

**Strategic Planning Consulting Project**  
**Utah State Charter School Board**  
November 7, 2014

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**Project Overview**

Kyle Braithwaite interviewed key stakeholders of Utah’s charter school system to provide information that could be further used to develop strategic priorities for the State Charter School Board (SCSB) of Utah. Interview discussions focused on important concepts involving the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT Analysis) to charter schools in Utah. In addition, Kyle sought stakeholders feedback on the mission and purpose of the SCSB and ways in which the SCSB can improve, refocus, and prioritize their efforts moving forward.

**Process Summary**

In mid-April 2014 a committee gathered to discuss the initial steps involved in creating a strategic plan. The committee consisted of Laura Belnap, Jennifer Lambert, Tina Smith, Kim Frank, & Bruce Davis. Kyle Braithwaite, an MBA student with Weber State University, was approved to help complete a series of interviews with key stakeholders related to the SCSB and provide a report of findings. The committee established a list of questions to conduct the interviews. The results of those interviews is the basis of this report.

The SCSB selected key stakeholders to be interviewed during this process. Selected individuals included those with current or previous involvement with the SCSB, State Board of Education (SBE), State Charter School Office (SCSO), and both the UAPCS & UCN charter associations. Fifteen of the 24 selected individuals participated with six participating in person and nine over the phone. The interviews lasted between 20 to 60 minutes each.

Tim Beagley (SCSB)	Roderic Land (CMAC Rep)	Terryl Warner (SBE)
Laura Belnap (SCSB)	Teresa Theurer (SBR, SBE)	Marlies Burns (SCSO)
Dean Broadbank (SCSB)	Freddie Cooper (SBE, CMA)	Jennifer Lambert (SCSO)
Bruce Davis (SCSB)	Heather Groom (SBE)	Janene Bowen (SCSO)
Kristen Elinkowski (SCSB)	John Pingree (SCSB)	Joe Heywood (SCSO)
Robert Enger (SCSB)	Scott Smith (SCSB)	Tina Smith (UAPCS)
Howard Headlee (SCSB)	David Crandall (SBE)	Kim Frank (UCN)
Kim Burningham (SBE Rep)	Mark Openshaw (SBE)	Chris Bleak (UAPCS)

Each interview consisted of twelve questions. Questions helped gauge the stakeholder’s views of Utah’s charter school system, the SCSB, and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats the charter school system faces. Interview questions also elicited potential strategic focuses for the SCSB. Stakeholders shared their perceptions of the SCSB’s mission and purpose and recommend priorities to target the next few years. The following questions were the basis of each interview.

1. Please tell me a little about your involvement with charter schools.
2. From your perspective, why do charter schools exist?
3. What are the strengths of Utah’s charter school system?
4. What are the weaknesses of Utah’s charter school system?
5. What opportunities do you see ahead for the Utah charter school system?
6. What threats do see on the horizon for the Utah charter school system?
7. What is the mission and purpose of the State Charter School Board?

8. What is your response to the following draft mission statement? *“Our mission is to expand and sustain high-performing educational options for the children of Utah through innovation, choice, and autonomy with accountability.”*
9. How can the SCSB help charter schools succeed?
10. What should the SCSB stop doing? What should the SCSB start doing? & What should the SCSB continue to do or do more of?
11. Over the next few years what should be the top priorities for the State Charter School Board?
12. Do you have any additional ideas or suggestions for improving Utah’s charter school system?

## Summary Findings

- *Establish an effective school closure process for consistently low performing or poorly managed schools*

Nearly every interviewee made this or a similar comment. Stakeholders indicated there must be a way to identify low performing/poorly managed schools, make necessary changes to management or governing boards, and strategically close the school and revoke or reassess the charter.

- *Create an objective tool to evaluate school performance.*

An objective performance management tool should clearly identify performance standards and be evaluated often. This priority was tied closely with the above priority as a way to measure which schools may need further support and attention. Most stakeholders mentioned that accountability needed to be a key area of focus moving forward and objectively evaluating schools based on their individual charters was a key component.

