



## Portfolio Performance Report 2020-2021 School Year

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Jenn Thompson  
IPCSC Director

## The IPCSC's mission is to cultivate exemplary charter schools.

The Idaho Public Charter School Commission (IPCSC) is Idaho's independent chartering entity. Composed of seven Governor-appointed commissioners and a small staff, we provide oversight for approximately 60 public charter schools in our state.

The commission is primarily tasked with protecting taxpayer and student interests in the charter sector. This important work requires that we evaluate the risk to student and taxpayer dollars posed by new charter school applications. It also requires that we evaluate the return on investment of those public dollars as we consider charter school renewal applications.

Our mission of cultivating exemplary charter schools reminds us that our day-to-day tasks are in service of students and families.

We envision a healthy charter school

landscape focused on:

**Quality**—Idaho families have exemplary charter school options.

**Autonomy**—Charter schools design and implement unique educational programs.

**Accountability**—Charter schools meet the standards defined in the IPCSC's performance framework.

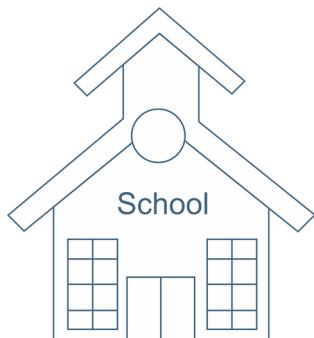
**Compliance**—Charter schools operate in compliance with laws, rules, and regulations.

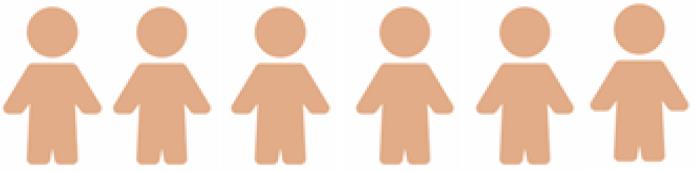
**Advocacy**—The IPCSC advocates for student and public interests.

We believe that by engaging in our mission with professionalism, integrity, and transparency, Idaho's charter schools and our educational landscape as a whole will continue to thrive.

