Between the 2007 and 2011 school years, enrollment in CA charter schools **increased ⬆** by *over* **175,000** students

55%

...of all
public school students
come from just 4
southern California
counties

Average spending on
facilities in 2009-10 was
$669/ADA
for charter schools,
and only
$75/ADA
for school districts*
(*only includes facilities expenses
in SACS code 5600)

Welcome to Volume Two of *EdTec Connect*!

Thanks to everyone who provided great feedback on our inaugural issue of *EdTec Connect* in the Fall.

Packed with information and tools you can use, each edition of *EdTec Connect* features in-depth articles and metrics on key charter school operational and financial topics. This edition features great new articles on timely topics related to **budgeting**, **student performance data**, and **assessing your back-office support needs**.

We're also excited to announce:

- **Adam Miller Joins EdTec's Management Team.** Adam comes to us from CCSA, where he most recently served as Chief Operating Officer.
- **EdTec Los Angeles Has Moved.** Keeping pace with its rapid growth in Southern California, Edtec has moved to a larger office, centrally-located in downtown Los Angeles.

Full-length articles, from both current and previous editions, are always available for download on our website, **www.edtec.com**.

Everyone at EdTec wishes you a happy spring, an exciting graduation season, and a great summer!

Using & Understanding Benchmarks for Budgeting

By Kelly Theofanis, Director of Client Management, EdTec Inc.

In our work with school leaders and business managers, we're often asked about what other schools are doing when it comes to budgets. To answer, we've always had plenty of anecdotal information and data from our own clients, but it wasn't organized into an analysis-ready format. So, we decided to take on a broader study of charter school financial data to get better answers. At the CCSA Conference in March, we presented our findings. In this preview, we've summarized a handful of interesting findings, suggested ways to use the benchmarking data, and provided links to the full presentation and further reading. The full report is available for download (link below).

About the Data

The basis of our analysis is 2009-10 SACS unaudited actuals data, which is publicly available. Data collected in this study is from 315 charter schools throughout California and represents:

- 100 cities
- 36 counties
- Roughly even distribution of free/reduced lunch eligible students (50 schools in each quartile)
- Distribution of new and established schools (20 in each group of years, new to 6+ years in operation)

Since the vast majority of school revenues are formula-based, we focused our analysis on expenditures and fundraising. And, in areas where SACS data doesn't provide enough detail, we used data from EdTec clients to drill deeper. We focused on expenditures because they are largely discretionary – although some are allocated from restricted funds – and each school must make tradeoffs to best serve its students. With data from nearly one third of California charter schools, we obtained enough information to provide heuristics for charter school leaders.

Using the Data

Although these statistics provide helpful information, we did not set out to prove any cause and effect theory related to charter school spending patterns. Instead, our goal was to provide school leaders additional context for making financial decisions. Benchmark data is best used in:

- Planning a budget: to establish a baseline for new schools (e.g. in petition budgets) or test the logic and assumptions in budgets for existing schools
- Evaluating budget efficiency: to see how the budget measures up to other schools, compare to spending changes over time, or analyze/explain areas in which spending might be outside of the norm

It's useful to approach benchmarking data as a kind of diagnostic for the budget, not to dictate how any school's budget should look, justify expenditures, set salary scales, or be the sole input for any individual line item or budget as a whole. A charter budget should reflect the priorities and capacity of the school at that time.