- *Utilize Mentoring program more efficiently*

Funding and appropriations are provided to the SCSB for the purpose of offering mentoring programs for charter schools. No specific ideas were given by the interviewees, but many felt like the board could do a better job in ensuring that these mentor programs are established and worthwhile. Many felt like this is a great way for charter schools to share their best practices with each other and help the SCSB further identify and cultivate the innovative successes within the charter school network.

- *Technological Innovation and Online Learning are both Opportunities and Threats*

The majority of stakeholders mentioned that technological innovation and online distance learning are either opportunities or threats or both. While there are many benefits to the advancement of online distance learning it appears that a lot of stakeholders found this to be an issue that causes potential threats to the charter school network, primarily surrounding potential unethical or fraudulent use of online distance learners or homeschoolers. Stakeholders mentioned that developing a system for monitoring and evaluating such distance learning programs could be key to success in this area moving forward.

- *Communication from SCSB to charter schools*

Stakeholders mention that charter schools may not know who is a part of the SCSB or may not feel like they hear from you often enough. Suggested to get to know each of the authorized schools and maybe ask for a few programs to present some of their successes to the board on regular basis.

- *Labs of Innovation & District Competition*

Stakeholders gave one of two answers to the question “Why do charter schools exist”. Most believe that charter schools were created and exist as “labs of innovation” and should be utilized accordingly; not only providing choice in education, but also sharing successes with other schools including other public non-charter schools.

The other group of stakeholders mentioned that charter schools are natural competition to non-charter schools and have the ability to force the quality of education to increase across the board. This group also felt that innovation was a part of this process, but that competition was a primary piece of charter school existence.

- *Two large threats: Saturation & “For-Profit”*

One threat that was mentioned often throughout the interviews was the idea that many areas are becoming over saturated with schools (including charter schools) and growth is limited in those areas. Further authorizing even innovative charters in these areas would only be cannibalizing enrollment of other schools with little benefit to education as a whole.

Another threat that was repeated often by interviewed stakeholders was the fear that some people are trying to use the charter school network solely to make money (potentially fraudulently). Developing a way to identify such practices and deter them from happening may involve learning from the mistakes and successes of other states and implementing necessary procedures within the charter school system.

These summary findings were developed as key strategic priorities that appeared often while conducting the stakeholder interviews. The remaining portion of this report will further detail the findings from each of the interview questions.

### **Interview Question Result Details**

This section will include details for each question of the interview. Each question will include a summary results section as well as a list of actual responses to the questions by stakeholders (names and identities of stakeholder comments will be removed to maintain anonymity).

#### **Question 1: Please tell me a little about your involvement with charter schools.**

This question was used primarily to initiate conversation with the stakeholder and help Kyle Braithwaite better understand the background of each stakeholder. The results of this question will not be disclosed in this report in order to maintain the anonymity of individual stakeholder comments.

#### **Question 2: From your perspective, why do charter schools exist?**

##### *Summary Results:*

As mentioned in the summary finding above stakeholders primarily fit into two categories when responding to this question. Category 1: Choice & Innovation. Category 2: Competition.

##### *Actual Responses:*

“Providing parents with choice. Providing innovative options and experiences for students. Smaller school environment. Laboratory to test new innovative and disseminate to other traditional schools”

“Charter schools are the research and development laboratory, not intended to be a parallel system (Worried that the communication won’t actually happen); Choice and opportunity for parents and student education, providing competition to local traditional schools (money doesn’t currently flow in a way that affects traditional schools losing students).”

“Provide options to tax payers. I also think it is to be a laboratory for district schools to use as a way to explore learning options for students. Labs of innovation.”

“Opportunity and choice. Provide choice for unhappy individuals from regular public schools. Helped alleviate the growth in certain areas.”

“Need and Choice.”

“To create independent schools that can innovate and make original decisions without the bureaucracies of a big district which slows and stops progress.”

“Improve education and give autonomy.”

“Originally sold as a laboratory for innovative ideas. If they are just another iteration of an existing school I ask myself why. I laud the innovation provided.”

“Finding new ways of teaching and learning.”

“The schools exist to make everybody better.”

“Offer a choice in education. State-wide opportunity.”

“Party line is that charter schools are incubators of innovation. A lot of time that works and a lot of times it doesn’t.”

