administrative duty burdens on staff (e.g., lunch duty)   | 37                           | 14                               | 14                             |
| Providing support to address negative student behavior   | 35                           | 45                               | 45                             |
| Providing regular salary increases   | 29                           | 28                               | 26                             |
| Providing bonus pay  | 29                           | 24                               | 25                             |
| Implementing incentive-based pay   | 25                           | 19                               | 19                             |
| Providing mentorship for teachers  | 25                           | 2                                | 2                              |
| Providing competitive district pay   | 15                           | 22                               | 23                             |
| Providing requested supplies and materials   | 15                           | 20                               | 20                             |
| Providing opportunities for career advancement   | 13                           | 43                               | 44                             |
| Providing professional development opportunities   | 13                           | 29                               | 28                             |
| Offering smaller teacher-student ratios  | 6                            | 39                               | 38                             |
| Providing residencies or additional training to early career teachers  | 0                            | 27                               | 26                             |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

**Table D.8. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies or Tools Their School Has Used To Support The Academic Needs of Students**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies or tools your school has used for supporting the academic needs of students (particularly students at risk of dropping out). | HP Charters Rank<br>(N = 13) | Other Charters Rank<br>(N = 165) | All Charters Rank<br>(N = 178) |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Implementing evidence-based curricula  | 56                           | 35                               | 36                             |
| Providing small-group instruction in class   | 52                           | 66                               | 65                             |
| Providing targeted pull-out instruction by an interventionist  | 46                           | 48                               | 48                             |
| Collecting and utilizing weekly assessment data to make instructional choices  | 46                           | 46                               | 46                             |
| Implementing project-based learning  | 35                           | 14                               | 15                             |
| Maintaining small teacher-to-student ratios  | 29                           | 37                               | 36                             |
| Providing differentiated Tier 1 instruction  | 29                           | 45                               | 43                             |
| Implementing strategies to improve student attendance  | 29                           | 34                               | 34                             |
| Offering extensive opportunities for student-led discussions   | 29                           | 20                               | 21                             |
| Utilizing culturally and linguistically appropriate materials and lessons  | 21                           | 12                               | 13                             |
| Requiring a set amount of nightly homework   | 0                            | 3                                | 3                              |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

**Table D.9. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies or Practices Their School Has Used To Support the Non-academic Needs of Students**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies or practices your school has used to support the non-academic needs (e.g., attendance, behavioral, and social emotional learning) of students (particularly students at risk of dropping out). | HP Charters Rank (N = 13) | Other Charters Rank (N = 164) | All Charters Rank (N = 177) |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Providing administrative support to teachers related to student behavioral issues  | 48                        | 38                            | 39                          |
| Defining and integrating school-wide leadership or character traits into classrooms and shared spaces  | 38                        | 26                            | 27                          |
| Implementing school-wide behavioral expectations for shared spaces (e.g., hallways, cafeteria)   | 37                        | 44                            | 44                          |
| Explicitly teaching social and emotional skills either in classrooms or in school-wide venues (e.g., assemblies)   | 33                        | 41                            | 40                          |
| Maintaining explicit anti-bullying policies  | 29                        | 15                            | 16                          |
| Implementing Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)   | 25                        | 25                            | 25                          |
| Providing leadership opportunities for students  | 25                        | 14                            | 15                          |
| Collecting and tracking student behavior data to reduce challenging behavior   | 25                        | 21                            | 21                          |
| Implementing school-wide reward system for positive behavior (e.g., tickets or bucks that can be “spent” on rewards, lotteries for prizes)   | 23                        | 31                            | 30                          |
| Offering engaging afterschool programming for students   | 23                        | 18                            | 19                          |
| Communicating leadership or character traits to families   | 23                        | 19                            | 19                          |
| Providing wraparound services (e.g., counseling, case management, crisis care)   | 17                        | 25                            | 25                          |
| Providing engaging extracurricular opportunities for students  | 15                        | 21                            | 21                          |
| Hiring a behavioral support specialist to provide push-in or pull-out services as needed   | 6                         | 13                            | 12                          |
| Providing material assistance to students (i.e., school supplies, meals, clothing)   | 0                         | 17                            | 15                          |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.