Big Trends

The following examples provide broad strokes of charter school spending patterns.
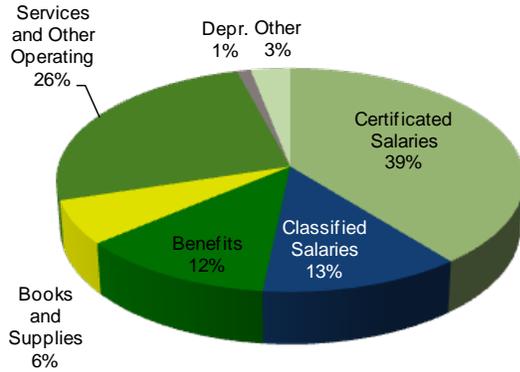
Charter School Spending as a Whole
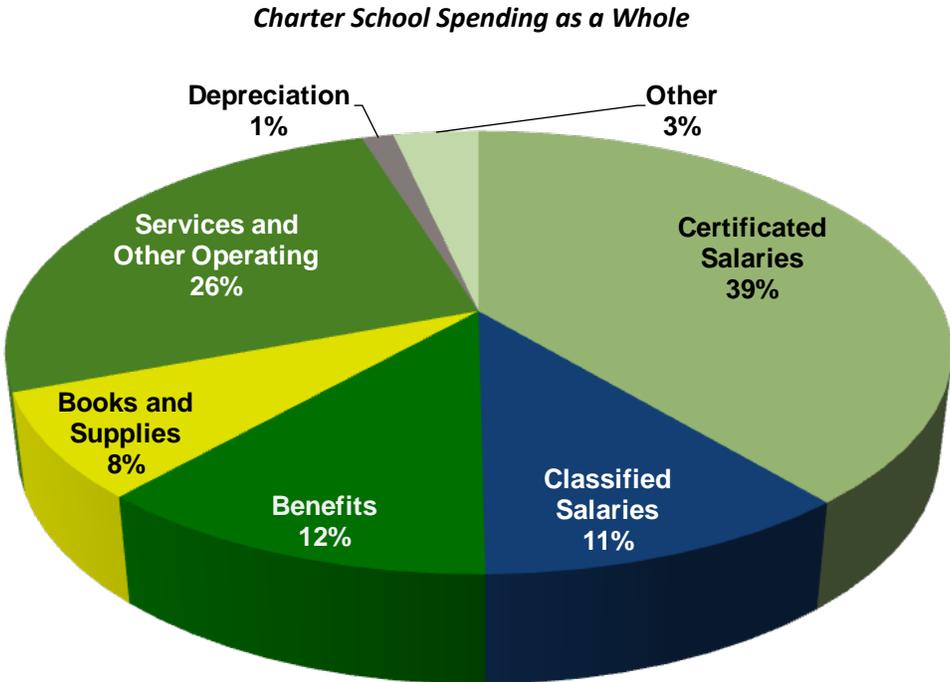
The pie chart above shows average spending patterns across all schools in the benchmarking data. On average, charters spend 62% of their budgets on salaries and benefits. This is not a surprising finding; schools are generally personnel-driven organizations. Allocations may vary from school to school, but this chart shows the average spending patterns of a charter school. Note: services and other operating expenses include back office services, leases, and additional programming. Comparing a single school's allocation to this chart can serve as a litmus test; look for places where your school differs, then explore those areas more thoroughly.
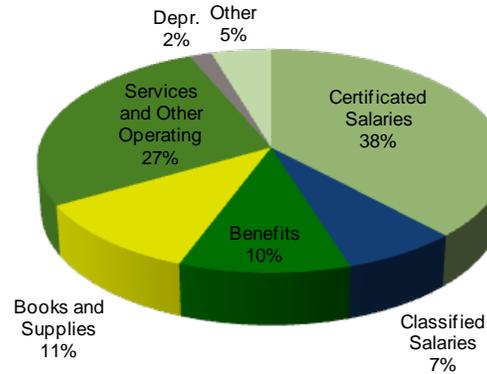
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Charter School Spending as a Whole: Stand Alone vs. CMO

Charter Management Organizations (CMOs: organizations that operate multiple charters) and stand alone charters (schools not affiliated with a CMO or network of schools) have very similar spending patterns.

Stand Alone

Services and Other Operating 26%
Depr. 1%
Other 3%
Certificated Salaries 39%
Classified Salaries 13%
Benefits 12%
Books and Supplies 6%

CMO

Depr. 2%
Other 5%
Services and Other Operating 27%
Certificated Salaries 38%
Benefits 10%
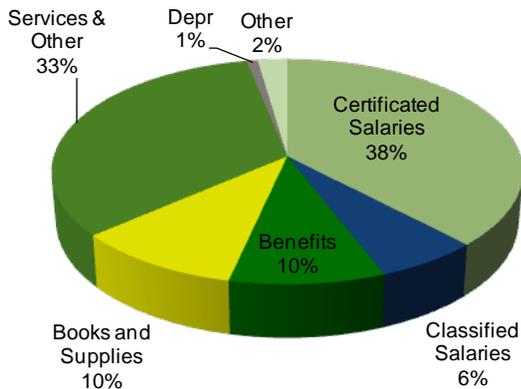Books and Supplies 11%
Classified Salaries 7%

The overall trend of spending most of the budget on salaries holds true for both types of entities, but other comparisons reveal some variances. For example, the difference in spending in books and supplies is likely driven by several non-classroom based CMOs with significant spending in that area (e.g. computers and curricula/software platforms).
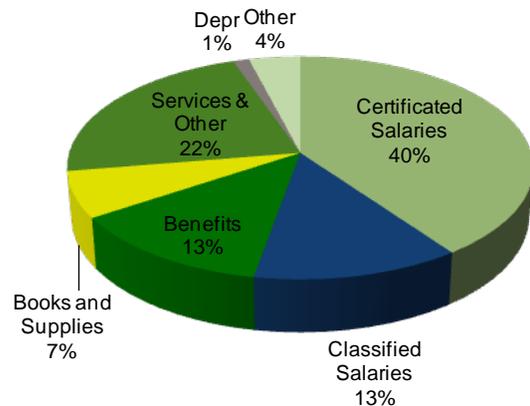
Charter School Spending as a Whole: New vs. Existing Schools

Over time, expenditures appear to shift from services and operating expenses to salaries. Compare services and operating expenses and salaries in Year 1 schools (33%, 44%) vs. Year 6 schools (22%, 53%).

