

Idaho Public Charter School Commission 2014 Annual Report

A Year in Review

Thank you for your interest in Idaho's public charter schools. The Public Charter School Commission (PCSC) is Idaho's largest authorizer, with a portfolio comprising 73% of Idaho's 48 charters. Our mission is to protect student and public interests by balancing high standards of accountability with respect for the autonomy of public charter schools. We endeavor to implement best practices and enforce compliance with Idaho statute in order to ensure the excellence of public charter school options for Idaho families.

This report represents the first of its kind. We thank Idaho's legislature, educational leadership, and charter school stakeholders for their thoughtful effort in the recent changes to our state's charter school accountability structure. Their work has made the data provided here not only available, but meaningful.

In the wake of Idaho's 2013 legislative session, the PCSC, its staff, and its stakeholders have developed a performance certificate and performance framework. We hope these documents will improve transparency of PCSC expectations, as well as highlight the challenges and successes of our portfolio schools.



As of early 2015, our portfolio has expanded to include three, new schools: Syringa Mountain School, Bingham Academy, and Idaho College and Career Readiness Academy. We also welcome two transfers that were formerly district-authorized: North Star Charter School and Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy.

During 2014, we had the privilege of being selected by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers for a formative evaluation of our work. Their recommendations both affirm our current direction and serve as a guide for future improvement.

We invite you to join us in supporting a high quality charter school sector here in Idaho.

Sincerely,

Alan Reed, Chairman
Tamara L. Baysinger, Director

January 2015

Portfolio Overview

The PCSC’s portfolio comprises 35 public charter schools. These schools are located all across the state, in both rural and urban communities. Their time in operation ranges from one semester to 15 years. They offer an array of educational choices: Core Knowledge, Expeditionary Learning, Harbor, Montessori, Classical, Waldorf, and more. Several are alternative schools, and others focus on underserved or at-risk populations while welcoming all students who wish to attend. Seven are categorized as virtual schools; among them, these offer coursework to grades K-12 through a variety of platforms.

School Name	Year	Location	Grades	Method
Academy at Roosevelt Center, The	2006	Pocatello	K-8	Harbor
American Heritage Charter School	2013	Idaho Falls	K-8	Core Knowledge
Another Choice Virtual School	2010	Treasure Valley	K-12	Virtual, Special Needs
Bingham Academy	2014	Blackfoot	9-10	Postsecondary Preparation
Blackfoot Community Charter Learning Center	2000	Blackfoot	K-5	Brain-Based
Chief Tahgee Elementary Academy	2013	Fort Hall	K-6	Language Immersion
Coeur d' Alene Charter Academy	1999	Coeur d'Alene	6-12	College Prep
Compass Public Charter School	2005	Meridian	K-12	Compass Method
Falcon Ridge Public Charter School	2005	Kuna	K-8	Harbor
Heritage Academy	2011	Jerome	K-6	Schoolwide Enrichment
Heritage Community Charter School	2011	Caldwell	K-8	Classical
Idaho College and Career Readiness Academy	2014	Statewide	9-12	Career Technical
Idaho Connects Online	2009	Statewide	6-12	Virtual
Idaho Science and Technology Charter School	2009	Blackfoot	6-8	Science & Technology
Idaho Virtual Academy	2002	Statewide	K-12	Virtual
INSPIRE Connections Academy	2005	Statewide	K-12	Virtual
iSucceed Virtual High School	2008	Statewide	9-12	Virtual
Kootenai Bridge Academy	2009	Coeur d'Alene SD	11-12	Virtual, Credit Recovery
Legacy Charter School	2011	Nampa	K-8	Harbor
Liberty Charter School	1999	Nampa	K-12	Harbor
Monticello Montessori Charter School	2010	Idaho Falls	K-2	Montessori
North Idaho STEM	2012	Rathdrum	5-8	STEM
North Star Charter School	2003	Eagle	K-9	Harbor
North Valley Academy	2008	Gooding	K-12	Core Knowledge
Palouse Prairie School of Expeditionary Learning	2009	Moscow	K-6	Expeditionary Learning
Richard McKenna Charter High School	2002	Mountain Home	9-12	Liberal Arts, Virtual Alternative
Rolling Hills Public Charter School	2005	Boise	K-9	Harbor
Sage International School of Boise	2010	Boise	K-8	International Baccalaureate
Syringa Mountain School	2014	Ketchum	1-5	Waldorf Inspired
Taylor's Crossing Public Charter School	2006	Idaho Falls	K-10	Harbor
The Village Charter School	2011	Boise	K-8	Limitless Learning
Victory Charter School	2004	Nampa	K-12	Harbor
Vision Public Charter School	2007	Caldwell	K-12	Classical
White Pine Charter School	2003	Idaho Falls	K-8	Core Knowledge
Xavier Charter School	2007	Twin Falls	K-12	Core Knowledge

Approximately 14,950 students are served by the PCSC’s portfolio schools. Idaho also offers 13 district-authorized charter schools. The total number of public charter school students in Idaho is approximately 19,265; about 5,450 of these are enrolled in virtual charter schools.

During 2014, two PCSC portfolio schools closed their doors. Wings Charter Middle School (Twin Falls, grades 6-8) voluntarily relinquished its charter for financial reasons related to persistently low enrollment and unsustainable facility costs. The charter for Odyssey Charter School (Idaho Falls, grades 6-9) was revoked on the grounds of failure to meet a condition in the school’s performance certificate; that condition required that the school achieve accreditation candidacy status during its initial year of operation.

Also during 2014, the PCSC approved two transfer requests from existing, formerly district-authorized schools. These included North Star Charter School (Eagle, grades K-12) and Coeur d’Alene Charter Academy (Coeur d’Alene, grades 6-12).

In December 2014, the PCSC placed a temporary moratorium on the approval of additional transfer petitions until such time as the PCSC has the capacity to meet its statutory obligations and adequately service its existing portfolio, new charter petitioners, and transfer petitioners. This decision was made with the understanding that existing charter schools will be able to continue operations under their existing authorizers. New charter petitioners will be not be affected by the temporary moratorium, and the PCSC looks forward to opening its doors to potential transfers as soon as it has the capacity to serve them well.