“Some exist for innovative purposes and others for more parental/community control.”

“I think some are being created just purely for profit other than student learning.”

“They have different tracks. Spend a lot of time in extracurricular activities in traditional schools and charter schools don’t have that and I like that. They are smaller and locally controlled which I think is good. Parents much more involved in the charter school movements and are expected to be more involved in the classroom and school volunteering.”

“Need from the community for target populations that were not being serviced by the traditional system. Students all learn differently, so charter schools help fulfill those differences.

#### **Question 3: What are the strengths of Utah’s charter school system?**

##### *Summary Results*

The majority of stakeholders feel as if Utah is a great breeding ground for innovative charter school options. Other strengths to the system include smaller class sizes, ease of chartering, improved application process, and ability to efficiently run schools on limited funding.

#### *Actual Responses*

"Good legislative support. As a whole there is a good funding structure. Political support."

"Smaller schools run by volunteer boards can and do run quality public schools. Some of the top performing schools are charter schools. The well run schools are oversubscribed."

"Educating more with less funding. Building construction is far more efficient than traditional schools"

"First of all there are a lot of well intention people. We have a strong entrepreneurial populace. Charters have helped elevate district schools to ask difficult questions."

"The application process is good and well improved."

"We have quite a few charter schools, low barriers, policies are favorable to charter schools. Serve a wide range of students."

"For the most part the state supports the concept and system of charter schools. Positive atmosphere in the state."

"We give a lifetime charter which is a strength and possibly a weakness."

"Multiple authorizers. The charter board itself is able to look through and provide advice to the SBE."

"There are a lot of good sized charter schools. Unique and specific education models. [Some] offer good options in an area of other struggling schools."

"Relatively easy to start a charter school in the state."

"We have a great charter school director in Marlies Burns."

"Small class sizes. Local governing boards are not paid and still actively involved. More family setting and accepting. A focus on education is key and a strength."

"Utah works on a shoestring. Charter schools do a lot with a lot less and they have found ways to provide quality choice without lots of money."

"The legislative environment allows for innovation and best practice sharing. There is a desire to communicate the successes."

#### **Question 4: What are the weaknesses of Utah's charter school system?**

##### *Summary Results*

The most prevalent response to this question was the lack of accountability among charter schools and the inability to identify and potentially close underperforming ineffective schools. Over saturation and lack of communication between SCSB and charter schools are two other factors mentioned by stakeholders.

##### *Actual Results.*

"Lack of measure for failing schools and being able to shut them down or providing added support and training."

"Administrative costs are prevalent in charter schools because it is a large part of expenses. Funding amongst the schools is not equalized."

"Charter schools have not "cracked the nut" when it comes to high schools (outside of the niche focused schools)."

"Accountability and the fact that some schools probably shouldn't still be open."

"We are at a pivotal point and we need to decide if they are labs of innovation or are they different choices. What are we considering as being a benefit to taxpayers?"

"There are some schools who are struggling and probably need to be shut down."

"If there is a dysfunctional board, then there needs to be a way to get them corrected quickly versus some strung out process. The kids are the ones being affected"

"There needs to be more professional development within the charter school boards."

"I don't believe we should have charter board members for life."  
"Not having an accountability system. This is public dollars and there needs to be an accountability system. A comprehensive and cohesive system."  
"Accountability is hit and miss."  
"Funding hurts charter schools with unique models more."  
"Perception is that charter schools get a pass. PR management of charter school perceptions in the public and within the state education department."  
"Mainly tracking school performance."  
"I have a lot of nervousness about the groups who seem to be using charter school flexibility to make money."  
"Better system for closing charter schools who are failing. When a charter schools does poorly it reflect poorly on all charter schools."  
"We have yet to close a charter school or have a system in place to close a school or move a school to a more appropriate management structure."  
"Saturation in some areas. It becomes more difficult to market to students."  
"There is no real renewal process for charter schools. There should be some sort of renewal."  
"Underperforming schools don't have to justify their existence. Never shut down a charter school... which is a weakness to the schools but a strength to the builders."  
"More and more charter schools decreases the oversight of the schools."  
"Few employees for all the charter schools is difficult. More help in the state offices."  
"I'm not thrilled about the alternative route to licensing. Lack of quality."  
"We don't have a way to take an underperforming charter school to another level of either out of the system or into new management style."  
"Forms and applications are great, but too many forms and too many processes may limit innovation and experimentation."  
"We don't do a good job expressing trainings that are available to charter schools. SCSB needs to be an example of what they are asking charter schools to do and provide (i.e. have a strategic plan so you can ask charter schools to have one)."  
"Legislative weaknesses around unequal funding."  
"There isn't an accountability structure in place that remains constant and consistent."