## Fiscal Year 2021—Just the Facts

**57**  
Operating Schools



  
**29,049** Students Served

All Charter Schools are  
  
and  
Public

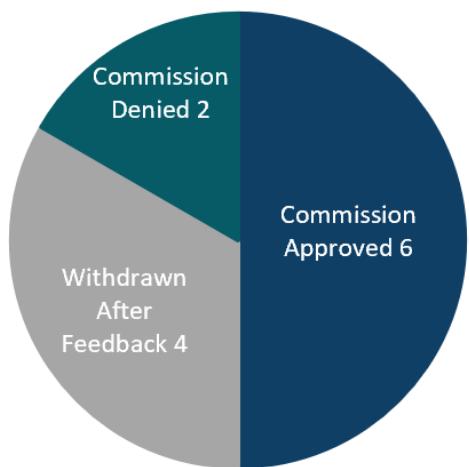
  
**6** Pre-Operational Schools

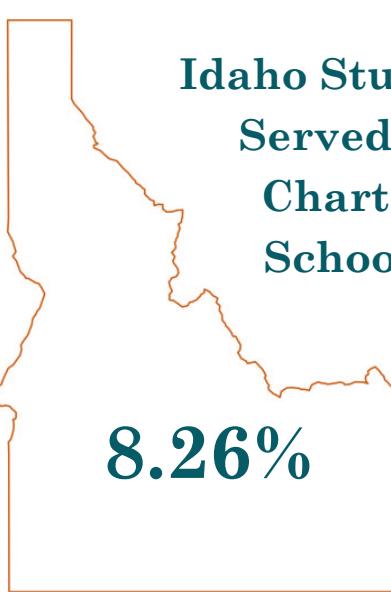
### Authorizers Balance

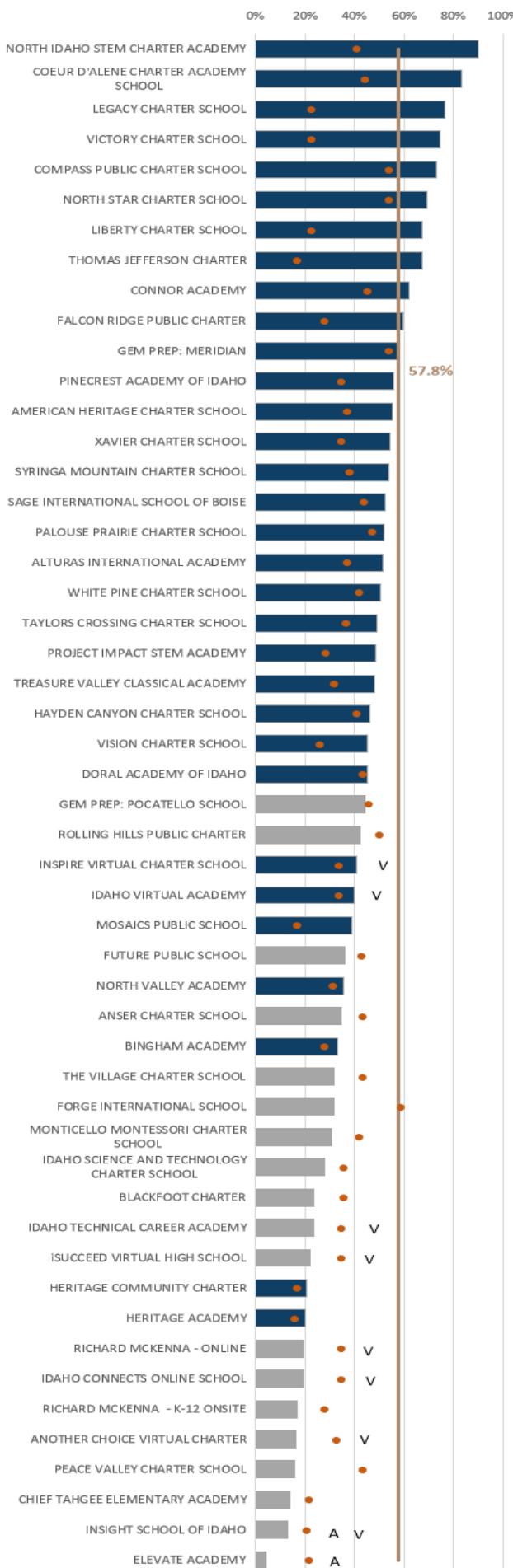
Autonomy

Accountability

**50%**  
Petition Approval



  
**Idaho Students Served by Charter Schools**  
**8.26%**



## Math Proficiency

The inherent variability of charter schools makes it difficult to effectively evaluate assessment outcomes. As we seek to better understand the relative performance of each of our schools, the IPCSC revised its performance framework to provide more nuanced data.

The Math ISAT proficiency chart on this page presents each school's average rate of proficiency in comparison to both a minimum standard (orange dots) and a reach goal (brown line).

The reach goal is the statewide goal for 2021 established in Idaho's Consolidated Plan (ESSA). Just under 10% of all Idaho schools met this goal. The minimum standard is established by the IPCSC and represents the average proficiency rate of each charter school's "identified comparison group".

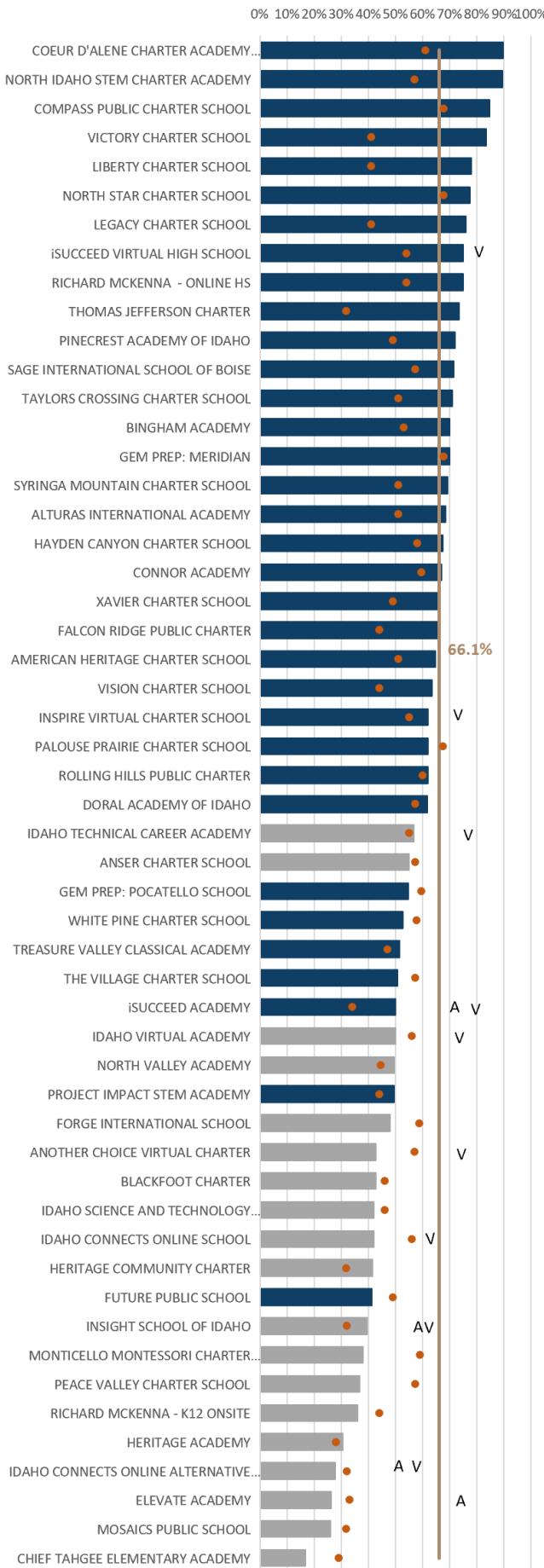
Why is the minimum meets standard different for each school? This is because the IPCSC's minimum expectation is that each charter school performs as well or better than the average of its peers. In most cases the comparison group is defined as the traditional school district in which the charter school is physically located.