Who We Are

The PCSC’s seven members hail from all around the state. Commissioners are appointed by the Governor (3 members), Senate Pro Tempore (2 members), or Speaker of the House (2 members). They serve 4 year terms; statute provides for a 2-term limit. Officers are elected every two years in spring.

The PCSC office is staffed by the Office of the State Board of Education, and includes 2.5 FTE: Director Tamara Baysinger, Program Manager Kirsten Pochop, and Administrative Assistant Lorriane Byerly.

The PCSC’s Fiscal Year 2015 budget is \$331,400, an increase of \$17,500 from Fiscal Year 2014. All FY15 revenue was obtained through the authorizer fee described in Section 33-5208(8), Idaho Code.

In its October 2013 Authorizing Roadmap, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers provided the following comparison of PCSC resources compared to those of similar authorizers:

Authorizer	# of Schools	FTE	Budget
OH CCS	47	21	\$3,400,000
CO CSI	23	4	\$1,730,000
HI PCSC	32	15	\$1,230,000
Denver Public Schools	36	9	\$750,000
Idaho PCSC	34	2.5	\$313,900

OUR COMMISSIONERS

Chairman Alan Reed
Idaho Falls
Term: 2014 - 2018

Vice-Chair Gayle O’Donahue
Nampa
Term: 2012 - 2016

Commissioner Esther Van Wart
Pocatello
Term: 2011 - 2015

Commissioner Nick Hallett
Rupert
Term: 2010 - 2014

Commissioner Wanda Quinn
Coeur d’Alene
Term: 2011 - 2016

Commissioner Brian Scigliano
Boise
Term: 2012 - 2016

Commissioner Gayann DeMordaunt
Boise
Term: 2011 - 2015

School Performance Evaluation

The PCSC bases its evaluation of school performance on the performance certificate and performance framework. These documents were developed in accordance with 2013 legislation, through a collaborative process that invited the input of stakeholders over a five-month period. Performance certificates set forth the rights and duties of each school and the PCSC as its authorizer. Performance frameworks establish the specific criteria schools are expected to meet in order to qualify for periodic charter renewal pursuant to Idaho Code.

The PCSC's performance framework is divided into four sets of measures: Academic, Mission-Specific, Operational, and Financial. Renewal decisions will be based primarily on the Academic and Mission-Specific results, but will also be informed by Operational and Financial outcomes.

	Purpose	Measures	Weight
Academic	To assess and compare schools' results on standardized assessments.	15 measures aligned with state standards as established in Idaho's ESEA waiver and Star Rating System. Categories include state & federal accountability, proficiency, growth, and college and career readiness. Modified measures are available for charters designated as alternative schools.	Primary (60%)
Mission-Specific	To recognize achievements specific to school's mission, which may not be captured by standardized assessments.	3 to 7 measures individually negotiated with each school. Measures may be academic or non-academic in nature, but must be data-driven and objective. Existing schools were offered the option to opt-out of mission-specific measures for their initial certificate terms.	Primary (40%)
Operational	To evaluate schools' legal compliance and operational effectiveness.	16 measures in categories including: educational program, financial management & oversight, governance & reporting, students & employees, school environment, and additional obligations.	Secondary
Financial	To analyze schools' financial stability using independent fiscal audits and enrollment data.	8 measures split evenly into near-term and sustainability categories.	Secondary

Data is gathered primarily through ISEE reports and the Star Rating System. Independent fiscal audits and State Department of Education records are also used. Most PCSC portfolio schools need to submit only three, additional reports to the PCSC on an annual basis.

Many public charter schools, whose staffing and financial resources are limited, report difficulty in keeping up with the reporting obligations required of all public schools. The PCSC is committed to minimizing this burden as much as possible without compromising its ability to protect students and taxpayers.

ANNUAL REPORTS TO PCSC

Dashboard Report (leadership and contact update, support unit calculations, optional updates)

Fiscal Status Report (year-to-date actuals, year-end projections, cash flow projections)

Mission-Specific Results (if applicable)

Annual Performance Reports

Each PCSC portfolio school receives an annual report reflecting its outcomes on each measure within the performance framework. Schools are encouraged to use this information for strategic planning and to ensure that any identified weaknesses are addressed in advance of renewal consideration, which takes place in Year 3 of operations, then every 5 years thereafter (or as otherwise stated in initial performance certificates).

Annual reports include scores on individual measures, which are then tallied to establish an Accountability Designation in each of three categories: Academic & Mission Specific (combined), Operational, and Financial.

Individual schools' reports are published on the PCSC's website. These reports include scoring details for all measures, in addition to explanatory notes as applicable.

ACCOUNTABILITY DESIGNATIONS

Honor

Schools achieving at this level in all categories are eligible for special recognition and will be recommended for renewal. Replication and expansion proposals are likely to succeed.

Good Standing

Schools achieving at this level in Academic & Mission-Specific will be recommended for renewal; however, conditional renewal may be recommended if Operational and/or Financial outcomes are poor. Replication and expansion proposals will be considered.

Remediation

Schools achieving at this level in Academic & Mission-Specific may be recommended for non-renewal or conditional renewal, particularly if Operational and/or Financial outcomes are poor. Replication and expansion proposals are unlikely to succeed.

Critical

Schools achieving at this level in Academic & Mission-Specific face a strong likelihood of non-renewal, particularly if Operational and/or Financial outcomes are also poor. Replication and expansion proposals should not be considered.

The PCSC thanks NACSA for assistance provided through its [Core Performance Framework and Guidance](#).

2014 Annual Performance Outcomes

PCSC portfolio schools were provided with their first, annual reports in January 2015.

Because standardized testing was not performed in Idaho in 2014, the academic results included here are from 2013. They are based on the use of the ISAT, rather than the Smarter Balanced Assessment, and care should therefore be taken when attempting to compare 2013 results to outcomes in future years.

