



NATIONAL  
CHARTER SCHOOL  
RESOURCE CENTER

# Disseminating Best Practices

*A Primer for State Entity Grantees of  
the U.S. Department of Education's  
Charter School Programs*

U.S. Department of Education  
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The National Charter School Resource Center (NCSRC) provides technical assistance to federal grantees and resources supporting charter sector stakeholders working across the charter school life cycle. NCSRC is funded by the U.S. Department of Education and managed by Manhattan Strategy Group in partnership with WestEd.

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## About This Primer

The Charter School Programs (CSP) State Entities (SE) grant’s primary goal is “to award grants to state entities to enable them to award subgrants to eligible applicants to enable such eligible applicants to open and prepare for the operation of new charter schools and to replicate and expand high-quality charter schools.”<sup>1</sup> Another purpose of the grant is to share best practices between charter schools and other public schools to help improve struggling schools and local education agencies (LEAs) throughout the state. This latter goal is often addressed by the applicant in the competitive preference priorities.

**This primer will outline best practices to ensure that SE grantees and their subgrantees’ best practices are shared with public schools throughout their state and beyond.** It addresses two critical components to a systematic approach to best practice dissemination: 1) identifying charter school best practices and 2) sharing the best practices with the education community.

## Identifying Charter School Best Practices

The first step to identify charter school best practices is to create a rubric or framework to evaluate subgrantee best practices that would be beneficial to share with both the charter school community and traditional public schools. The rubric or framework can be simple but should, at a minimum, document the exact practice, evidence of optimal results, suitability for widespread adoption, and potential benefit to the broader sector (i.e., rationale as noted in Figure 1).

In [Identifying Promising Practices in Charter Schools: A Framework for an Evidence-based Approach](#),<sup>2</sup> the authors create a basic approach that SE grantees can use to identify promising practices, displayed in **Figure 1**.

**Figure 1. Evidence-based Approach to Identifying Promising Practices**



Identifying and collecting best practices can be done regularly throughout the grant by checking in with subgrantees and asking questions. Questions you could ask to understand a subgrantee school’s best practices include:

<sup>1</sup> FY20 Application for New Grants Under the Expanding Opportunities through Quality Charter School Programs – Grants to State Entities Program. U.S. Department of Education. <https://oese.ed.gov/offices/office-of-discretionary-grants-support-services/charter-school-programs/fy-2020-competition/>. Retrieved August 18, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Allender, S. & Evan, A. (2019). Identifying promising practices in charter schools: A framework for an evidence-based approach. San Francisco, CA: WestEd.

- Has your school tried any new or innovative practices in the classroom (e.g., teaching practices, new curriculum)? What success have you seen so far?
- Has your school developed any new practices around school culture, discipline, talent management, or other organizational practices that have shown results? What success can be demonstrated to date?
- Do you have any anecdotes to share after applying a research-based practice in your school?

These questions could be a part of regular subgrantee school site visits, virtual check-ins, cohort webinars, or monitoring activities. These questions could also be sent to subgrantees via a periodic survey; SE grantee staff can follow-up to gather information about specific practices and findings.

To build evidence of effectiveness, SE grantees should gather qualitative and quantitative data on the identified practices to fully evaluate whether each is a best practice worth disseminating.

Questions to consider include:

- What are interim progress and performance milestones that can be tracked (i.e., academic performance data, student attendance rates, teacher retention)?
- What have participants (i.e., students and educators) shared about their experience implementing this practice?<sup>3</sup> Have you surveyed your audiences related to their experiences to provide quantitative data?
- What factors are necessary to ensure success?
- Is this practice scalable or replicable for different types of schools, grade levels, student populations, etc.?
- Can elements of the best practice be modified with the same results?
- How much time and effort will it take to implement?<sup>4</sup>
- Is there secondary data that you can pull from external sources to compare to your existing data to determine practice efficacy?

If, through this evaluation and review of data, you find that practice is not a *best* practice, ask yourself why. Use the data you have collected to determine areas for continuous improvement. Once you have refined that practice, start the process from the beginning. You may want to identify another practice and conduct the same exercise to determine if that is a replicable, best practice to be disseminated.

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<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2016). Non-regulatory guidance: Using evidence to strengthen education investments. <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceusesinvestment.pdf>. Retrieved August 21, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Rabinowitz, P. Criteria for choosing promising practices and community interventions. <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/analyze/choose-and-adapt-community-interventions/criteria-for-choosing/main>. Retrieved August 13, 2021.