Year 1

Services & Other 33%
Depr 1%
Other 2%
Certificated Salaries 38%
Benefits 10%
Classified Salaries 6%
Books and Supplies 10%

Year 6

Depr 1%
Other 4%
Services & Other 22%
Certificated Salaries 40%
Benefits 13%
Books and Supplies 7%
Classified Salaries 13%

As schools grow, permanent staff members tend to assume roles and responsibilities previously performed by consultants. For example, schools may decide to hire for special education or back office functions rather than outsource.

These snapshots provide a general sense of how resources are allocated charter sphere-wide in California. This overview is helpful, but in order to truly understand or use this information for decision-making, we need to examine specific areas more closely. Two areas that come up often in budget planning discussions, especially in the spring, are teacher and executive compensation and benefits. The following case demonstrates how benchmarking data can provide insight and guidance for decisions in these areas.

Case Study: Salaries and Benefits and Lighthouse Community Charter School

Across all types of charter schools, certificated salaries (1100) often take up the largest portion of the budget.

Average Spending per ADA	Middle 50% Spending per ADA	Average Percent of Budget	Middle 50% Percent of Budget
$2,688	$2,277 – $3,057	31.92%	27-37%

In the 10-11 fiscal year, general purpose funding rates were $5,077-6,148 per ADA. On average, teacher salaries took up 44-53% of schools' largest revenue source! A major portion of the largest revenue source is dedicated to certificated staff. When analyzing this data, keep in mind:

- Independent study schools must spend 40% of revenues on certificated salaries. The high number of independent study charters may pull up the average.
- Cost of living and salary levels vary widely with geography, age, and experience level of employees.

For additional comparison, district-wide data is also available online through EdData. On average, school districts (all types) spend $3,567 per ADA on this same category – charters spend about 75% as much! Many factors may drive up the cost in traditional schools, including the salary negotiation process and collective bargaining, which is less common in charter schools than traditional public schools.

How can we make sense of this data when looking at a single school's budget? Taking one school as a case study shows how benchmarking data can illuminate variances from the average. School directors should consider whether such variances are justifiably explained by school policies. Per FTE teacher salary information is not available from SACS data, so we looked to our client data for comparisons. Lighthouse Community Charter School opened its doors in 2002 in downtown Oakland in a renovated storefront and served 92 students in grades Kindergarten and 6th grade. In that first year, the school employed 7 full time staff members. Ten years and four addresses later, the school has grown to serve over 700 students in grades K – 12 supported and taught by 100 faculty and staff members.

	EdTec Clients Average	Lighthouse Average	CA Unified School Districts Average
Per FTE Teacher	$50,803	$52,721	$67,530
Per ADA	$2,640	$2,318	$3,510

Variables that affect teacher salary include years of teaching experience, collective bargaining, and non-salary pay (e.g. bonuses). Gavin Kwong, Business Manager at Lighthouse, explains how some of these factors influence salaries, "At Lighthouse, we typically have had high levels of retention over the years and hence have a more veteran staff. We also look to hire teachers with at least 1-2 years of experience, though exceptions have been made. Hence, it does make sense that our average salary is slightly higher than other EdTec clients." In addition, Lighthouse participates in the federal Teacher Incentive Fund, which requires redeveloping salary schedules to include add-ons such as bonuses for certain subjects and credentials. In light of the hiring practices at Lighthouse, there is logical support for why salaries there are slightly higher than other charters.

Another budget item we're asked about often is certificated administrators salaries (1300).

Average Spending per ADA	Middle 50% Spending per ADA	Average Percent of Budget	Middle 50% Percent of Budget
$435	$207 – $605	4.96%	3 – 7%

The range and distribution for this expense are much narrower than for teacher salaries. This may be due in part to the fact that there are fewer employees in these positions per school and that the range of experience levels in this role is also narrower. It is also important to note administrator – Executive Director, Principal, etc. – salary is discretionary in charters and set by the Board of Directors. Additionally, leadership structure can also vary widely in charter schools, for example, management responsibilities may also be given to assistant principals, lead teachers with administrative responsibilities, or non-certificated administrators.

