Making Your Data Come Alive!

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Charter schools are often asked to present their achievements to authorizers, funders, grant reviewers, parents, and the community. However, each group has a different perspective on what defines a school's success, meaning that schools should know how to make their "best data case" based on the stakeholder group receiving the information.

How can you be prepared to tell the most compelling, data-supported story of your school's achievements based on the target audience?

In order to better understand how to tell your data story, let's first review some key terms:

♦ **In-house benchmarks**: Assessments created by your school. While in-house benchmarks can be extremely useful in gauging student achievement, they are not ideal for external presentations because you can't make comparisons to other schools and there's no objective way to demonstrate their rigor.

♦ **State tests**: Refers to Smarter Balanced tests, CAHSEE, CELDT, or any other state-specific test on which a school's results can be compared to those of other schools.

♦ **Normed assessments**: Shorthand for norm-referenced assessments. Normed assessments identify whether a given student performed better or worse than another student, but not necessarily how much that student knows on a given topic. These assessments have been sample tested and analyzed before being widely given.
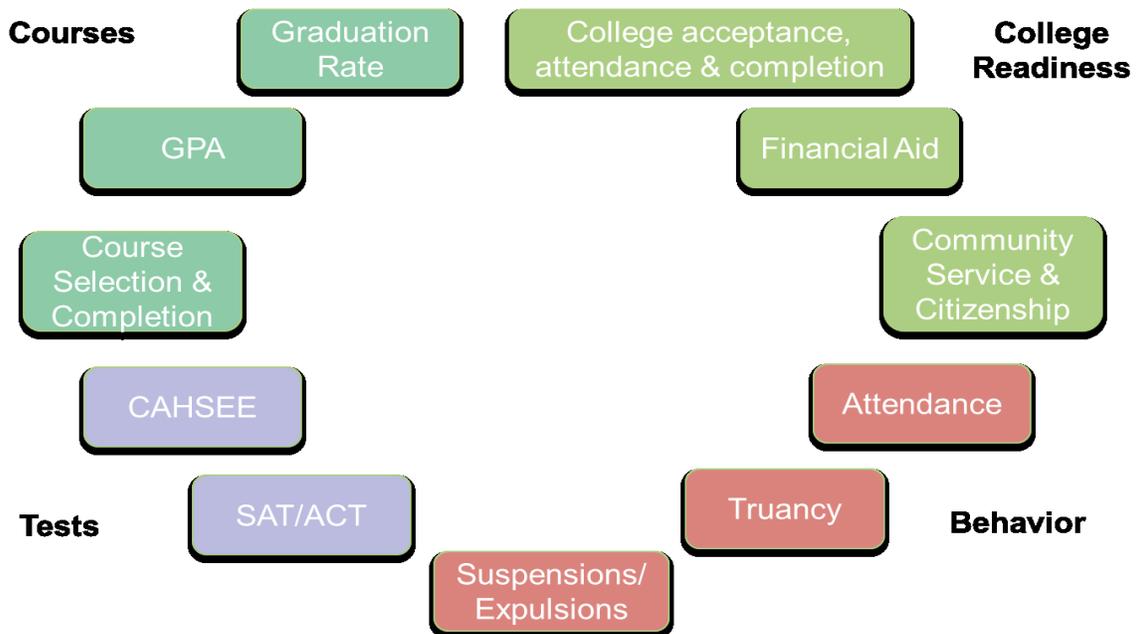
Now that we understand the key terms, let's dive into which data pieces are best suited for specific stakeholders.
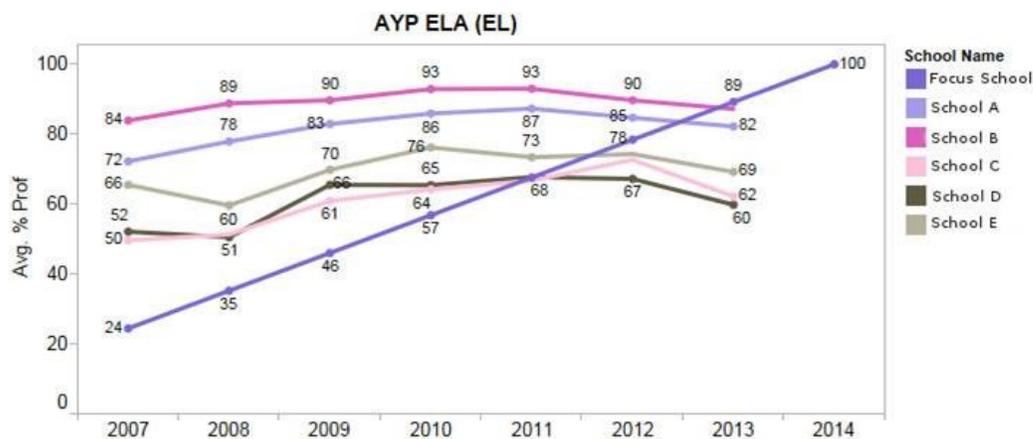
Authorizer/WASC

