

Accountability Plan Overview

In 2004 the Idaho Charter School Network (ICSN) worked in collaboration with the Colorado League of Charter Schools, the Idaho State Department of Education, and an ICSN Accountability Committee made up of school district administrators, local charter educators, parents, and founders to develop this Accountability Plan for Idaho's Public Charter Schools.

Why Design an Accountability Plan? Charter school accountability has been a central component of the charter education movement since the beginning of the movement when authorizers granted charters freedom from red tape and bureaucracy in exchange for accountability. Asking whether, or not, a charter school is working is a three-fold question involving issues of law, academics, and school vitality. It is a question that requires a common understanding between a charter school and its authorizer on how the school will be held accountable. The first decade of the charter movement saw many authorizers that did little to monitor and evaluate the progress of their chartered schools. As a result, when the time came to renew the charter, the decision to do so, or not, was somewhat arbitrary. Currently, charter schools in Idaho do not have to have their charters renewed, but accountability for excellence and student achievement is essential to their sustainability.

ICSN developed this Plan to:

- Create an accountability process and criteria that helps schools fulfill their mission by encouraging self-examination, effective decision-making, and continual improvement;
- Create an accountability model that makes a direct, meaningful contribution to schools' continuous improvement efforts;
- Support the partnership between schools and authorizers by developing a clear understanding of how authorizers will hold schools accountable and how charter renewal will be determined;
- Focus on student achievement and recognize the critical importance of a viable organization to support student achievement;
- Create networks and resources for schools and authorizers to help them design, implement, and assess their accountability efforts;
- Align with state reporting requirements whenever possible to avoid duplication of efforts; and
- Ensure that innovation is both recognized and rewarded.

This Plan provides charters and authorizers with a process and criteria both can commit to (ideally in a contract) that will clarify what is expected of a school's charter.. ICSN recommends that charters and authorizers collaborate throughout the implementation of this plan which can be implemented in part or in whole as a valid way to ensure that charters are fulfilling legal, financial and academic requirements that are foundational determinants of their success as an organization. The Plan is based on the following essential components of public charter school operation:

1. Governance & Administrative obligation
2. Successful Academic Program
3. Stakeholder support, satisfaction and involvement
4. Continuous school improvement

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While the design committee has taken special care to ensure that terminology and processes included in the plan are general enough to be applied to schools of varying educational philosophies, we believe this document provides authorizers and charters with a process that is both comprehensive and fair.

The cost of the audit ranges from \$1000 - \$2000 depending on the stage of the school and the length of the visit.

Timeframe & Task	School	ICSN
<i>Before Opening--</i>		
Pre-Planning	<p>Schools and authorizers will educate themselves about the elements of the ICSN Accountability Plan and commit to a process for determining charter renewal that is based on <u>clear goals, processes</u> (e.g.: The five steps of the ICSN Accountability Plan with variations as negotiated by the charter and authorizer) and <u>requirements</u> (annual report, school improvement plan, and/or report on accreditation standards, etc.)</p> <p>Goals, process and requirements meet the needs of both the charter and the authorizer <i>and</i> become part of the approved charter.</p>	<p>ICSN is available to help educate schools and authorizers about the accountability process and help with preliminary planning.</p>
Pre-Opening		
Site Visit by Outside Team for Pre-Opening	<p>Schools will work with ICSN to assemble the visiting team.</p> <p>Founding board responds to critical questions in narrative or spread sheet and returns to team leader.</p> <p>Review the Pre-opening checklist.</p> <p>Since the school may not have a facility at this point in time, the visit may take place in a board room or conference room in the community.</p>	<p>ICSN will work with the school to assemble the visiting team.</p> <p>Meet with founding board and parents if available. Focus on Goal 1 & 2.</p> <p>After the report is issued, ICSN will work with the school and the visiting team leader if there are any concerns about findings from the self-study report.</p>
<i>Year One-</i>		
Self Study	<p>Schools will create an accountability committee, consisting of key stakeholders from the school community: teachers, parents, board, etc., that is</p>	<p>ICSN will provide technical support for the self-study</p>

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	<p>charged with developing the self-study.</p> <p>Critical questions templates are one way to organize the self-study. Schools should additionally organize the list of documents needed for the site visit.</p>	
Site Visit by Outside Team	<p>Schools will work with ICSN to set a date and assemble the visiting team.</p> <p>Schools will provide funding for meals for the visiting team. Visit fee will cover lodging, travel and honoraria for visiting team</p> <p>Board, principal and teachers conduct a self-study in anticipation of the visit.</p>	<p>ICSN will work with the school to assemble the visiting team.</p> <p>The team visits the school for two to two and 1/2 days. During the visit the team observes in classrooms, conducts focus groups with students, parents and teachers, and conducts interviews with the board, principal, business manager and others as needed. The team also reviews documents organized by the self study team.</p>
Reactionary Report	<p>School will select key staff to reflect and act upon the report produced by visiting team.</p> <p>Selected staff will produce Reaction Report to recommendations in report produced by the visiting team. Schools will work with ICSN and their authorizer to determine how they might remedy noted weaknesses and maintain noted strengths.</p>	<p>ICSN will provide technical assistance in interpreting the report from the visiting team and will work with the school to address concerns of the visiting team and identify needed resources.</p>
<i>Subsequent Years</i>		
Follow-Up Visit	<p>School will host a follow-up visit/review by team leader and another member of Year Three external team. Team will produce Follow-Up Report on progress since earlier visit.</p> <p>School leaders may identify areas they would like to pay special attention to and add to the team accordingly.</p> <p>If a major change has occurred at the school (i.e. change in leadership or significant staff changes, significant board changes beyond typical rotation, or the school has undergone a major expansion) a full visit would be in order.</p>	<p>ICSN will coordinate the assembly of the follow-up visiting team.</p> <p>ICSN will provide training to the leader of the visiting team.</p> <p>ICSN, upon the request of the school, will work with the school to present the renewal materials to the authorizer.</p>