Executive Director compensation, specifically, was not available in the SACS data, so we turned again to our clients' data to take a closer look. The chart below shows the distribution of 32 Executive Director salaries.
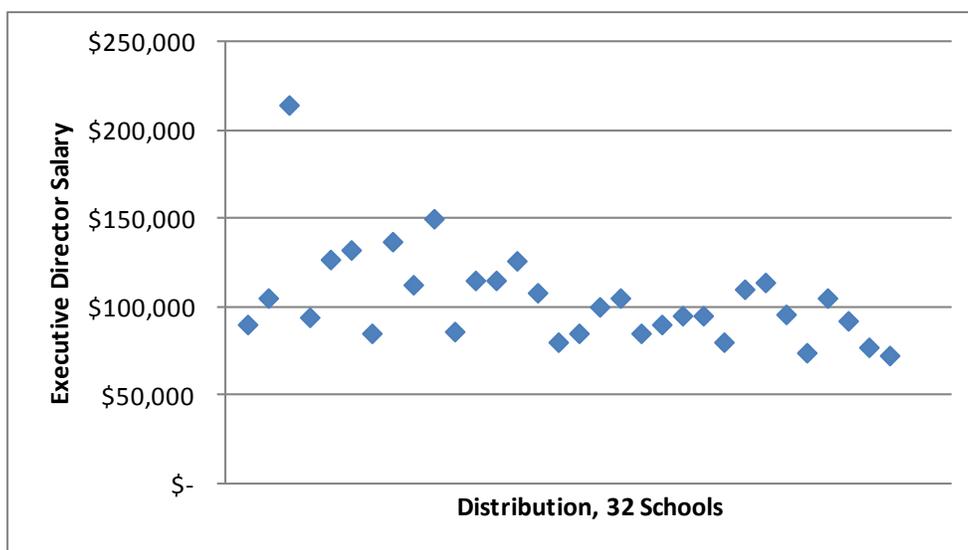
The average salary is $104,766, ranging from a low of $72,406 to a high of $214,500. Even keeping outliers in the data (very high and very low), the data shows most school leader salaries cluster around the $100,000 mark. In this case, Lighthouse is right on track with the average salaries for Directors. It is possible that Executive Director salaries plateau sooner (vs. teachers) and that there is less variance by grades served. That is, a high school Director can expect about the same salary as a middle school Director.

We jumped into this research project with a few of our own assumptions to test, and gathered useful data that gave us a much better sense of how our schools and their peers in California allocate their limited resources. The information also provides a scorecard against which we can assess how schools measure up to peers in the charter world. Creating benchmarks not only helps us answer those lingering questions about what other schools do, but also provides a financial snapshot of the charter school movement in California .

Additional resources:
- Full EdTec study: http://www.edtec.com/news/CCSA/Benchmarks.pdf
- Ed-Data: http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us
- Legislative Analyst's Office report on charter school funding: http://www.lao.ca.gov/laoapp/PubDetails.aspx?id=2554

This article and the associated benchmarking analysis project were completed with additional contributions from EdTec's Director of Client Management and School Finance, Bryce Fleming; Business Manager, Rachel Foodman; and Lighthouse Community Charter School's Business Manager, Gavin Kwong.

Collecting, Maintaining and Presenting Your Student Data for Internal and External Audiences

By Stephanie Cho, Development Manger, EdTec Inc.
Annice Weinstein, Manager Data Assessment, EdTec Inc.

Managing a program of student data gathering and analysis is an important, yet challenging undertaking for many charter schools, given an environment where staffing is constrained and cash is tight. However, in addition to the everyday benefits to school leadership and staff, solid facts and figures that demonstrate your students' progress and achievements are critical for all charter schools to be successful with key initiatives such as WASC accreditation, charter renewal, and grant writing.

When evaluating school performance, accreditors, authorizers, and grant makers require sound analysis and longitudinal assessment data that illustrate how a school is meeting its instructional goals and delivering results. In practice, many charter schools don't always have the resources or know-how to best gather, analyze and present their data effectively.

Though the time and money to establish a good system may feel onerous and infeasible, such efforts prove a worthwhile investment down the road. The benefits of such analyses are valuable and far-reaching, for both those peak times when you might be tasked with a specific request by your authorizer, as well as for internal, everyday use to actively validate and improve your school's instructional methods.

EdTec's resident student performance data analysis expert, Annice Weinstein, weighs in about actionable best practices in collecting, maintaining and presenting your student data:

Annice Weinstein,
Manager Assessment Data, EdTec Inc.