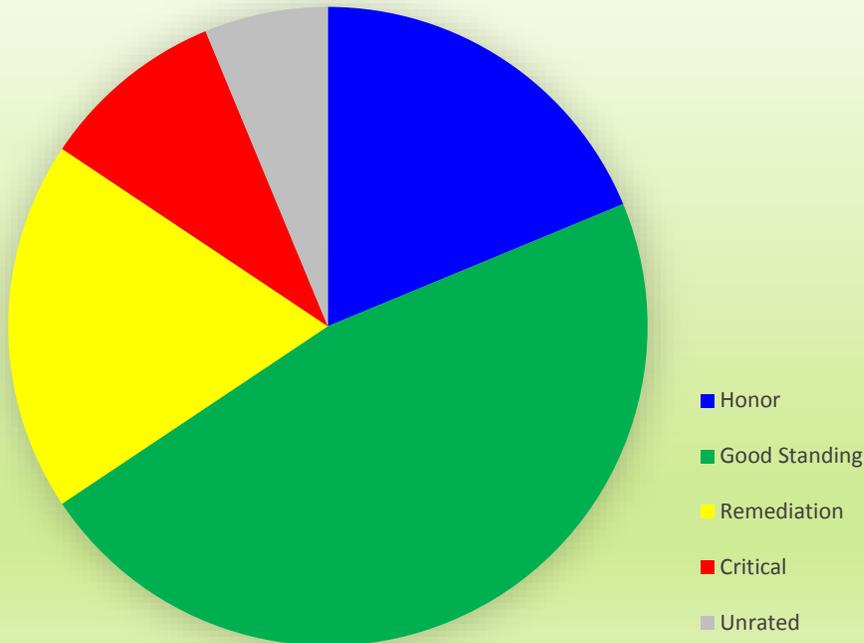
Mission-Specific measures were not evaluated for this report, as initial data will not be available until fall 2015.

Operational outcomes reflect the time period from July 2013 through December 2014, and Financial outcomes are based on FY 2014 and previous independent fiscal audits.

Academic Outcomes

The PCSC’s academic framework dovetails with the Star Rating System. Schools must earn at least three stars in order to be eligible for a Good Standing or better rating on the framework.

Academic Accountability Designations



As of the 2012-13 school year, the majority of PCSC portfolio schools showed strong outcomes on standardized assessments, with 66% designated as Good Standing or Honor.

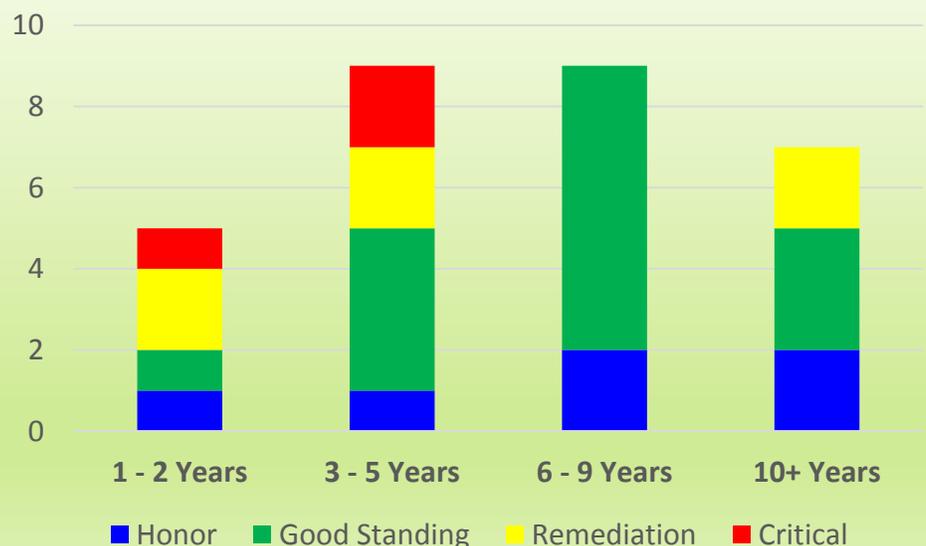
9% of the 32 schools achieved very low scores, resulting in a Critical designation, while 19% fell into Remediation. These schools will have until at least spring 2017 to improve their outcomes before being considered for renewal.

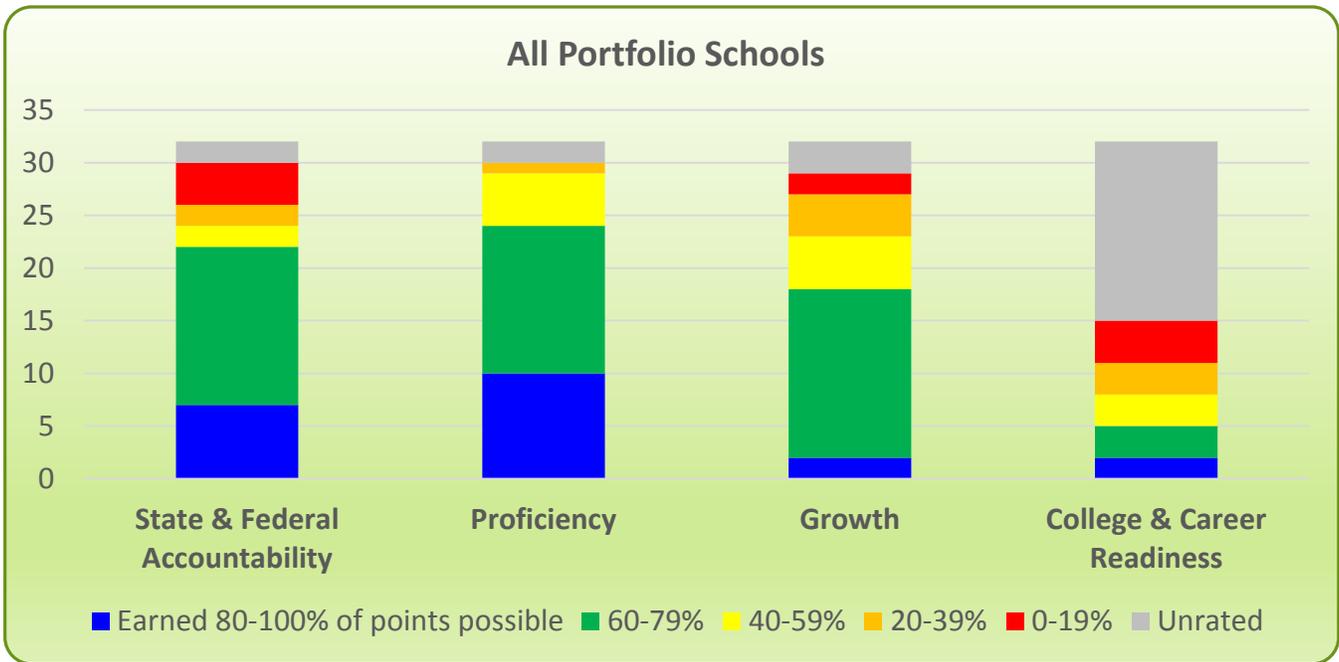
The “unrated” schools are those that opened in Fall 2013, and therefore have no test results for the prior year.