In a handful of cases in which the student population is markedly dissimilar to the district, a custom comparison group was identified based on schools with similar percentages of student groups, such as economically disadvantaged or special education.

### Math Proficiency Legend

- School's Rate > Comparison Group Rate
- School's Rate < Comparison Group Rate
- IPCSC Minimum Meets Standard
- Statewide Accountability Goal 2021
- A = Alternative Program    V = Virtual School

## ELA Proficiency



The ELA ISAT proficiency chart on this page presents each school's rate of proficiency in comparison to both a minimum standard (orange dots) and a reach goal (brown line).

Each year, the IPCSC provides an annual performance report to each school. These individual reports are made available to the public on our website. Schools are encouraged to use this information to inform their strategic planning process each year.

A school that meets all standards at renewal is guaranteed another five year term of operations. On the other hand, a school that does not meet the minimum standard on one or more measure (academic, operational, or financial) is not guaranteed a next operating term.

## Math and ELA Data Highlights

**Well done!** - In their first year of operations, both Doral Academy and Pinecrest Academy performed well on all academic measures.

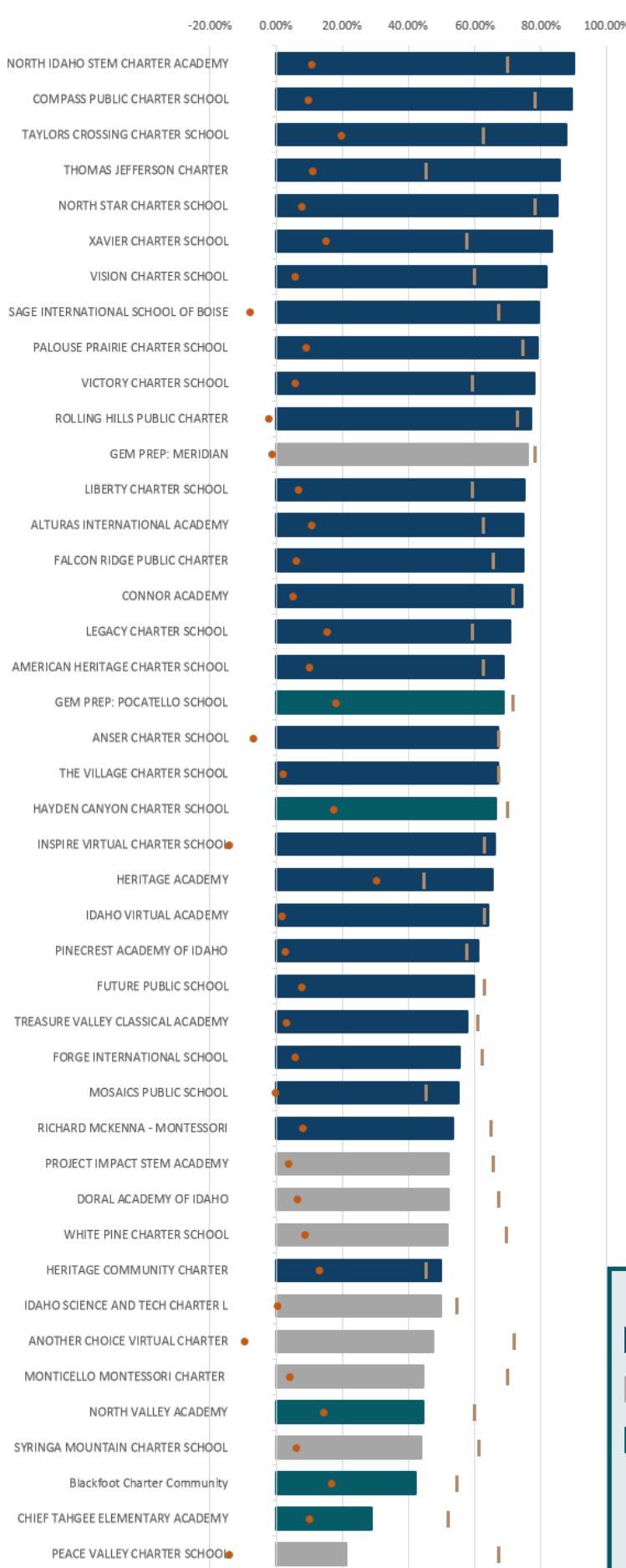
**Challenge accepted!** - Among the schools that have not yet met the minimum standard, several are within 10% of the goal and with focused effort, this goal is achievable.