Q: **What's your background, especially related to student data analysis?**

A: *I've been working in the field of online assessment delivery and management systems for 15 years. Over the past five years, I've focused on the analysis and presentation of California state assessment results and implementing CA standards-aligned benchmark testing and analysis.*

Q: **What can schools proactively do to prepare themselves for data analysis needs/requests?**

A: *A key piece to successful student achievement data analysis is having consistent systems for gathering the data in the first place. The output – the statistics/graphs/charts that ultimately lead to data-driven decision making – is only as good as the data that goes into the analysis.*

Maintaining your student information system is one way to ensure the breakdowns by gender, ethnicity/race, socioeconomic status, disability, etc. are truly reflective of your student population. Errors in this information can affect your API and AYP numbers, as well as affect any additional analysis done at the school.

For the purpose of internal analysis at a school, it's also important to have a consistent system of storing both state and local assessment data so it can be easily accessed for longitudinal analysis. Oftentimes, with changes in staff and facilities, the CDs with STAR/CELDT/CAHSEE data get misplaced as do annual local assessment data (e.g., NWEA), writing rubric scores, Development Reading Assessment scores, benchmark results, etc. Developing a consistent system of storing this data – on a hard drive or a server or an online data management system such as DataDirector/Zoom – is essential at renewal time when schools are typically asked for proof of longitudinal improvement for continuously enrolled students.

Q: What are the different types of data requests schools should be prepared for in their first year(s)? What about as they grow?

A: Schools are typically asked to provide evidence that they are outperforming neighboring schools or schools within the district with similar demographics. Because the API and AYP scores are based on the student population continuously enrolled at the school in a given year, from October (CBEDS date) to the STAR testing date, it's important to make a note of significant changes in your enrollment from one year to the next. While neighboring schools may have a relatively stable population, charters tend to grow a lot in the first couple years after opening and have more turnover. Did you enroll a lot of new students? Did you lose a lot of continuing students? Do your new enrollments seem to perform at a different level compared to your existing students?

Although it can be a difficult task, if you can gather your new students' previous years' STAR scores, either from their parents or the previous school's cumulative folder, you may be able to get a better sense of what your actual API growth is given your new student population. Comparing API growth for two very different sets of students can be misleading, and is unfortunately what happens when you have a lot of change in your student population from year to year. Collecting the previous years' scores for your incoming students allows you to get a glimpse at what changes are really occurring.

Q: What data needs are schools often overlooking?

A: Charter schools are often asked to show that their students are making longitudinal progress, but the California state criterion-referenced assessments are not designed to show that sort of growth. Norm-referenced tests are intended to show longitudinal growth, but are not required by the state. Examples of norm-referenced tests used by schools: NWEA, ITBS and SAT-9.

If you plan to collect norm-referenced test data, it's essential to plan long-term and to be consistent with the schedule and students tested. If you choose not to test all your students, select an appropriate cohort to track over time (example: 6th grade in 2010, 7th grade in 2011, 8th grade in 2012) so you have a comparison of the same group of students each year. If you test in Fall and Spring the first year, continue the pattern of Fall and Spring testing each subsequent year, rather than introducing a round of Winter testing. By testing twice each year (pre and post), you can get a sense of how much progress students make in a single year and compare that across different groups of students, such as students enrolled for 3 or more years compared to new students.

Q: How much time should a school leader plan to spend for these needs/requests?

A: Each school should have a standard practice for what to do when student achievement data is delivered by the state (CAHSEE, CELDT, STAR, etc). The storing or saving of this data to a safe place should only take a couple minutes; the consistency of this practice with all test data is essential.

Implementing norm-referenced testing is much more involved and will take a significant number of staff members to organize and deliver efficiently.

The amount of time it takes to analyze the data will depend on what requirements need to be met for district reporting, the types of internal questions you'd like to answer using the data, whether the data will be presented to a group and what type of audience that is. But if the data is readily accessible and has been consistently collected, that should speed up the process of the analysis.

Q: What are some of the reasons you see for why school leaders *aren't* using or analyzing their data well?

A: *There are a few common impediments to student achievement analysis:*

1) The data from the state is not formatted in a way that is easy for school leaders to understand
2) Each individual round of testing is not linked to previous rounds of testing or other tests, making it difficult to compare how students perform over time or across tests.
3) Local assessments are not linked to state assessment results.

As a result, many schools invest in an assessment management system like DataDirector/Zoom, Edusoft, or Pearson's suite of products to help them decode the state test files and compare the same set of students across tests and/or years.