Schools that had been in operation more than 5 years at the time of testing tended to show stronger academic results. This result is likely multi-factorial.

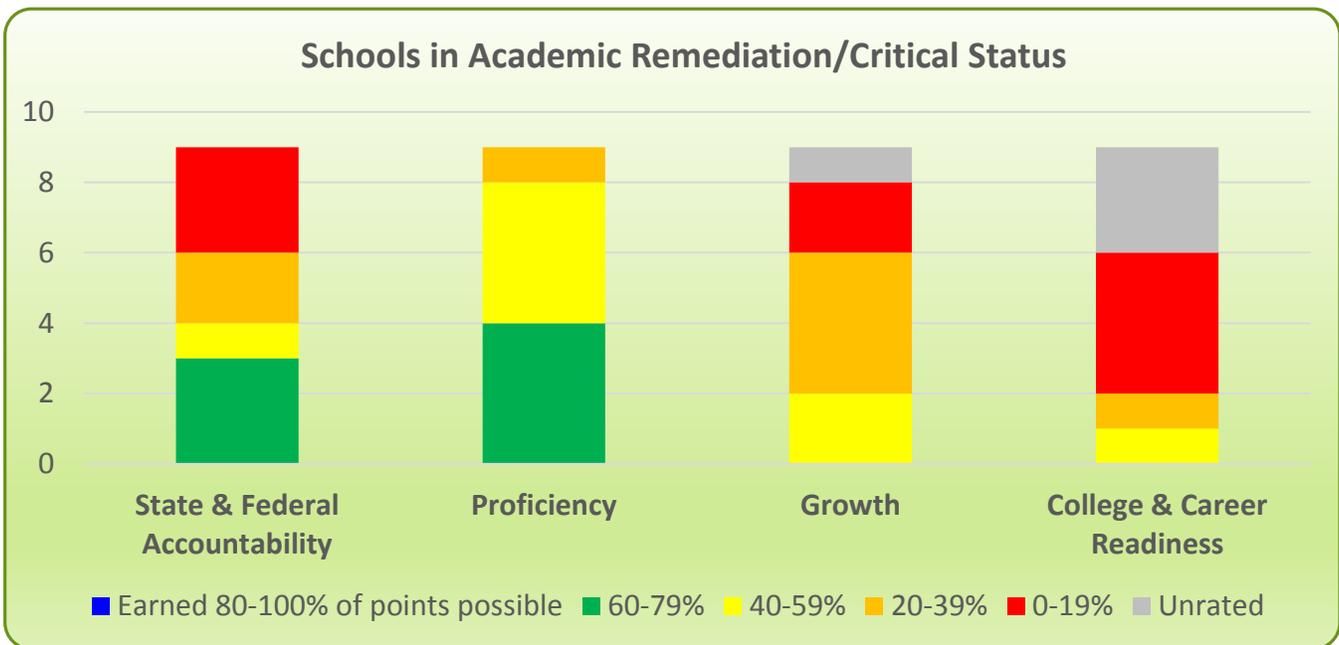
Individual schools hone their educational programs over time. Also, schools with poor academic outcomes are more likely to fail in their early years. Two of the PCSC-portfolio schools that closed in recent years were among the lowest academic performers; one was in its 5th year of operation and the other in its 7th.

School Age and Academic Accountability Designation





Among all portfolio schools, proficiency is an area of greater strength than growth. (Both criterion-referenced and norm-referenced growth are considered.) College & Career Readiness appears to be the weakest category; however, it is important to note the small number of schools whose outcomes are reflected above. Many PCSC portfolio schools do not offer high school grades, and many that do are not scored on some or all of the indicators due to insufficient sample size.



The nine schools that earned accountability designations of Remediation or Critical struggled most with growth and post-secondary measures. Individual schools' reports should be examined to understand the context of these results, which in some cases are related to small sample size or targeted student demographics.

SAT Results

SAT results offer additional perspective regarding schools' academic outcomes.