**High flyers!** - Kudos to the schools consistently performing at the top of the charts! These schools meet the IPSC's minimum standard and exceed the reach goal year after year.

**Shout Out!** - iSucceed Virtual performed particularly well in ELA. Your efforts are appreciated!

### ELA Proficiency Legend

- School's Rate > Comparison Group Rate
- School's Rate < Comparison Group Rate
- IPCSC Minimum Meets Standard
- Statewide Accountability Goal 2021
- A = Alternative Program      V = Virtual School



## IRI Proficiency

IRI Proficiency is a new measure in the IPCSC's framework. Blue bars indicate a school that outperformed its comparison group on the spring administration of the IRI. Teal bars indicate that the school did not outperform its comparison group, but *did* improve its own proficiency rate by at least 10% between fall and spring.

Several aspects of this data are worth noting. First, schools such as Chief Tahgee and Blackfoot Community did not achieve high outcomes, but did make significant gains with their own students between fall and spring. Second, schools such as Thomas Jefferson and Heritage Academy outperformed their comparison groups by a significant margin. Third, some schools, such as Sage International saw a drop in their own proficiency rate, but still outperformed their peers. These are all wins, especially during a pandemic year.

Of concern are schools such as Peace Valley and Another Choice who did not perform as well as their comparison groups by a significant margin. In both cases, fewer students achieved proficiency in the spring than in the fall, indicating that these schools lost significant ground during the school year.

As the IPCSC considers fine-tuning these new measures, Gem Prep Meridian's outcomes make a case for considering a ceiling for this measure. For example, the IPCSC may choose to consider whether 80% meets standard, regardless of how a school's comparison group is performing.

### IRI Proficiency Legend

- School's Rate > Comparison Group Rate
- School's Rate < Comparison Group Rate
- School's Spring 10% greater than Fall
- Spring Proficiency Rate of Comp. Group
- School's Change Fall to Spring

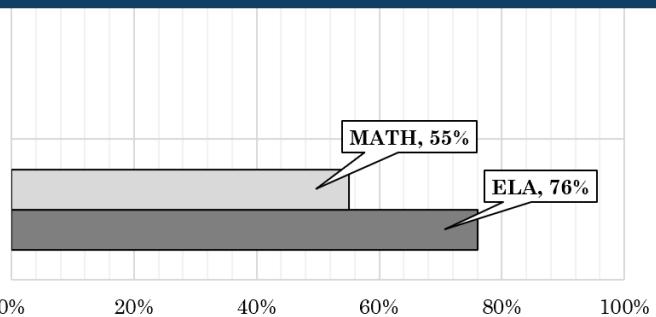
## Alternative Measures

At-risk students face additional barriers to success. The IPCSC's revised framework includes measures designed to provide a more complete picture of how well a school meets the academic needs of its students. Alternative measures serve to complement standard measures.