#### **Question 5: What opportunities do you see ahead for the Utah charter school system?**

##### *Summary Results*

Most stakeholders felt like there would be substantial growth potential in the state and that charter schools would be a vital part to absorbing that growth. Opportunities abound in the area of innovative schooling options and providing opportunities for students in rural areas.

##### *Actual Responses*

"Public education in Utah is the fastest growing segment. I would like to see more unique schools. Need a diversity of schools around. American Prep may be an opportunity to look at and see if allowing them to take over failing school or opening new schools is possible."  
"Significant growth potential for charter schools, especially with population growth. Charters can help absorb that growth."  
"There is an opportunity to use the information we receive from charter schools to help traditional schools."  
"Technological advancements. Charters should have more opportunities to focus on their own schools to figure out what they can do to be great."  
"Schools are unique and provide unique information."

“We have some information now with so many charter schools to start looking into what is and isn’t working. Provide education about what we find to those in other schools and areas.”

“Charters going into the poverty stricken neighborhoods could be a good solution to education issues in those areas.”

“Innovative businesses and technology could be applied to education.”

“The state as a whole realizes that charter schools are public ed and a mindset is changing for the future.”

“More niche school opportunities. Offer new opportunities in district areas that have a need.”

“We have a huge share of online education and there are opportunities in rural areas for top classes.”

“The opportunity for Utah is to push for highly innovative models in school systems. Growth potential in certain areas of the state where bonding requirements are not possible.”

“I am excited to see the unique schools coming up and see what we can learn from their unique models.”

“Continual growth of charter schools in the state. There is a lot of testing anxiety and I believe more parents will shift to the small class sizes provided by charter schools. Parent involvement in the classroom increasing.”

“Taking charter schools who perform well and expanding them.”

“Finalizing and securing charter school options with funding at a more equalized basis.”

“Legislative opportunities look very bright. Bridges have begun to be built between charters and traditional schools and old traditions and stereotypes seem to be slowly disappearing.”

#### **Question 6: What threats do you see on the horizon for the Utah charter school system?**

##### *Summary Results*

The most common threat mentioned was the existence of poorly performing charter schools and the inability to shut them down if needed. Stakeholders also mention funding on a number of occasions as being a threat. There is a growing angst that the state legislature may become disenchanted (as on stakeholder mentioned) with charter schools if there is no significant performance measurement in place for charter school evaluation. Saturation and inefficient leadership within charter schools were a couple other threats mentioned by stakeholders.

##### *Actual Responses*

“Funding.”

“Traditional public schools system feels threatened by charter schools.”

“Low performing and failing schools are a threat.”

“Online education can be a threat.”

“Political threats that are used to not find equitable funding. Over and under regulation. Creating an environment to decrease the autonomy that charter schools have.”

“If a single school is fraudulent or has a massive scandal that would have a more profound impact on charter schools vs. traditional schools.”

“People are quick to jump on the shiny new toy and forget about charter schools (i.e. Online classrooms/teaching).”

“There are some threats with failing schools and those who are consistently in the bottom quartile.”

“People getting into charter schools purely to make money.”

“Enrollment numbers are lowering and saturation is a factor.”

“Allowing schools to continue operating in the same way they always do, when they aren’t being successful.”

“Because charter schools are innovative the measurements don’t always match up with their model of charter. The Core doesn’t take into account the extra stuff that charter schools are teaching.”

“Sheer number of charter schools is a challenge as well. Difficult to monitor the schools.”

“Losing favor with the state legislature. Being able to evaluate charter schools will be a strong need of the legislature.”