Q: **What are some examples of how schools are specifically using or illustrating their data well for different needs?**

A: *Because it takes planning and foresight to ensure you're collecting all the data you need, many schools find themselves scrambling to collect and report their student achievement data for charter renewals or grant proposals. Use this as an opportunity to create some structure around student achievement data collection. As you're developing charts and graphs for your proposal, make note of what data is missing and should be collected on a regular basis going forward. Then use the graphs and charts from your proposal as a template for future analysis. Update it each year so you can track changes and look for trends. Successful schools don't just report the data; they actively engage with it on a regular basis to change instruction.*

The most useful data analysis usually stems from burning questions the school is trying to answer, such as:

- *Why did our API score decrease?*
- *Is there a specific group of students who need more help?*
- *Do our teachers instruct with the level of rigor necessary for the students to demonstrate competence on the CSTs?*
- *Are girls lagging behind boys in Math at a certain grade level?*

For each question asked, you have to evaluate if you're collecting the type of data necessary to answer that question. The next step is using the data to find the answer.

Q: **What are some of your best suggestions for how schools seeking to use their data better can make the most of their limited time and resources?**

A: *Sticking to the same reporting template is the easiest way to making sure you're collecting the same data every year. Staff will also become accustomed to the format of the graphs/charts, making it easier for them to process the data and act on it.*

Q: **Are there resources available that schools aren't utilizing enough for the purpose of data analysis? If so, what are they?**

A: *Schools can use DataQuest (http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/) or Ed-Data (http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/Pages/Home.aspx) to look at how their school, neighboring/comparison schools, and the district are performing on state tests, as well as to find demographic or staffing information. Most publicly available data about schools is available on these sites.*

Q: **Are there specific software tools or services you can recommend for data analysis that would fit a school's limited budget, ranging from lower cost (1) to higher cost (3)?**

A:

1) *Schoolzilla Project -* http://www.schoolzilla.org/
2) *DataDirector/Zoom, Edusoft, Pearson, Illuminate, LinkIt!*
3) *Build your own that is tailored to your school's specific requirements*

Q: **Outline a few key ways / strategies that schools can use to highlight their best data.**

A: *Each school has to identify their strengths and highlight those areas. For some schools, it may be a significant jump in API from year to year. For other schools with modest gains in API, it may be that they're still outperforming their local area comparison schools by a significant amount. Some schools may have a large percentage of their student population in a certain subgroup, such as English learners, and are achieving greater gains with that particular subgroup than are nearby comparison schools. Start with what you believe the school is doing well at, confirm it based on the data available, and then highlight it.*

While often neglected due to time and financial constraints, student data analysis is an increasingly important component of running a successful charter school and is an essential investment in a charter school's long term viability. However, schools don't necessarily have to invest a great deal of money and time in a costly assessment management system; it can be cost effective to simply be organized and consistent in tracking your data, and to be aware of the opportunities that reliable student data affords you to provide quality instruction to your students. The most successful schools rely on their student data to inform and enhance their instruction while also leveraging that data for sound analysis that highlights their strengths to external audiences.

Assessing Your School's Back-Office Support Needs

By Adam Miller, Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships, EdTec Inc.
   Peter Laub, Executive Vice President & Chief Client Services Officer, EdTec Inc.

Charter school leaders face two difficult challenges: managing a non-profit business and navigating the maze-like world of public education bureaucracy. This one-two punch has left many charter school leaders and board members dazed and confused. Help is not always easy to find, as specialized knowledge of school operations and finance, as well as non-profit corporate regulations, rarely reside in a single individual. Even if relief is found, it is a continuing struggle to stay on top of changing funding schedules, amended reporting requirements, and moving grant deadlines. Not to mention, of course, that all of this needs to be done while maintaining focus on the school's mission to provide an outstanding education.

The complexity of charter school finance, the lack of experienced finance staff, and the desire to concentrate on the school's educational mission has led hundreds of charters to conclude that a high quality business services provider can be an invaluable asset. However, the decision as to whether to outsource services and to which provider depends on the unique needs and desires of each charter school. If there is one thing those of us in the charter school world all know, one model does not fit all.

Bringing You Scale, Allowing You Focus

Being independent allows a charter school the autonomy to be nimble and to focus on the needs of its unique students and community. Unfortunately, this wonderful flexibility comes with a price: lack of scale. The benefits of scale allow a Safeway supermarket to charge less than the corner store and Ikea to bring you a dresser for $50. It should theoretically allow your school district to operate less expensively than your charter school, but alas that must be the exception that proves the rule. A business services provider brings the benefits of scale to a charter school. Scale allows business services providers to hire and train specialized staff that many charter schools could not afford on their own. Further, scale allows providers to build redundancy within functional areas. If a staff member at the business services provider who lives and breathes the ConApp leaves, there is another person there with similar skills and knowledge who can step in. If this happens at the school level, it can be a different story. The school's intellectual capital related to business

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operations walks out the door with the staffer, and the school struggles to fill the void.