### MATH AND ELA CONTENT MASTERY

**Why This Matters:** At-risk students are often behind in grade-level proficiency in both Math and ELA. This measure is a complement to Math and ELA proficiency.

This measure considers the percentage of students who were continuously enrolled at the school who earned 2 credits in Math and ELA, regardless of the grade-level of the course taken. This measure acknowledges that a student enrolled in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, may not perform well on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade ISAT assessment if his or her skills are at the 6<sup>th</sup> grade level; however, if that student mastered the content (earned full credit) in the next course in his/her own academic progression, that success should be noted for the student and the school.



### PROGRESS TOWARD GRADUATION

**Why This Matters:** At-risk students may change schools frequently and fall behind in credits earned. As traditional academic measures only reflect the school's success with students who were continuously enrolled for the whole school year, alternative measures are necessary to evaluate whether a school is serving all students well.

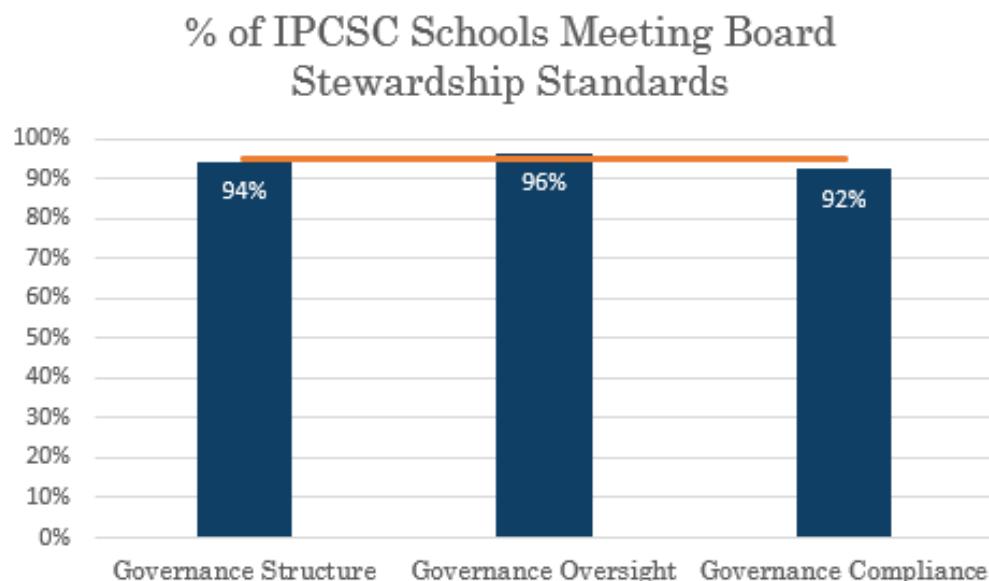
For students who are at-risk of failing to graduate, it is crucial to ensure that they earn enough credit while enrolled at a school to not fall further behind, regardless of whether they are enrolled for the whole school year or only one grading term. The 9-12 progress toward graduation measure considers whether a student successfully completed at least as many credits as expected during the time they attended the charter school.

### ADDITIONAL GRADUATES

**Why This Matters:** 4 and 5 Year ACGR measures capture the percentage of students who graduate 4 and 5 years after they began 9<sup>th</sup> grade. These measures are designed to speak to *student* success. They only speak to *school* success in cases where the school retained the student for the entire 4 or 5 years. As at-risk students are a more mobile population and generally enroll in several high schools throughout their high school career, ACGR alone does not sufficiently help us understand whether an alternative school is serving students well.

This additional graduation measure allows the IPCSC to consider the percentage of students who were in enrolled as 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and graduated, regardless of when the student should have graduated. As this measure includes students who may be in their 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> year of high school, this measure provides a clearer "data story" for at-risk students and the schools that serve them.

## Operational Measures: Board Stewardship



For public charter schools, the line between success and failure often comes down to the quality of board stewardship and school leadership they experience. School teams that respond quickly and competently to issues as they arise help ensure a school's overall success. Conversely, teams that do not respond quickly or competently foster a riskier environment.

The IPCSC's operational measures are designed to identify signs of distress in a charter school. While charter school failure is most commonly linked to financial failure, financial failure is always precipitated by signs of distress in a school's operations.

For example, a governing board in distress might hold many executive sessions, have long board meetings, experience Open Meeting Law violations, or may not evaluate their school leader thoroughly. A leadership team in distress may experience staff turn-over, have "findings" in student services reviews, fail to turn reports in on time, or lose track of the "little things", such as updating the website.

