



# Executive Summary

PREPARING FOR DC CHARTER SCHOOL  
REVIEW & RENEWAL | A TOOLKIT |

# Toolkit Objectives

Help the boards and school leaders of DC charter schools answer:

- I. What are the charter review and renewal processes?
- II. Is our school on track to achieve its charter goals as agreed to in the charter agreement?
- III. What are our options if our school is not on track and is in danger of being closed?



# Important Notes:

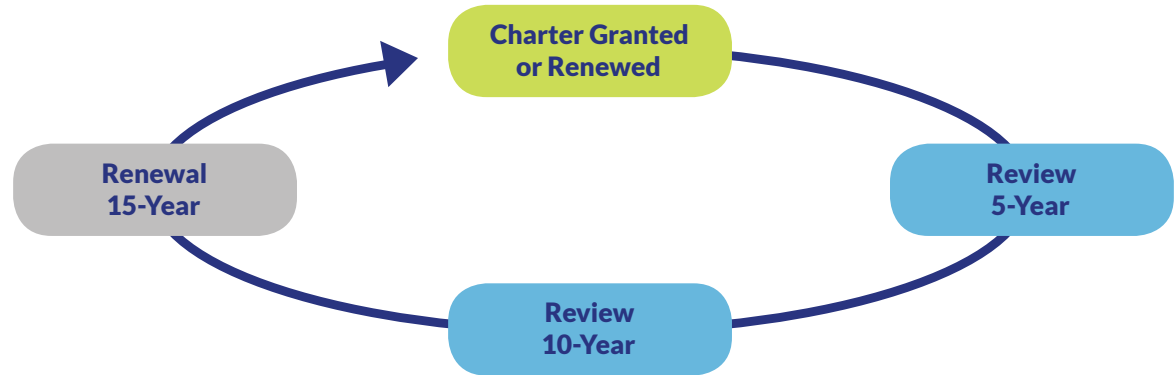
- **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.** This summary is just that—a high-level overview of the toolkit. While shorter, this presentation alone does not include enough detail, nuance, and guidance for boards to make important decisions. Use this as a starting point and read the full sections of the toolkit that are relevant to you.
- **THIS IS A ROADMAP...**
  - Created through a partnership between FOCUS and DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB), this should not be interpreted as official DC PCSB policy or guidance unless noted. Instead, this toolkit is meant to be a roadmap and discussion guide for how to approach these decisions, based on both FOCUS' and DC PCSB's experiences.
- **...FOCUSED ON PROGRESS TO GOALS.**
  - This toolkit focuses on monitoring progress to goals and academic achievement as a school looks toward review and renewal. Consult DC PCSB if you need detailed information on financial or compliance requirements.

# I. What Are the Charter Review and Renewal Processes?

The DC School Reform Act requires the DC PCSB to assess every school's academic performance, financial management, and legal compliance formally at least every five years.

DC PCSB does this through two different processes:

- Review at 5 and 10 years
- Renewal at 15 years



## Renewal

- Law does not grant DC PCSB discretion: DC PCSB “shall not” renew the charter if the school has not met its charter goals.
- Schools must apply for renewal.
- Schools must renegotiate charter agreement after successful renewal.

## Review

- Law grants DC PCSB Board discretion in its decisions: DC PCSB “may” revoke a school’s charter if it has failed to meet its charter goals.

(Note, at any time DC PCSB must revoke the charter for insolvency or a pattern of fiscal mismanagement)

# II. Is My School on Track to Achieve its Goals?

Boards and school leaders track progress toward charter goals each year to ensure that the school stays on track for successful charter continuance (review) and renewal by following these steps:

**STEP 1:** Identify your school's charter goals.

**STEP 2:** Measure progress toward goals every year.

**STEP 3:** Determine whether your school is on track to meet its goals.

# STEP 1. Identify your School's Charter Goals

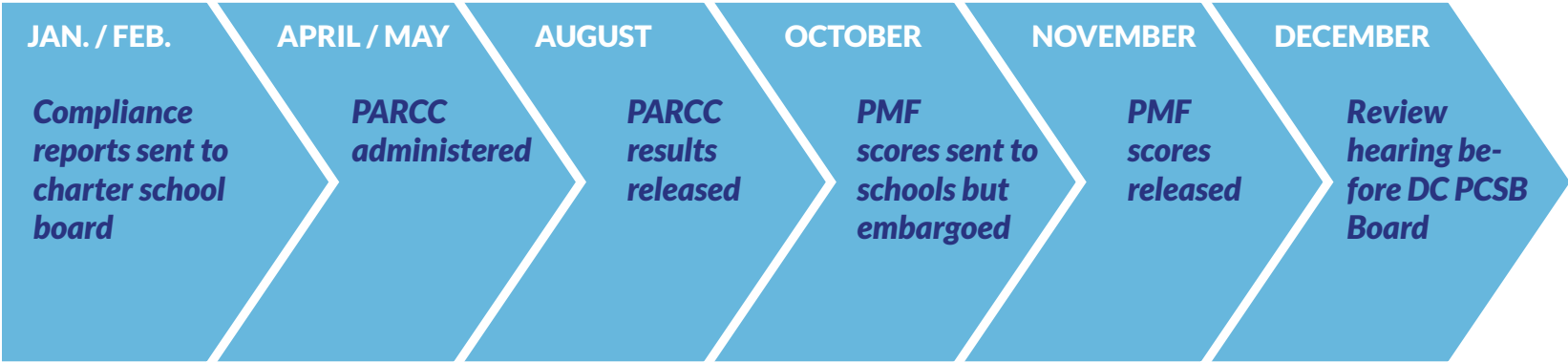
- Goals are written in the school's 15-year Charter Agreement
- There are three choices for developing goals
  - Adopt the PMF as goals for all or some campuses;
  - Adopt individualized (“mission-specific”) goals; or
  - Adopt the PMF as goals and supplement this with additional mission-specific goals.
- Note: Schools may amend their goals ahead of review or renewal if there are compelling reasons. There are time limits. See toolkit [page 14](#) for more details on charter goals.