“If someone is just trying to use the system to make money. This is not the goal of the public school system and shouldn’t be a part of charter schools either.”

“Getting bogged down in red-tape and bureaucracies.”

“Poorly performing charter schools pose a threat as well. Distance learning is a potential threat to charter schools.”

“The student cap.”

“Funding of charters is difficult.”

“If we don’t have a true quality evaluation tool in place the legislature may become more disenchanted with charter schools.”

“Saturation is another threat to some schools. Most parents don’t pick schools based on model, they pick close to home.”

“Governing boards that don’t know how to govern. They want to be day to day managers and not a governing boards.”

“I have seen lots of passing the lemons amongst charter schools.”

“It is possible that a charter school could go south, bringing a lot of negative light on charter schools. There is a perception that a lot of people are making a lot of money off the charter school system including potential fraud.”

“We only have a limited amount of money. Online pupil unit funding accountability. Funding should be equitable.”

“Profiteering is a threat.”

“Funding. Especially the discussion revolving around ADM and funding options.”

“Lack of communication on common core and sage testing.”

“Online education going without parameters.”

### **Question 7: What is the mission and purpose of the State Charter School Board?**

#### *Summary Results*

Authorizing, overseeing and holding charter schools accountable to their charter agreements are the primary responses to this question. Other responses included lobbying for charter schools and providing the necessary tools for charter schools to learn and succeed.

#### *Actual Responses*

“Encourage charter schools to be successful. Hold schools accountable for their results. Provide overall governance of the state-wide system. Help them abide by their Charter.”

“Be advocates for charter schools with legislators with SBE and with the community. Build support and financial backing from the state. Provide resources to be successful.”

“To authorize charter schools and hold them accountable to their charter document.”

“I have to wonder what the job really is. The SBE has the constitutional responsibility over the SCSB and has delegated authority to SCSB. What does that mean? They have the ability to choose new charters. Does the SBE or SCSB close charter schools? What authority was handed over to SCSB and what authority was kept within SBE? I believe the SBE may be shared authorizers in the process and both parties need to work more closely with each other.”

“Supporting and promoting charter schools and innovation. Quality in education is important.”

“They need to be the authorizers of the schools and less on the cheerleading. Focus on knowing the needs of the schools and the schools that are trying to open. Let’s be an authorizer.”

“Certainly need to provide oversight of charter schools. Identifying standards and then following up on standards. Evaluation processes in place.”

“Charter schools, look for innovation, & improving schools.”  
“Open, track, and support charter schools in the state of Utah.”  
“Their mission is to support public education through charter schools that are high quality.”  
“Oversight and support of Charter Schools and calling out those that don’t fit.”  
“Should include innovation in the charter school realm. Making sure students are educated in coordination with state law. Provide support for charter schools, including training.”  
“Oversight of the charter schools. Looking at academic and financial data to see how they are doing. Sending information to education department.”  
“Oversee the charter schools and be sure that the standards are being met. They are the state school board for charter schools. Accountability. Approving standards that are appropriate and specific.”  
“Primary authorizer in the state. Approve applications and monitor the performance of charter schools. If charter schools don’t do what they are chartered to do then hold them accountable.”  
“Their job is to do what is outlined in statute and board rule.”

**Question 8: What is your response to the following draft mission statement? “*Our mission is to expand and sustain high-performing educational options for the children of Utah through innovation, choice, and autonomy with accountability.*”**

*Summary Results*

Most really liked this mission statement. Some felt like there needed to be some discussion around the word expand and autonomy. Overall, most felt like the mission statement hit each of the important functions specific to the SCSB and its mission.