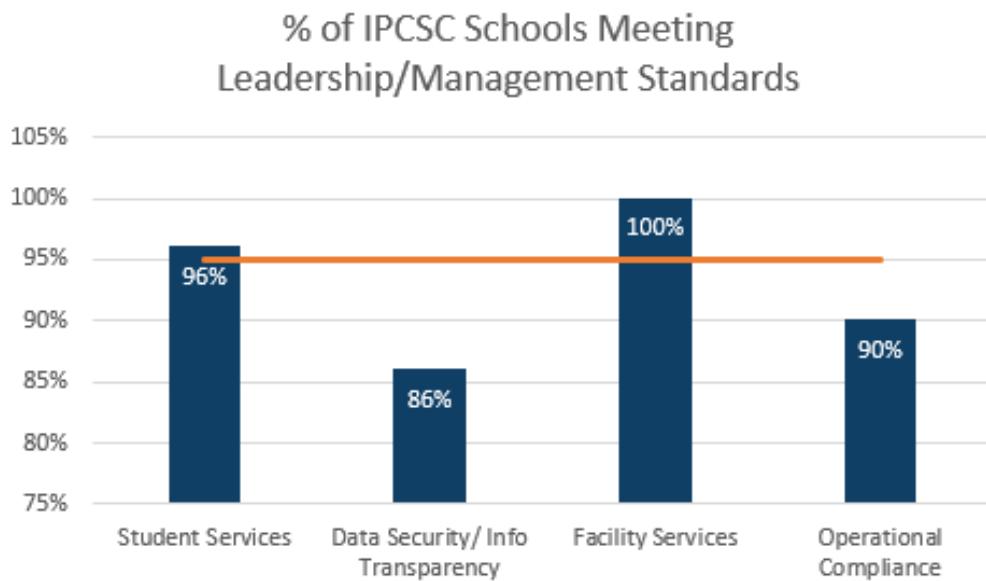
The operational measures are divided by board stewardship and leadership/

management in order to help a school identify which party is responsible for the issue and who can take action to address it. Through these measures we hope to help our schools identify issues before they get out of hand

The IPCSC evaluates three Board Stewardship measures. The Governance Structure measure considers whether the board's guiding documents (such as bylaws and meeting procedures) are compliant and in use. The Governance oversight measure considers whether the board is performing its duty to the school and taxpayers by ensuring the school has effective leadership, policy, and financial oversight. The Governance compliance measure considers whether more serious investigations into issues such as ethics were necessary.

The IPCSC evaluates four leadership and management measures, some of which require inter-agency cooperation to fully address. First, the student services measure considers whether the State Department of Education's (SDE) expert teams in special education and federal programs are satisfied with the school's services.

## Operational Measures: Leadership and Management



Second, the data security and transparency measure considers whether the school is engaging in compliant financial transparency and is keeping student data safe.

Third, the facility services measure considers whether a school's facilities are being well maintained and ancillary programs, such as meal service and transportation, are adequate, requiring collaboration with the building safety team and several SDE expert teams.

Finally, the operational compliance measure considers the compliance of a school's enrollment process and its response to any issued corrective action plans.

In order to evaluate a school's performance against these measures, the IPCSC staff conduct an extensive desk audit, reading reports and working with other agencies to make sure all parties are all on the same page with expectations and that ratings earned by a school on any particular measure are directly connected to a data source.

The IPCSC's goal is to have 95% of our schools meet standard on the board stewardship and leadership/management

measures. In fiscal year 2021, two investigations into governance compliance were necessary. In both cases, the issues were ultimately joint failures of board stewardship and school leadership.

At the time of this report, both schools are on a path toward resolution. A third school has been identified as struggling with board stewardship and efforts have been made to provide support.

The lower percentage of schools meeting standard on the information transparency measure is specifically related to website compliance. Overall, schools are compliant with Idaho's transparency laws; however, as the law is somewhat vague, each school posts reports in different formats and in different locations. In some cases, information was difficult to find on the school's website. In some cases expenditure reports include more detail than in others. The issue of which contracts to post is also somewhat unclear.

The IPCSC is working with schools to clarify the expectations. We are also working internally to better streamline our processes.

## Financial Oversight

In addition to academic and operational oversight, the IPCSC evaluates each school's financial performance against a set of near-term measures and against a set of sustainability measures. Near-term measures are designed to identify whether a school is able to meet its financial obligations in the next year; sustainability measures are designed to identify whether a school is able to meet its long-term financial obligations. Our overall goal is to see 95% of our schools meet standard on all financial measures.