Authorizers and Western Association of Schools & Colleges (WASC) accreditation committees typically want to see similar types of data. State and federal measures of comparison (such as the new API and AYP measures) are ideal for authorizers and WASC, both school-wide and by subgroup. Make sure you're prepared to explain variations by subject area, subgroup, and year-to-year fluctuations. In order to adequately explain any variations, you should analyze the impact of student turnover/incoming students, changes in curriculum, and staff changes. You should also be prepared to explain how these analyses will affect your school's future plans.

Another good data element to show to authorizers and WASC committees is the measurement of longitudinal growth for continuously enrolled students. Comparison to other schools is ideal for authorizers and WASC; just be sure to clarify if you're using CDE-designated schools similar to yours for comparison purposes. You'll also want to showcase other positive indicators that support claims made in your charter, such as any data that backs up programs unique to your school.

Courses

Graduation Rate

GPA

Course Selection & Completion

CAHSEE

SAT/ACT

Tests

Suspensions/ Expulsions

College acceptance, attendance & completion

College Readiness

Financial Aid

Community Service & Citizenship

Attendance

Truancy

Behavior

Funders

Since funders want to see positive results from their investments (for example, a school grant), they are frequently interested in seeing consistent high performance, especially in comparison to peers. Similar to authorizers and WASC committees, funders also like to see performance on comparable measures such as state tests. They also look at normed assessments which indicate growth and whether students are on target.

In order to make your best data case to funders, it's important to focus on methodologies that produce consistent results. Instilling a culture of data analysis, meaning using data to determine the effectiveness of your programs, adjusting plans, etc., is key to demonstrating the likelihood

of success when requesting grants and reporting out on your school's success under grants already received.

Parents, Recruitment and Community

The approach for parents, recruitment and the community at-large is very different from the approach recommended for stakeholders we've already reviewed. For parents, it's best to focus on an individual student's growth in the classroom. While in-house benchmarks are not suitable for external parties, they are ideal for showing student progress to parents. Performance on class projects, student goals, behavior, and engagement can also be strong indicators of student progress.

Using data for recruitment requires a similar shift away from authorizers, WASC and funders. It's important to think about how to highlight data *beyond* student performance. Parent satisfaction surveys, community interest at school events and waitlist numbers are great data points for recruitment because they express the real popularity of your school and its programs.

When preparing recruitment data, it's important to think about how to highlight your school's unique qualities. Make sure to use your data to explain your school's programs as they pertain to student success. While it's still important to show performance on state tests to indicate success, it's crucial to avoid coming across as "teaching to the test," meaning an overemphasis on state testing results. Uniqueness and alternate measures of success are vital to recruitment, so try to explore them creatively when crafting student recruiting materials.

A data-based case for the community at-large typically requires a more targeted approach than the strategies presented for the other stakeholder groups noted above. In order to get and hold the public's attention, it's necessary to keep any message short, easy to digest, and as graphics-heavy as possible. Widely-used and easily-created vehicles of communication, such as press releases and printed or emailed parent newsletters are great ways to quickly inform your community of your school's success.

The advent of social media and the rise of web-based information-sharing platforms have made it even easier to access communications channels to tell your school's unique story with data. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and blogs are great (and free!) ways of making your school's best data case to the community.

With all of the data points charter schools must gather to show their success, it is vital to understand how to utilize, select and highlight that information for different stakeholder groups. Just as every distinct audience has a different goal of their own, you, too, will need a different method for communicating your successes to each of those groups. By using different types of data for authorizers/accrediting committees, funders, parents, recruitment, and the community, you can mold the information to fits the needs of each group to maximize its impact and make your school's best data case! 🌱