*Actual Responses*

“I think it is succinct and captures [the mission] well.”  
“It fits pretty closely to what I have been talking about. However, the expansion portion should be looked at and understood. Training and Teaching may not be appropriate when they are also authorizing and holding them accountable.”  
“Do they say schools at any point? I would say this is a good start, but it doesn’t talk about charters at all and I think it should. SCSB does this but through just the chartering process, not all educational options in the state.”  
“It captures the sense of what was in the law. It puts emphasis on quality and accountability. The sense of that was missing previously.”  
“I like the three elements. They are the main things that the charter school board should be looking for and helping [the charter schools] with.”  
“Mostly what we have been talking about. Evaluation.”  
“Autonomy – How far does that autonomy to go? First of all the law is clear that they must accept all students.”  
“I like it and it’s what I have saying.”  
“Sounds good.”  
“That’s awesome.”  
“Its ok, I don’t get too excited about expand, but sustain is a very important word to me. I think we need to control what we have and then worry about expansion.”  
“I love that statement, I really like that statement. Is that really their mission statement? I like that a lot.”  
“We are not the people who expand the choices we should just be the overseer of this statement.”  
“Yes, I like the autonomy with accountability part especially. Does it reflect the statute that is already written?”

**Question 9: How can the SCSB help charter schools succeed?**

### *Summary Results*

Help schools succeed by defining clear and specific performance criteria and then hold schools accountable for their performance. Provide opportunities for mentorship programs to take place and facilitate the exchange of information amongst charter schools.

### *Actual Responses*

“Make sure they have the resources that they need. Financial, mentoring, encouragement.”

“Help the staff support at the state level. Protect the system as a whole and hold the schools accountable for what they do.”

“Academic, governance, and financial compliance. Make sure the systems are working.”

“Clear consistent standards and as little administrative burden as possible on the schools.”

“Tell the schools what the accountability structure is and then stand out of the way and let them do it.”

“Through an accountability process that provides mentoring and patience.”

“[Applications] shouldn’t necessarily score points because it is a new option, it should score points if the board appears to be a board that can be successful.”

“Hold schools accountable, but in an equitable process that helps sustain the movement of charter schools.”

“They could have stronger criteria for approval. I have noticed that some schools who are denied the first time come back around stronger than ever. Applications seem concept heavy, but plan light... not implementable.”

“Look at what is happening and share it with others. We could be a force nationally.”

“Mentoring money could be used more appropriately with schools. More communication amongst schools and with the SCSB to better use these funds.”

“SCSB could be out visiting the schools and gaining information on how things are happening.”

“I think continuing to fight for funding.”

“Evaluate [charter schools] and give quality feedback on improving year to year.”

“Setting standards and measuring them clearly.”

“Appropriations to charter schools has provided for a mentoring program that needs to be utilized.”

“We need to give them the tools they need to be successful. We need to help mentor, train and support but then give them their autonomy.”

“I think it would be helpful to use the strategic plan to be on the same page. Better, consistent, and planned oversight. Need to improve on this.”

“Should do what statute says. Authorize and hold schools accountable. Set standards and stick with them. Most charter schools are willing to be held accountable to their charter.”

“Charter schools need to feel like they are being evaluated like an employee evaluation form of sorts.”

“Facilitating the free exchange of information amongst successful charter school programs. Schools should be collaborating with other schools to help them succeed. We need to share success stories amongst each other.”

“Keep close track of the data and be sure that schools are providing the correct learning and financial stability.”

“Accountability and making sure that everyone follows the same rules.”

“Better communication between SBE & SCSB.”

“Play a bigger role in identifying and spreading best practices. We should find a way to spread that best practice information.”

“Find times when charter schools step out of bounds and help nudge them back in bounds so they don’t run afoul of all the regulations and policies.”

**Question 10: What should the SCSB stop doing? What should the SCSB start doing? & What should the SCSB continue to do or do more of?**

### *Summary Results*

Most struggled to find or place their thoughts into all three of these categories, but each stakeholder provided important feedback in each area. According to stakeholders, the SCSB could stop some of their specific practices involving the application and authorization procedure (the specifics are mentioned in the next section of actual responses). An overwhelming majority believe that the SCSB could start clearly identifying standards and evaluating charter schools based on those standards. Lastly, stakeholders felt like the SCSB was moving in the right direction and suggested that they continue to move toward further improvement, specifically mentioning professional development for charter schools and for the SCSB itself.

### *Actual Responses*

#### Stop

“Doing some of the trainings that may be a conflict with the accountability side of their obligation. Offering resources are fine, but mandating the resource be used should be stopped.”

“Looking at charter schools like mini district schools. Don’t hold them to the same framework as a district school.”