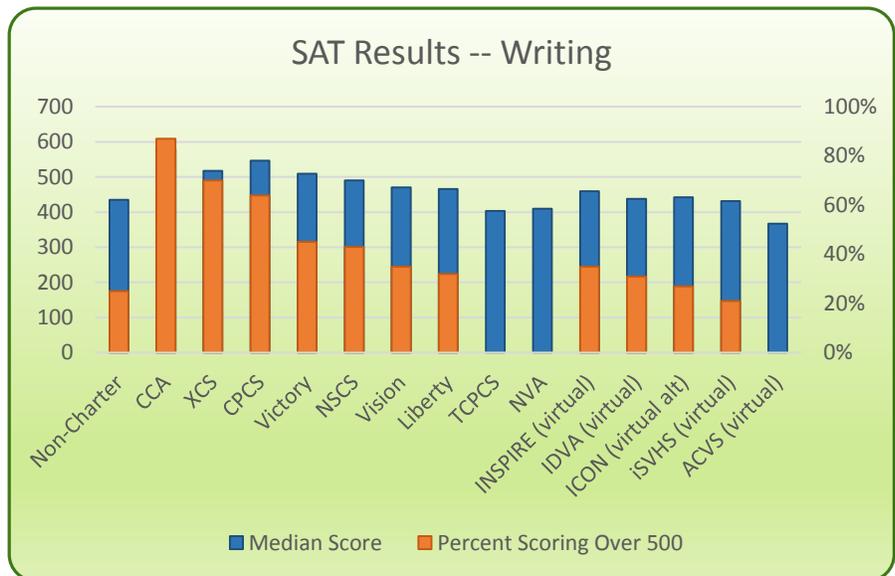
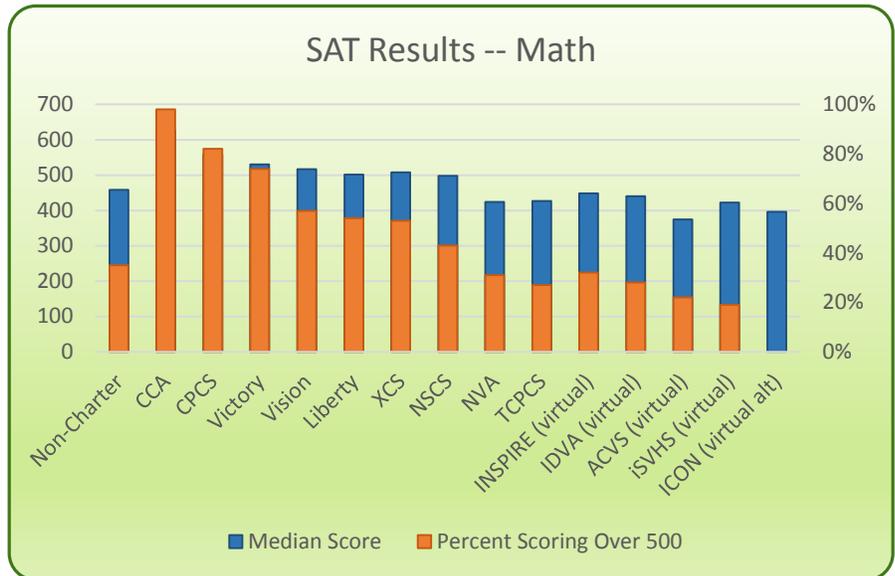
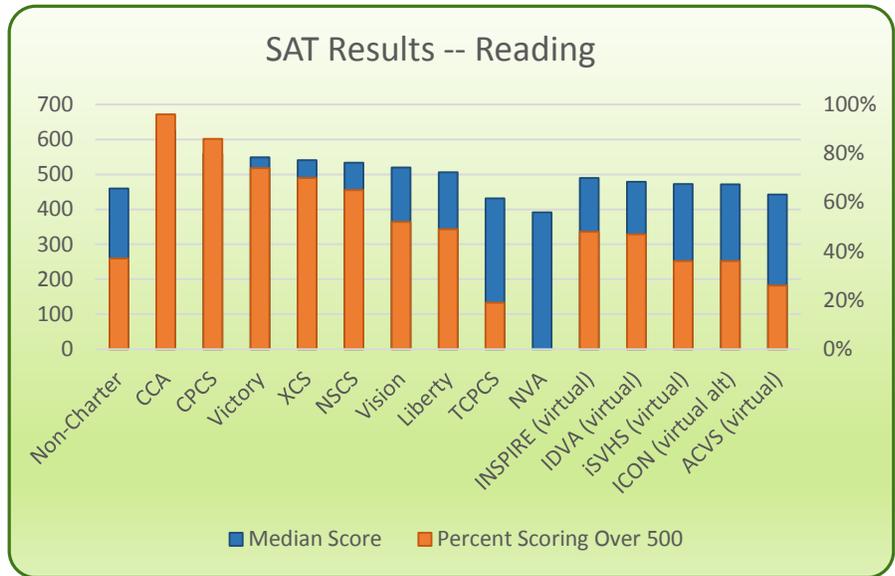
Comparison of the blue bars against the left axis will show the median SAT score for each subject's students. Comparison of the orange bars against the right axis will show the percentage of students that scored over 500, a level generally identified as "college ready."

The charts on this page reflect 2014 data for 11th graders who participated on the regular test date.