Scale also allows the rapid development and implementation of best practices. Each year, the business services provider learns from the challenges and successes of dozens of schools. Scale then allows some providers to invest in an internal knowledge base as well as efficient tools and systems to disseminate its knowledge to every client. A business services provider can move a school quickly up the learning curve and help it avoid obstacles that tripped up other charters in the past.

Besides providing the latest information and a consistent resource, outsourcing to a high quality business services provider can have a positive effect on the bottom line. Small and medium sized schools will almost always realize cost savings by outsourcing business services, compared to hiring internal staff with similar levels of expertise, especially when the true costs of hiring, training, managing, and retaining or replacing staff are factored into the equation. It is cost prohibitive to hire experts across a range of business functions. Even for larger schools, outsourcing can be a cost savings because a high quality back-office services firm's business operations emphasis creates efficient internal systems resulting in time and cost savings.

Lastly, business services providers can bring focus to the financial operations of a school. The key purpose of a charter school is to increase student achievement. Rare is the charter school founder who wrote a petition because he or she was passionate about STRS reporting, cash flow management, or audit filings. The focus of the school leadership should be on instructional issues, and fulfilling the promise of its charter. However, the business and financial operations are necessary prerequisites to a successful academic program. The best academic model can be torpedoed by poor financial oversight.   An outsourced business services provider can often bring the necessary level of focus and experience to the business and financial operations, freeing the school staff to focus on improving the education of their students. If the pain points sound familiar and the benefits attractive, it is worth exploring with your school leadership if a business services provider is a smart investment that will help further your mission.

Choosing a Partner

Once you've decided you'd like to work with a business services provider, you need to determine which one will work best for your school. A business services provider should be more than simply a vendor to the school. It should be a strategic partner that has as much invested in the success of the school as the board and staff do. To be a partner, the business services provider needs to do more than process financial transactions and provide historical financials.   While a provider's handling of transactions and financials may still free you up to focus on the school's academic program, a true partner is one that helps you align your budget and operations in support of that academic program. The provider should view itself (and more importantly, *you* should view the provider) as an outsourced CFO who monitors historical financials, creates accurate, forward-looking budget forecasts, closely watches cash flow, and offers strategic advice tailored to your school's financial and business operations.

There are meaningful and important differences in service delivery among the established back-office providers in California. It is critical that the school staff and board evaluate their own needs and then carefully choose the appropriate provider that matches those needs. The foundation for any successful relationship is knowing what you bring to the partnership and what you need from your partner. Too often there is a mismatch between the needs and expectations of the school and the provider.

When expectations are not aligned, incorrect assumptions can be made about who is doing what, which can lead to costly and even disastrous outcomes. This mismatch can range from who is completing and filing which reports to who is responsible for keeping track of the budget forecast. A missed report or an inaccurate forecast can result in losses in the tens of thousands. To put it more plainly, it can result in the loss of a budget for an instructional aide, a set of musical instruments, or a series of field trips.

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Critical Questions to Ask When Choosing a Back-Office Partner:

- **Where do we need help?** Identify the gaps in skills and knowledge of your staff and board. Do you have a charter finance expert on your team and therefore, are simply looking for an outsourced bookkeeper or transaction specialist (accounting, payroll, etc.), or are you looking for CFO level guidance about your financials and financial plan? Do you need support finding and financing a facility? Are there back-office operations that you want to keep in house (e.g., AP or attendance reporting)?

- **What specifically is included in the service bundle?** Understand what is specially offered and what is not. Seek detailed clarification on pricing, depth and frequency of services. For example, will the provider attend all of your board meetings and how often are forecasts and cash flows updated? Will they work with you on budget projections? What tools are made available to the school for on-demand visibility to its financial data? Then ask yourself if those services and tools match the expectations and needs of the school staff and board.

- **Can the service flexibly adjust to my needs over time?** Ask if the provider will tailor services to your needs or if it's a one-size-fits-all service. What other defined service scope options are available? Further, as your school's needs change over time, will the provider adjust its service scope to meet your requirements?

- **What is the service delivery staffing model?** Find out if the provider has specialized staff with deep expertise in their functional area or if a single individual is attempting to wear many different hats. Ask how many schools are assigned to your primary support resource and find out each provider's back-office support staff to client ratio.

- **What will the service delivery experience be like?** While the back-office services described by different providers may appear to be similar on paper, there can be tangible differences related to service delivery approach, support levels, and responsiveness. Your best course is to spend the necessary time to speak with several clients of each provider to hear about the service experience directly from the schools. Additionally, don't be satisfied with a few reference schools that have been selected for you by the provider; ask providers for a complete list of their back-office clients so that you can choose which schools to contact when performing reference checks.