The data below indicates that while the results are close to goal on most measures, only 72% of IPCSC schools were able to meet their enrollment projections in fiscal year 2021. This is likely due to student mobility caused by the pandemic during the 2020-2021 school year. However, as a charter school's budget is directly impacted by student enrollment, the ability to meet and maintain projections is an important factor in a charter school's financial viability.

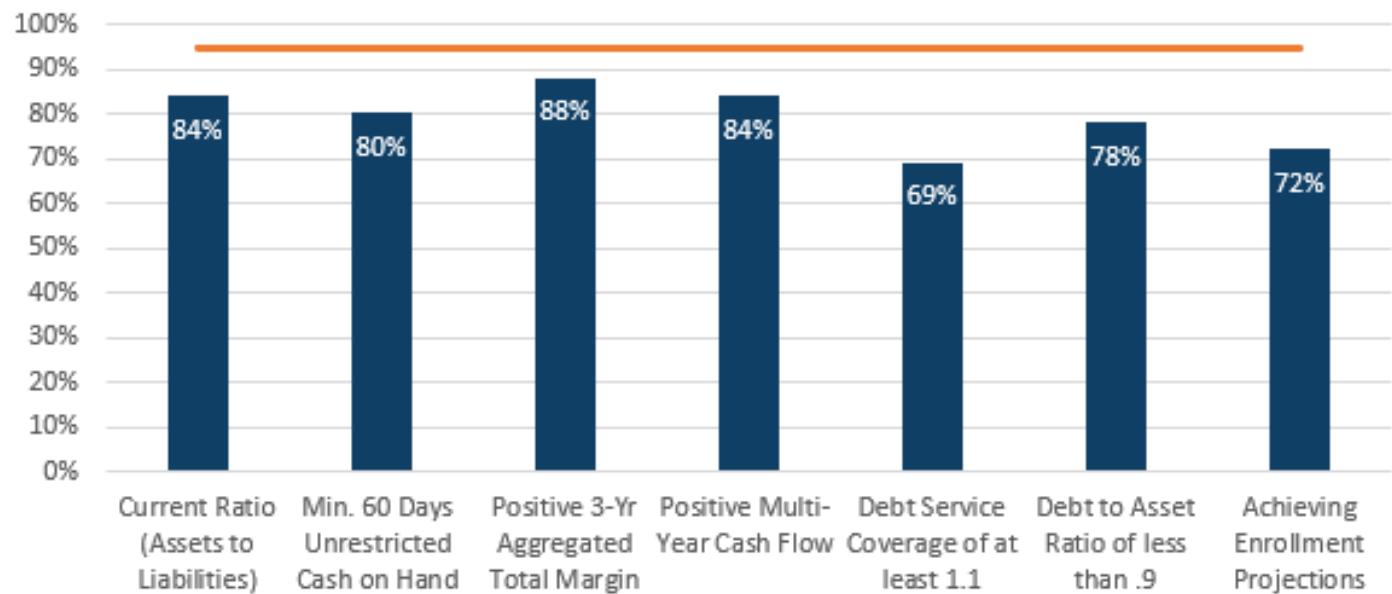
Schools with lower enrollment generally also evidence a decrease in their cash on

hand in compensation for the lesser revenue received. The data in the chart below reflects a drop from previous years on both the enrollment projection and cash on hand measures. Post-pandemic, schools are expected to bounce back in these areas.

Another obvious area of concern is the percentage of schools able to maintain a sufficiently high debt service coverage ratio and a sufficiently low debt to asset ratio. This is a more difficult needle to move as it is reflective of facility costs. While a few schools have poorly structured leases they are working to improve or move away from, most of the schools impacting this measure have long-term loans that are not likely to change.

In addition to the seven measures below, the IPCSC also considers whether any school is in default of its financial obligations. During fiscal year 2021, two schools were in default: one with chronic late payments, and another in default of loan covenants. Both schools have taken action to address the issues.