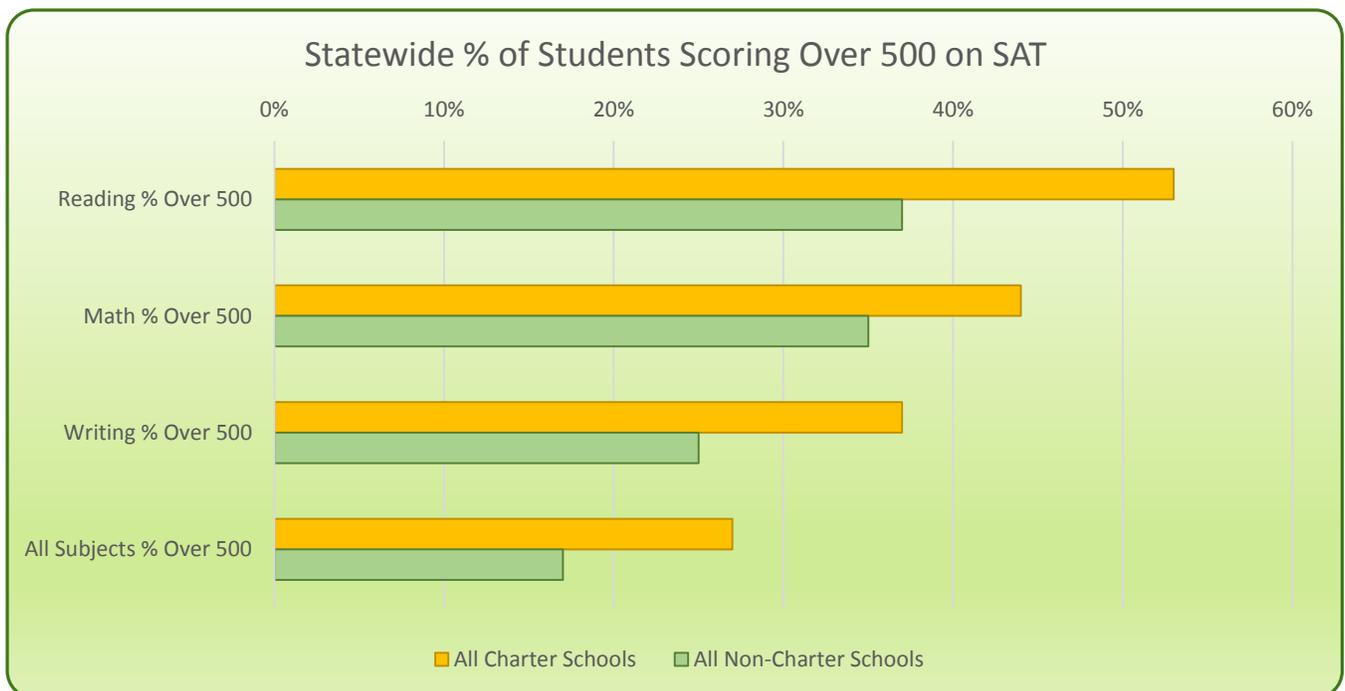
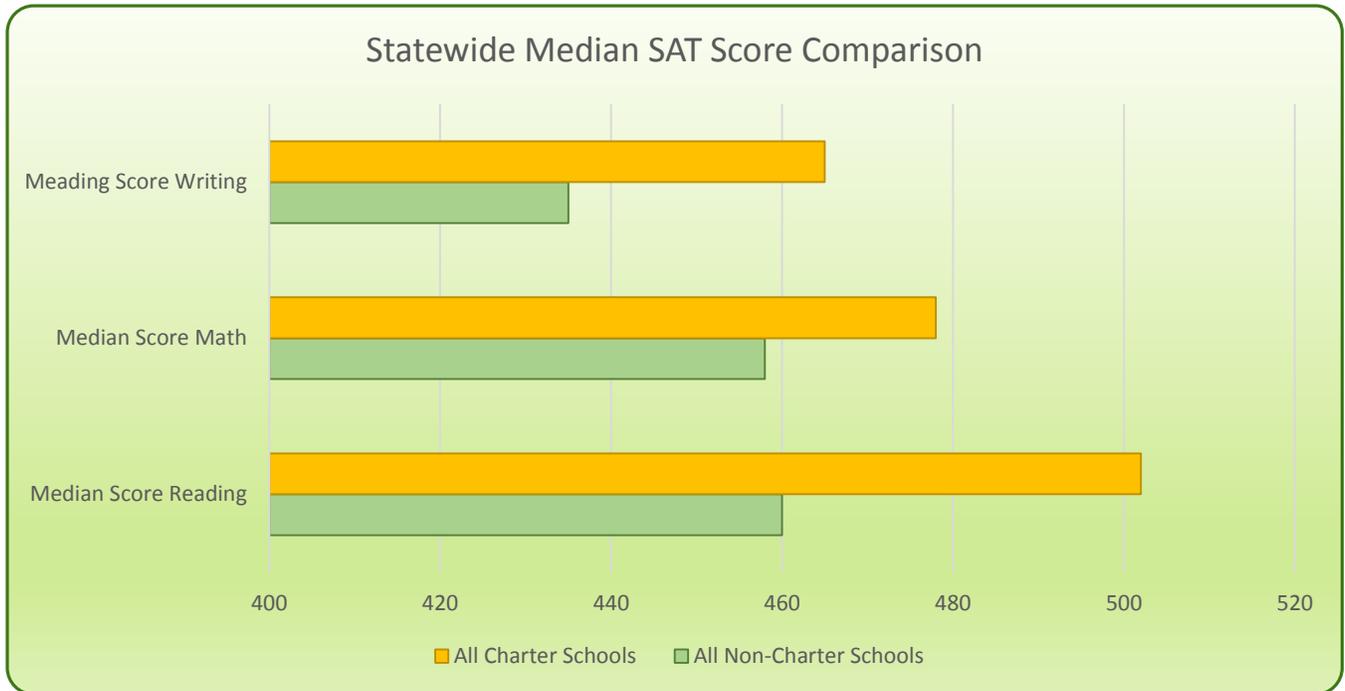
Data in categories with very small sample sizes are excluded. (This is the reason that some PCSC portfolio schools are not shown; it is also the reason that one school appears to have 0% of students scoring over 500 in reading, when the result is actually between 0% and 11%.)

The "non-charter" subject represents all non-charter schools statewide, combined. It is important to consider that the sample size for this category (16,201) is significantly larger than the sample sizes for the individual schools (ranging from 16 to 137.)

As the charts illustrate, most PCSC portfolio schools are performing well by comparison to the statewide average in terms of both median score and percentage of students achieving over 500.



The following charts compare SAT results for all public charter schools (both district-authorized and PCSC-authorized) to results for all public non-charter schools. Like the charts on the previous page, these reflect 2014 data for 11th graders who participated on the regular test date. The non-charter category included 16,201 students; the charter category included 786 students.