“Trying to not feel pressure to approve a school. There isn’t an emergency to approve a school that isn’t already approved. Keep the bias out of the approval process when the SCSB has helped a school build their plan. Don’t feel pressure from politicians to approve.”

“Stop authorizing schools for way more seats than needed. Especially those that have indicators to the negative.”

“A recommendation that is coming before the board is sometimes in the best interest of just one school rather than charter schools at large. Not comfortable with that type of adjustments. Standards for all schools and measurements based on schools.”

“Adding more bureaucracy”

“Approving every applicant.”

“Approving school models that we know are not going to be successful.”

“Stop letting bad schools continue.”

“Stop hiring teachers that are not trained. ARL has its place, but it needs to be very organized.”

“Requiring more and more reports. Consolidate the reports together”

#### Start

“Deal effectively with underperforming schools. Replace administration or close the schools.”

“Get a handle on online education and blended learning. Find a way of making online learning work. Think through the technological changes that are coming. Home schoolers may need some help and could be helped by charter schools - Underserved segment of the population.”

“Simplify, clarify, and be consistent on what they require of schools. Narrow in on specifics and decrease the number of measurements. This is difficult because of the differences in schools, but consistency is key.”

“Start having better and more meetings with the State Board of Education about what the expectations of each other are. Start doing a better job of advocating to the state board and legislature about what they and schools need to be successful (if you want us to do X then we need Y).”

“Hold the charter schools accountable to their contracts.”

“I have heard several times that people feel like they hear from the SCSB only when they are in trouble, this should change.”

“Thoroughly evaluating the schools in operation. Promote those that are doing well and find out why and then share that knowledge with the state.”

“Mentoring program.”

“More accountability for underperforming charter schools. Making a plan to close underperforming charter schools. Figure out how to take care of distance learning models more effectively.”

“Limiting charters for 3 years or 5 years for more consistent reviews.”  
“Holding schools more accountable. Don’t do it arbitrarily, look at schools specifically.”  
“Make the lines very clear between authorizing, holding accountable, and training schools. Communicate even to the excess. Get more professional development as a state charter school board (also sends a good message to schools).”  
“Offer training to charter schools that may be lacking from the charter associations.”  
“Approach the legislature about staffing issues.”  
“Take a closer look at what online education is and what a hybrid or online education looks like.”  
“Reach out more to the governing boards of the schools. I was involved for years without getting any contact from SCSB.”  
“Identifying schools that are doing a good job and find ways to expand their operations.”  
“Communicate more and be very transparent. Say what you mean and do what you say. A school recently asked to be put on probation and that should never happen, especially if you are more consistent, so be more consistent.”

#### Continue

“Gathering data from charter schools. Continue the innovative decision making on application process.”  
“Forming new schools. Mentoring program for struggling schools. Bring in more schools to learn from and then diffuse the information amongst other schools and traditional schools as well. Make the best use of the data we gather.”  
“I know the people on the charter school board care and are good mentors, but instead get out and help in situations where schools are struggling. Continue to respect the individual charters instead of shifting towards the big “conglomerate” charters.”  
“Working towards board consistency. Scoring application process is fairly consistent and needs to continue.”  
“Trainings should continue in-house, including pre-authorization trainings.”  
“I liked the presentations from struggling and successful schools at board meetings”  
“Develop the relationship with state legislature. Continue to educate the legislature. Use the data to show how great the schools are.”  
“Moving in the direction you are going.”  
“Being an advocate for the charter schools who are being innovative.”  
“Having performance frameworks available.”  
“Be a powerful influence to the charter school system as a whole.”  
“Building [a] performance framework. Updating the framework and analyzing the framework to monitor school performance.”

### **Question 11: Over the next few years what should be the top priorities for the State Charter School Board?**

#### *Summary Results*

The summary of this section is partly included in the project findings mentioned at the beginning of this report. However, three main priorities were discussed by almost all stakeholders throughout the interview process.

- 1 – Develop standards and procedures for dealing with underperforming charter schools.
- 2 – Develop a consistent evaluation tool for charter schools to know where they stand.
- 3 – Provide opportunities or resources for charter schools to share the successes with each other and with traditional public schools.