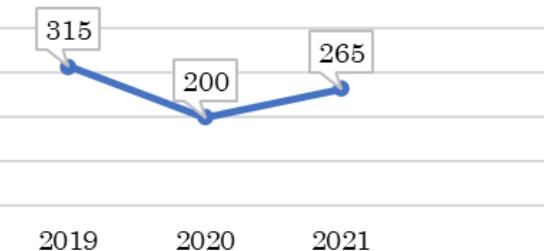
% of IPCSC Schools Meeting Financial Standards



## Drilling Down

While high level information is useful in guiding the IPCSC toward its goal, it is important that our work is also useful at the school level. Below are a few examples of the charts each individual school might see on its annual performance report.

### # Days Unrestricted Cash On Hand



**Why cash on hand matters:** This measure estimates a school's average daily cost of operations and considers the number of days a school could operate using only its available cash and investments.

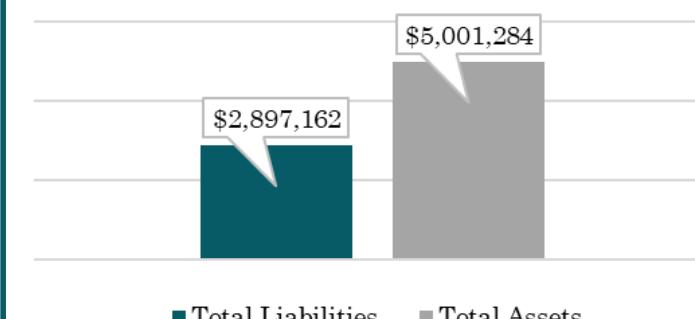
A school with at least 60 days cash on hand would be able to meet its immediate financial obligations with available cash, buying the time it might take to access other assets. A school with less than 15 days cash on hand is in financial distress and is at risk of automatic closure.

### Why debt to asset ratio matters:

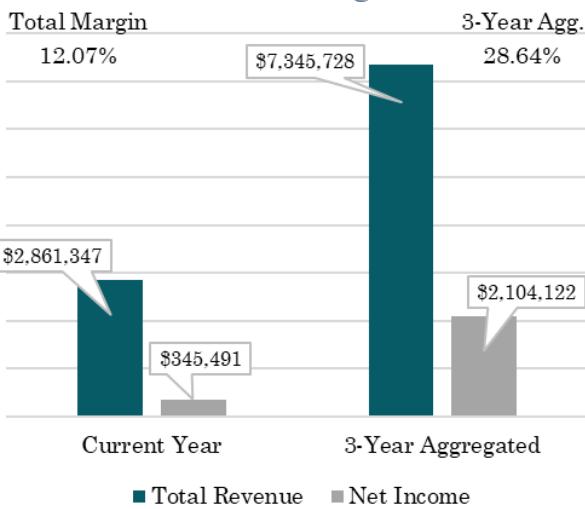
The Debt to Asset Ratio compares a school's total liabilities to its total assets.

A school whose total liabilities are 90% or less of its total assets is likely to be able to repay all short-term debts and still manage to set its long-term affairs in order in a worst-case scenario. A school with more liabilities than assets would not be able to meet all its financial obligations in a worst-case scenario.

### Debt to Asset Ratio



### Total Margin



**Why total margin matters:** The Total Margin compares a school's total revenue to its net income. A school with a positive total margin spent less than it brought in. That is, the school is living within its means and can plan for future purchases and investments.

An occasional negative total margin may indicate that a planned or necessary purchase has taken place. This is not necessarily a negative indicator. However, if the Total Margin is chronically negative or severe decreases appear, the school may be in financial distress. Aggregating this margin over three years helps identify long-term trends.

## FAQ and Additional Resources

### How are new petitions evaluated?

Statute outlines a 12-week process. The IP-CSC provides guidance for applications and evaluations. The guidance document outlines the timeline and procedures for new applicants. The Standards of Quality describes what a high-quality response might look like in each category. This is the tool by which applications are evaluated.

[New Petitioner Guidance](#)

[Standards of Quality](#)

### How are schools performing?

To serve the needs of schools, policy-makers and Idaho families, the IPCSC maintains a webpage for each school on which annual performance reports are accessible.

[Sample School Performance Report](#)

### What is the renewal process?

Charter schools are approved for 5-year terms and must apply for renewal every 5 years. The renewal process was revised ahead of 2021 renewals to ensure alignment to statute. The guidance document outlines timelines and procedures. The performance framework describe the standards each school is expected to meet for a non-conditional renewal.

[Renewal Guidance](#)

[Performance Framework](#)

### What are the IPCSC's plans?

The Commission's 5-year strategic plan outlines goals in communication, school achievement, and organizational growth.

[Strategic Plan](#)

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