Operational Outcomes

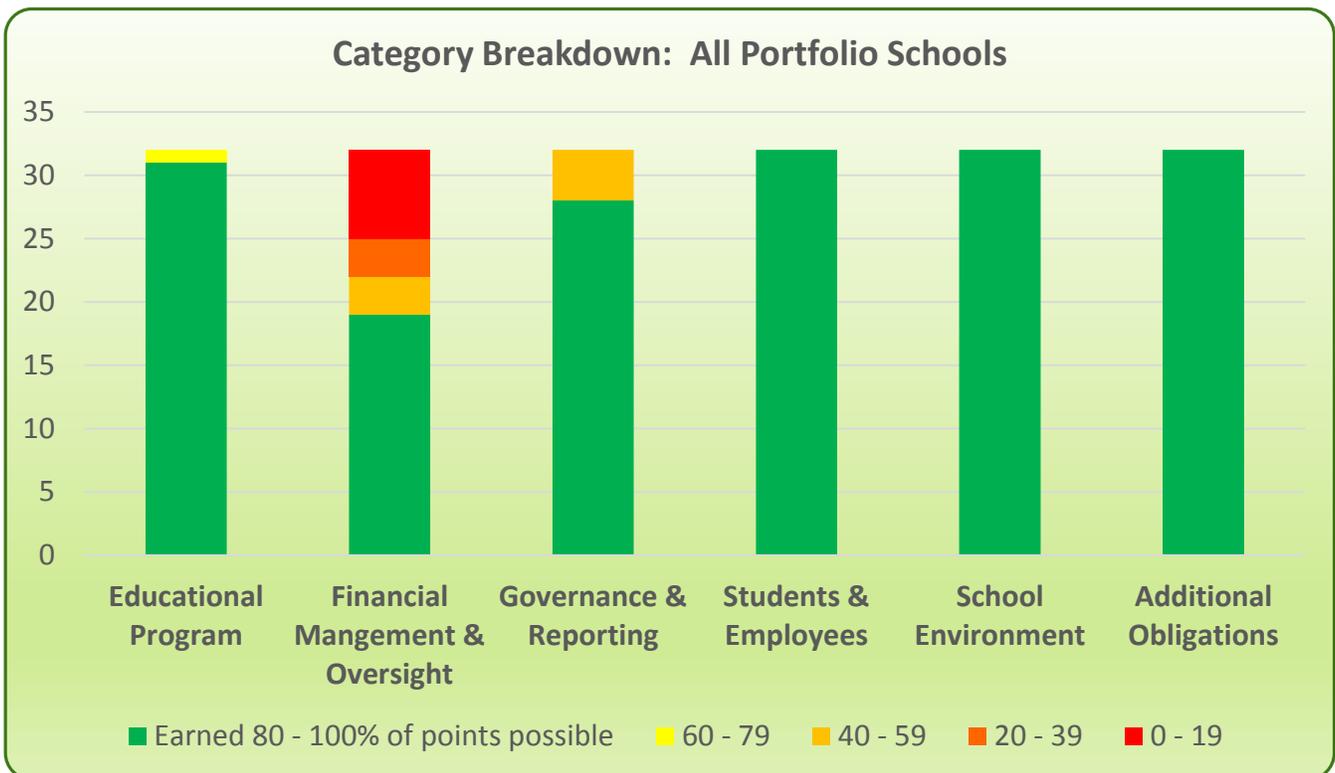
The operational section of the framework assesses a range of management and compliance outcomes.

Most of the measures are designed to reflect not only a school’s level of compliance, but also the expediency with which any occasions of non-compliance were resolved.

For example, a school that had special education findings during the year, but proceeded to correct them, will score higher than a school that failed to correct such findings. Similarly, a school that turned in one late report will score higher than a school whose reports were consistently tardy.

Of the 3 schools (9%) rated in Remediation status, all struggled with late reporting and fiscal audit findings. These areas also proved problematic for many schools with higher accountability ratings.

In most cases, improved results appear to be attainable by increased attention to due dates and professional development for business management personnel.



Financial Outcomes

Idaho’s public charter schools received \$93,142,181 in state funding during FY14.

Finances represent one of the most common areas in which public charter schools struggle, both in Idaho and nationwide. The Center for Education Reform’s 2011 “The State of Charter Schools” report indicated that about 47% of charter school closures occurred for financial or facility reasons, compared to 19% for academic and 34% for operational or other causes. More recent reports indicate a shift toward closures based on academic shortcomings.

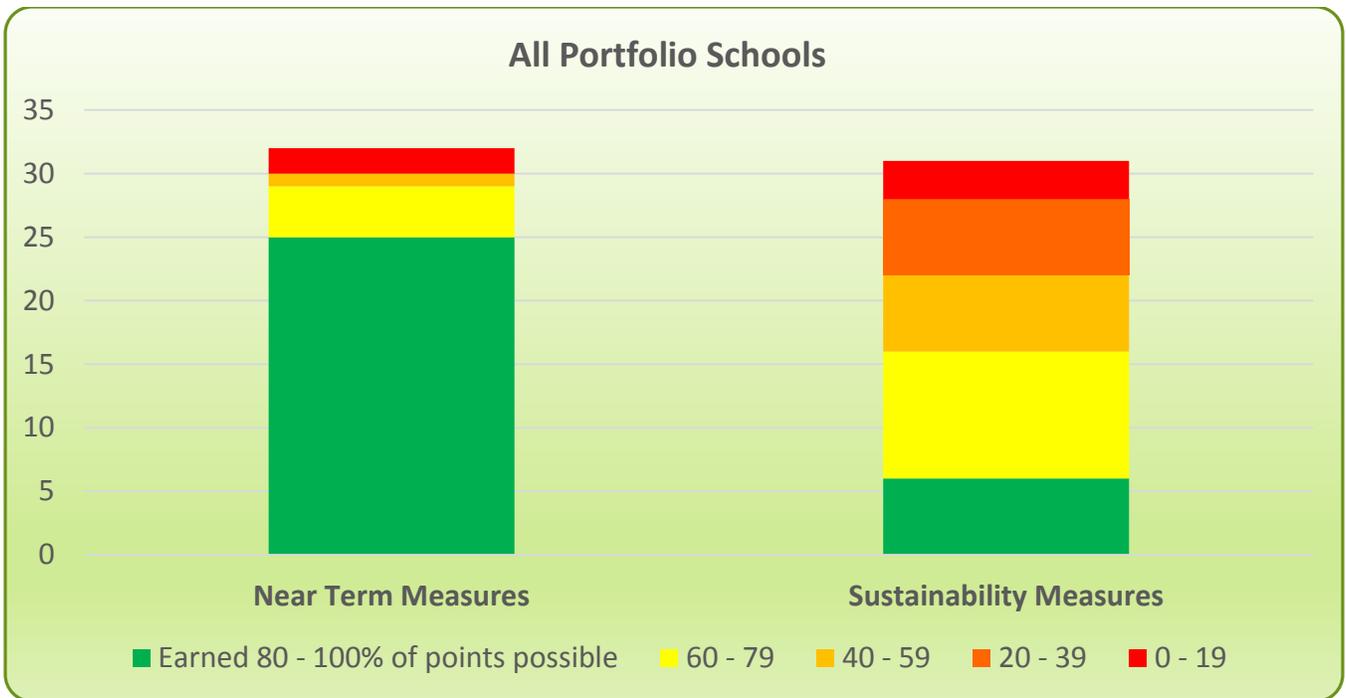
The PCSC’s performance framework evaluates schools’ near-term financial health and long-term viability. “Near-term” generally refers to the fiscal year following the audit, while “sustainability” refers to the school’s viability two or more years in the future. Data is taken mostly from independent fiscal audits, in addition to unit calculation worksheets and ISEE reports.