#### *Actual Responses*

“Dealing with poorly performing charter schools.”  
“Provide mentoring services for all schools, especially the struggling schools.”

“Share successful innovations to other charter schools and then other traditional schools.”

“Embrace new technology like blended learning/online learning.”

“Simple Clear Standards.”

“Create good data that people can use to better their schools or judge charter schools and prove that experiments either work or do not work.”

“Review charter agreements and if they are not what both parties want then the charters need to be tweaked to make sure they can be successful.”

“Strategic plan is the top priority. Give the board credibility and consistency. Will provide clarity and consistency to charter schools and others.”

“Continuing the work with standards, processes and procedures.”

“They need to know [what charter schools] they have. Take a look at who is already authorized.”

“Take a look at the number of authorized schools and about the satellite campus’ being authorized since they are less “innovative” and more associated with purely successful schools.”

“More authorizers should step up and not sure how the SCSB can get involved with authorizing schools. Help them be more comfortable.”

“Finalize the evaluation system and get its data out into the public and legislature.”

“Fight for more and more funding for charter schools.”

“Get charter schools a stronger voice at the table like they deserve.”

“Quality of each school is top priority. I am not interested in quantity as much as quality.”

“Approving and supporting new and innovative charter schools.”

“Having a system in place for accountability for charter schools.”

“Take care of distance learning issues with charter schools.”

“Find a way and develop a plan to close charter schools.”

“Identifying high quality schools and trying to get others to copy them, or allowing them to go out and copy them.”

“Finalize an objective tool to evaluate school performance. It also needs to be a technical support and help to the schools.”

“Get to know the schools and get to know the people involved.”

“Ensuring that charter schools that are authorized are performing according to their charter.”

“Watch the online charter schools closely.”

“Stay serious about schools that look like they are in trouble. Support the students by either moving the students elsewhere or helping the school succeed differently. Student focused.”

“Informing parents and governing boards of who they are and what they do.”

“Uniformity between district schools and charter schools.”

“Pushing for funding for the specialty programs like expeditionary learning and other special focus schools. Additional funding for those that do the extracurricular learning activities and hands on lab work, experiments, etc.”

“Revisit schools and see where the seats are allocated and how to prioritize where the seats should be allocated or expanded.”

“Take a greater stance in working with the legislature on funding.”

“Accountability and closing procedures.”

“Figure out online education process.”

**Question 12: Do you have any additional ideas or suggestions for improving Utah’s charter school system?**

*Summary Results*

The following is a list of additional comments made during the interview process. No action was taken to summarize the information.

### *Actual Responses*

“Write a strategic plan. Generate annual goals.”

“Charter school administration office support. Funding for mentoring programs will also help.”

“Defining the roles of everyone involved in this process: SBE, SCSB, Charter Schools, Etc.”

“I think the legislature needs to recognize that no matter what the system of school (traditional vs. charter) it takes money to run them. If you’re going to continue growing charter schools then you need a formula to grow the charter school office to do their role. Don’t assume that charter schools know and understand how to run all programs/laws appropriately in their schools with little district support.”

“I’d like to see a small committee of individuals made up of many different entities that talk about charter school issues.”

“Get a macro view of things and stop getting involved in specific school issues.”

“I want to see the relationship between traditional and charter schools improve.”

“I think if the State Charter School boards worked on relationships with districts, then they might have more districts willing to authorize charter schools.”

“Separate the technical support from the oversight so you can truly oversee them without the conflict of interest. We are not the parents, we are different.”

“Special Education is a real weakness for charter schools, because charter schools don’t have the necessary resources to take care of them the way a district school can.”

“There was hostility between districts and charter schools for a long time, but what is best for students is that the districts and charter schools have a very harmonious relationship in order to better serve students.”

“I really am happy with the system and I think it has done an amazing job educating my children. I am grateful for that. My child would have been completely lost in the traditional school system.”

“I would like to see some more legal protection for charter schools. Piracy type groups have a way of undermining schools and taking advantage of charter schools.”

“Charter schools are in a really good place and we still have work to do. The SCSB is incredible and I really enjoy working with them especially when we are not on the same side of the argument and we have to figure things out. I appreciate the culture of innovation and opinion changing.”