**Table D.10. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies Used To Successfully Open Their Charter School**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies your school has used for successfully opening your charter school. | HP Charters Rank (N = 13) | Other Charters Rank (N = 159) | All Charters Rank (N = 172) |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Developing a committed leadership or administration team   | 50                        | 42                            | 43                          |
| Adopting high quality curriculum and providing related teacher training  | 44                        | 30                            | 31                          |
| Selecting the right school leadership team for the school and the community  | 42                        | 29                            | 30                          |
| Hiring high-quality teachers and staff   | 38                        | 39                            | 39                          |
| Developing a clear mission and vision statement for the charter school   | 35                        | 57                            | 55                          |
| Identifying and executing an effective instructional model   | 23                        | 29                            | 28                          |
| Developing and implementing sound fiscal policies and procedures   | 19                        | 15                            | 15                          |
| Facilities planning  | 17                        | 4                             | 5                           |
| Ensuring community support is in place   | 15                        | 10                            | 11                          |
| Ensuring the school has adequate support staff for teachers  | 15                        | 15                            | 15                          |
| Purchasing high-quality instructional materials and curriculum   | 13                        | 15                            | 15                          |
| Receiving strong financial management support  | 12                        | 8                             | 8                           |
| Ensuring alignment between the education philosophies of teachers and the school   | 10                        | 14                            | 14                          |
| Having support from the Texas Education Agency   | 10                        | 10                            | 10                          |
| Using effective student recruitment strategies   | 8                         | 12                            | 11                          |
| Gathering input from the community and local families  | 8                         | 3                             | 3                           |
| Fundraising  | 0                         | 8                             | 8                           |
| Receiving strong guidance and support from charter management organization or local independent school district (ISD)        | 0                         | 10                            | 10                          |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

**Table D.11. High-Performing Charter School Campus Principal Rankings of the Most Impactful Strategies Used To Operate Their School**

| Please select and rank the five most impactful strategies used for operating your school.   | HP<br>Charters<br>Rank<br>(N = 13) | Other<br>Charters<br>Rank<br>(N = 167) | All<br>Charters<br>Rank<br>(N = 180) |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|
| Establishing a strong leadership team   | 73                                 | 58                                     | 59                                   |
| Hiring and retaining teachers and staff that are well-qualified to provide instruction to students (i.e., have experience, pedagogical and content knowledge) | 62                                 | 55                                     | 56                                   |
| Utilizing data to inform school-wide decisions  | 62                                 | 52                                     | 53                                   |
| Developing school-wide policies and procedures (e.g., attendance policies)  | 44                                 | 43                                     | 43                                   |
| Establishing strong teacher supports and coaching   | 42                                 | 42                                     | 42                                   |
| Hiring and retaining teachers and staff that are passionate about the school's mission  | 33                                 | 47                                     | 46                                   |
| Aligning major decisions to the mission statement or educational philosophy   | 29                                 | 43                                     | 42                                   |
| Maintaining the school's financial management systems   | 29                                 | 23                                     | 23                                   |

Source. Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals (spring 2023)

Note. HP stands for high performing. High-performing charter school campuses refer to 30 identified campuses that outperformed demographically similar campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments.

## Appendix E: Limitations

As with all research, there are some limitations to the Best Practices Guide. Two of these limitations are related to the project logistical constraints and the voluntary nature of data collection. The study team used a rigorous quantitative approach to identify 30 charter school campuses that outperformed demographically similar charter school campuses on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR®) in reading, mathematics, Algebra I, English I, or a combination of these assessments. Of those 30 campuses, the study team identified 12 for site visits, but only 11 of these site visits were conducted (92%) due to campus logistical constraints. High-performing charter school participation on the Statewide Survey of Charter Schools Principals also fell short of expectations. Only 13 of the 30 principals of high-performing charter school campuses completed the voluntary Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals. As a result, fewer than half of the identified high quality charter school campuses (43%) contributed to the identification of top strategies via the survey.

A third limitation is related to the correlational nature of the study design. Although the high-performing charter school campuses were identified using a rigorous, quantitative methodology, the best practices that were identified on the Statewide Survey of Charter School Principals and through qualitative data collection during site visits were not causally linked to high levels of student academic performance. The conclusions we drew regarding the best practices that lead to high levels of student achievement were entirely correlational rather than causal.