Making the Most of the Relationship

You've worked hard to choose the right business services provider, now it's time to make the relationship flourish. A good relationship is built on a foundation of mutual understanding of expectations, roles, and responsibilities. Your school needs to establish clear lines of communication with the provider, develop a clear understanding of the work flow with the provider, and have a reliable, designated onsite/internal staff member who coordinates the sharing of information (e.g. payroll, AP, etc.) with the provider.

As mentioned earlier, understanding what the service provider can and will provide for your school is critical for a good working relationship. Once a school leader and board understand what the business services provider will deliver, they can fill any remaining gaps with additional staff or staff allocations to particular tasks. This understanding aids in the efficient completion of back-office tasks and avoids costly mistakes that can be time consuming to fix. Gently, but firmly, keep the provider accountable for what is included in the contract. It's up to you to ensure continually that your needs are being met and your expectations exceeded. Just as you do not settle for substandard work in the classroom, do not settle for it from your business services provider. Excellence in the classroom can either be furthered or inhibited by the quality of your back-office operation.

Best Practices and Tips for a Smooth Working Relationship:
• **Take the Time to Understand Your Situation.** Schedule time each month to review the financials in detail to understand what assumptions are going into the forecast updates and to review budget variances.
• **Quality Checks Start on Day One.** Address response time and service level issues early so they do not become a problem.
• **Know Where the Responsibility Lies.** Understand that the board of directors is the true client of the business services provider because the board, not the staff, has fiduciary responsibility for the school.
• **Communication is Key.** Address any communication issues/information transfer issues with internal staff, the board and the service provider quickly so efficient business routines can be established from the outset of the relationship.
• **Delegate Internally.** Assign a person or team of people (e.g. school leader and board member) to oversee the work and make sure it all ties together. For example, a board member who is comfortable with financial statements should review the financial reports of the service provider and check that all financial statements (income statements, cash flow and balance sheet) are consistent with the bank balance.
• **Seek Guidance.** Don't hesitate to call upon the provider for support. That's what they're there for; they're your partner!

As a school leader, you put tremendous time, energy, and effort into ensuring that your students have the best teachers and the necessary resources to reach their potential.   To ensure that your charter school, both as a business and learning center, reaches its highest potential, you need to provide your school's leadership with the finest support and resources. After a close examination of your team's strengths and weaknesses, you may find that a business services provider, or more appropriately, a business services *partner,* can help you build a more sustainable and successful charter school. 🌱

Introducing EdTec's New People and New Places!

Welcome Adam Miller!

We're excited to welcome Adam Miller to the EdTec management team as our Senior Vice President of Strategic Partnerships. Adam comes to us after seven years at the California Charter Schools Association (CCSA), most recently serving as CCSA's Chief Operating Officer. His work at CCSA included developing working capital and facilities loan programs, making volume purchasing discounts on products available to individual charters, and managing CCSA's internal operations.

Through his work, he has visited scores of charter schools from San Diego to Siskiyou and all points in between.   Adam also found time to serve the charter movement through volunteer

positions such as serving on the Community Facilities Loan Committee for the Low Income Investment Fund and the board of a Los Angeles charter school. In his new EdTec role, he'll utilize his deep charter school knowledge to ensure that EdTec continues to be the leader in developing high quality products and services tailored to meet the unique needs of charter schools.

Adam has extensive management experience in the education space. Before joining CCSA, Adam was the Executive Director of the non-profit University of California Student Association, the official voice of over 200,000 UC System students. He led a statewide team, with representatives from every UC campus, to partner with university administrators, union representatives, state legislators, and student governments to address issues such as student housing, tuition, financial aid, and access. Prior to this position, he was the Director of Graduate Programs for the Princeton Review, in which he planned, developed, and executed test preparation courses throughout the Bay Area. He also ventured outside of education in 1996, after raising financing to co-found an internet start-up.

Adam completed his MBA at the University of Southern California, where he also served on the Dean's Faculty Committee on Curriculum to overhaul the core MBA curriculum. He earned a BA in Sociology from Stanford University and a MA in Sociology with a focus in education and quantitative methodology from the University of California, Los Angeles.

Please join us in welcoming Adam to EdTec! If you have any questions, comments, or ideas for him, you can reach him at **adam.miller@edtec.com**.

Welcome EdTec to Downtown Los Angeles!

We are excited to announce that our Southern California staff has moved from offices in West L.A. to downtown Los Angeles.

We are pleased to be supporting our clients and partners in the greater L.A. metro area, and throughout Southern California, from our larger, centrally-located office:

700 S. Flower Street
Suite 3212
Los Angeles, CA 90017
(213) 622 - 2680

EdTec's new L.A. offices are in the Macy's Plaza at W. 7th St. and S. Flower St.

Hope to see you there sometime soon!

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