While the financial measures in the framework serve as an excellent starting place for evaluating schools’ financial status, context is critical to full understanding of a school’s viability. The data provided here represents scores only; contextual information is available in the individual schools’ reports.

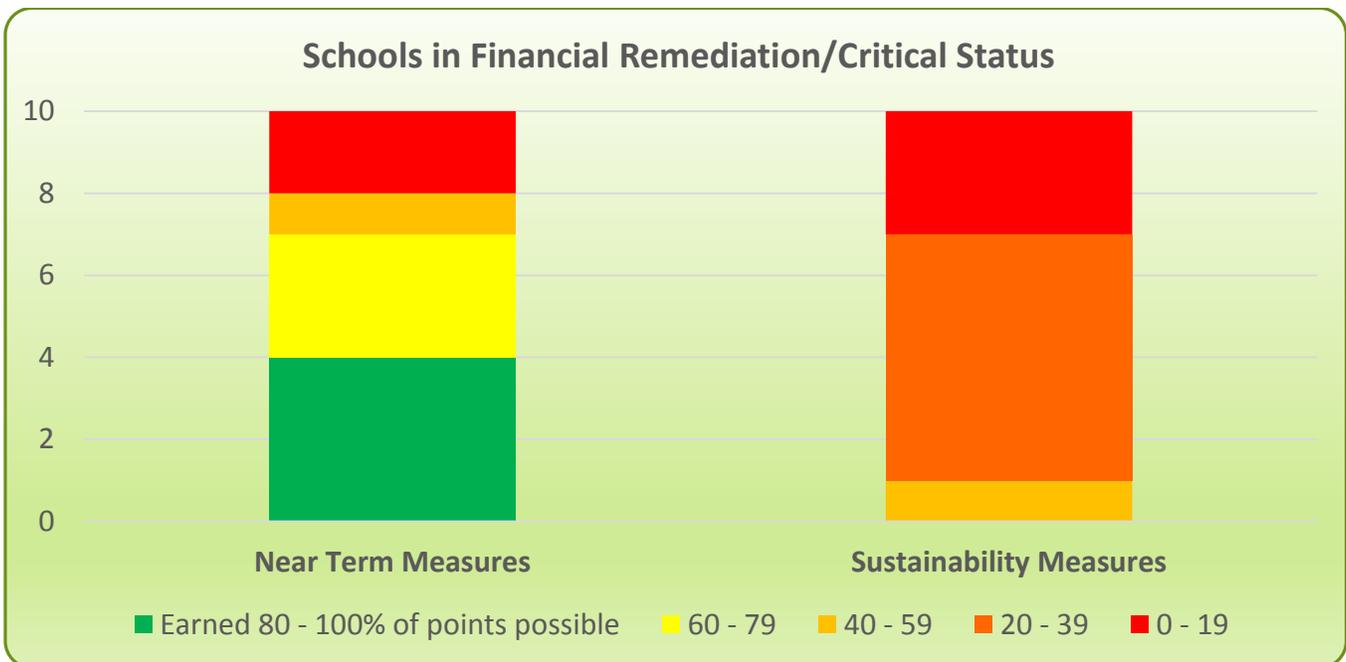
The financial status of PCSC portfolio schools ranges widely. A minority of schools face substantial concern, while 69% are presently in Honor or Good Standing status.



School maturity may be a factor in financial stability. PCSC portfolio schools in their 3rd to 5th years of operation currently have the highest rate of difficulty. However, 25% of the portfolio’s oldest schools also earned low scores. Due to the small numbers of schools involved (<11 per category), these statistics should be evaluated with caution.



The majority of PCSC portfolio schools score well on near-term measures. Financial sustainability is of greater concern, with nearly half of schools earning fewer than 60% of points possible in this category.



All ten schools falling into the accountability designations of Remediation and Critical face sustainability concerns. 70% of these schools appear to have positive near-term prospects.

Looking Ahead

During 2014, the PCSC benefitted from an extensive evaluation by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). Made possible by a federal grant, the evaluation took place over several months and included a site visit, extensive document review, surveys, and interviews.

The review team considered the PCSC's work in light of national best practices, focusing particularly on five areas: Application Decision Making, Performance Management Systems, Performance-Based Accountability, Autonomy, and Organizational Capacity.

The reviewers presented their findings to the PCSC in August 2014, and the NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report is available online at chartercommission.idaho.gov. The PCSC has considered NACSA's recommendations and responded by prioritizing specific tasks for completion over the next several years, in addition to the ongoing work associated with petition evaluation, school oversight, and high-stakes decision-making.

The highest priorities include the development and amendment of PCSC policy to reflect updated legislation; support of the State Board of Education's efforts to increase PCSC staffing and budgetary capacity; updating of pre-opening requirements; and design of annual performance reports.

Secondary priorities include development of new tools such as petition templates and evaluation rubrics; revision of petitioning processes specific to experienced school operators; and consideration of possible statutory amendments to facilitate quality authorizing.

Long-range priorities include the creation of an onboarding program for new commissioners; implementation of annual strategic planning and self-evaluation processes; and engagement of external reviewers for petitioners and schools.

A few of these tasks have already been completed, many more are underway, and the rest will be advanced as expediently as capacity allows. In the meantime, the PCSC values opportunities to engage with Idaho's education stakeholders and remains committed to its role in the continuous improvement of Idaho's charter school sector.

“The PCSC has made significant strides in aligning itself to national best practices and improving the authorizing environment in Idaho... The success of the performance management system will depend heavily on the PCSC's ability to implement the certificate and framework with fidelity, as well as providing clear and ongoing communication to schools regarding expectations.”

NACSA Authorizer Evaluation Report, August 2014