## Sharing Best Practices with the Education Community

Once a charter school's best practices have been identified, the next step is to disseminate the information to LEAs and other public schools throughout the state. Dissemination is more than just posting documents on a website or sending out an email blast. More interactive, communicative techniques are critical to ensuring these practices are broadly shared, received, and implemented or adapted by target audiences. **Figure 2** outlines a framework to help solidify a dissemination approach.

**Figure 2. Dissemination Framework**



- 1. Select an audience for the practice.** Create a list of individuals or entities within your state who would benefit from learning about the best practice(s). Ask yourself, “Who in our local school district(s) and state might be interested in or will benefit from the work?” Also, successful charter school best practice dissemination is typically grounded in building relationships with others in your state, including the state education agency (SEA), LEAs, individual public schools, and charter school support organizations (CSSOs). At this stage, you might also consider any regional and national organizations might be partners in disseminating our findings. These entities will be your audience as well.
- 2. Craft a message about the practice.** Once you know your audience, it is time to craft a story about the best practice. Focus on the measurable impacts on students. The center of the story should always be “Why?”: Why was this practice successful in a particular school or schools? Why is it important for other schools to potentially adopt this practice? As you finalize the story and create dissemination materials, use unified branding, messaging, and graphics across the collateral. This will give your materials a professional look and consistent language, which, in turn, will help the intended audience engage with the content.
- 3. Choose the best channels to deliver the message.** Some recommended ways to disseminate best practices are:
  - Video clips to demonstrate the best practice in action, along with staff interviews explaining the best practice
  - Case studies to highlight best practices
  - Webinars to give deeper context and advice on best practices
  - Conference presentations in your state or nationally, such as at your state’s CSSO or SEA, the National Charter School Conference, or through other regional education conferences
  - Blog articles and social media posts which can be shared via the SE’s own channels or through other state and national education blogs

- Interviews with media outlets that regularly report on innovations in the education field
  - One-on-one meetings with your peers in traditional public and charter schools, LEAs, and the SEA
  - In-person or virtual dissemination event to showcase the work of subgrantees
  - School-to-school meetings between school leaders and practitioners to share vetted practices based on similar challenges
  - Section on the SE website to highlight best practices
4. **Develop a schedule and your metrics of success.** Develop an outreach schedule to start building relationships and implementing each of the selected activities from Step 3. Set quantitative targets for your outreach efforts, such as the number of webpage visits, email open rates, number of conference session attendees, etc. These data will provide evidence of meeting your SE grant objectives and measures. Furthermore, setting and tracking success metrics allows you the opportunity to continuously improve dissemination efforts as part of Step 5. Remember: We cannot improve what we do not measure.
  5. **Evaluate your efforts and document for monitoring.** Remember to document dissemination efforts and the results in preparation for monitoring, reporting, and your SE grant closeout.

## Dissemination in Practice: Examples From the Field

### Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

#### Featured Dissemination Channel: In-person dissemination event

The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education hosts a [Dissemination Fair](#) to share charter school best practices with charter schools and traditional public schools in the state. This one-day event features multiple sessions and a keynote speaker. Topics presented range from how to recruit diverse teachers to student engagement. The event helps strengthen relationships and the commitment to continue dissemination efforts between traditional public and charter school stakeholders. You can learn more about Massachusetts' dissemination activities on their website at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/bestpractices/>.

### Maryland State Department of Education

#### Featured Dissemination Channel: School-to-school meetings

The Maryland State Department of Education partnered with the Maryland Alliance for Public Charter Schools (MAPCS), the state's CSSO, to create the [School-to-School Collaboration Program](#). The purpose of the program is to forge partnerships and promote problem-solving across the state's educational sector. This program enables schools to share resources and information through learning opportunities, trainings, and workshops about implementing successful practices and programs. The program provides stipends for charter schools who give presentations at the training. One example of a partnership that emerged from this program is the City Neighbors Foundation's professional development mentorship with four schools—two

charter and two traditional public schools—on implementing project-based learning. Another example is a new collaboration led by the Baltimore Leadership School for Young Women in partnership with two other all-girls schools in Baltimore City, one charter and one traditional public school. Teams of teachers from the three schools are working together to document best practices and lessons learned from working with young Black and Hispanic women and underserved populations in Baltimore. Additionally, the schools co-create and co-lead professional development opportunities. For more examples of this work, see the MAPCS website at <https://mdcharters.org/school-to-school-collaboration>.