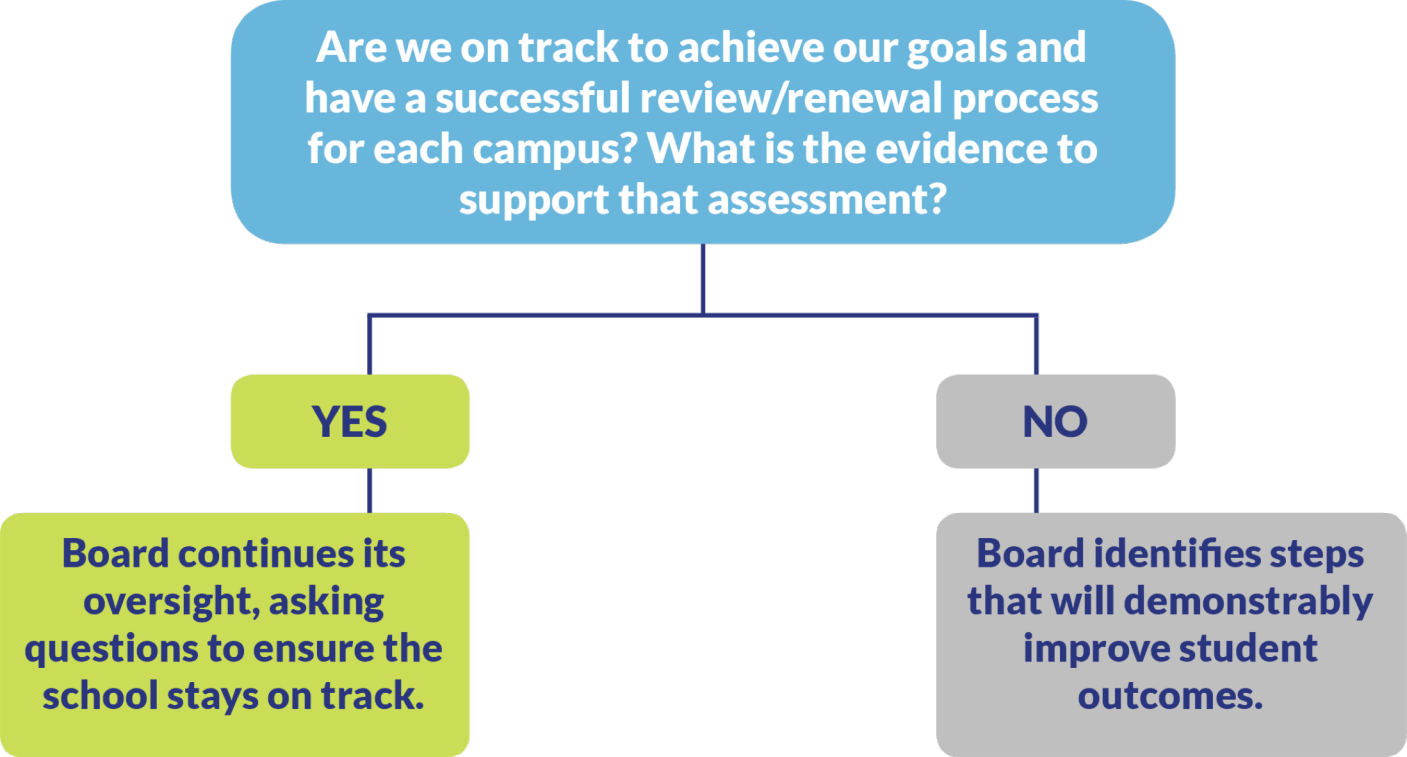
# STEP 2. Measure Progress Toward Goals Every Year

- Data is released over many months from many publicly available sources. (See sample timeline below.)
- School leaders create dashboards to help stakeholders – boards, staff, families—understand where the school stands.
- DC PCSB can provide insight into whether they believe you are meeting your goals – fully or partially. Just ask!
- DC PCSB may tell charter school boards if they are concerned about the school’s progress toward goals through “Board-to-Board” meetings. (Do not rely on this.)
- For more information on measuring progress toward goals, refer to [pages 20-24](#) of the toolkit.

## Sample Annual Timing of Data Release



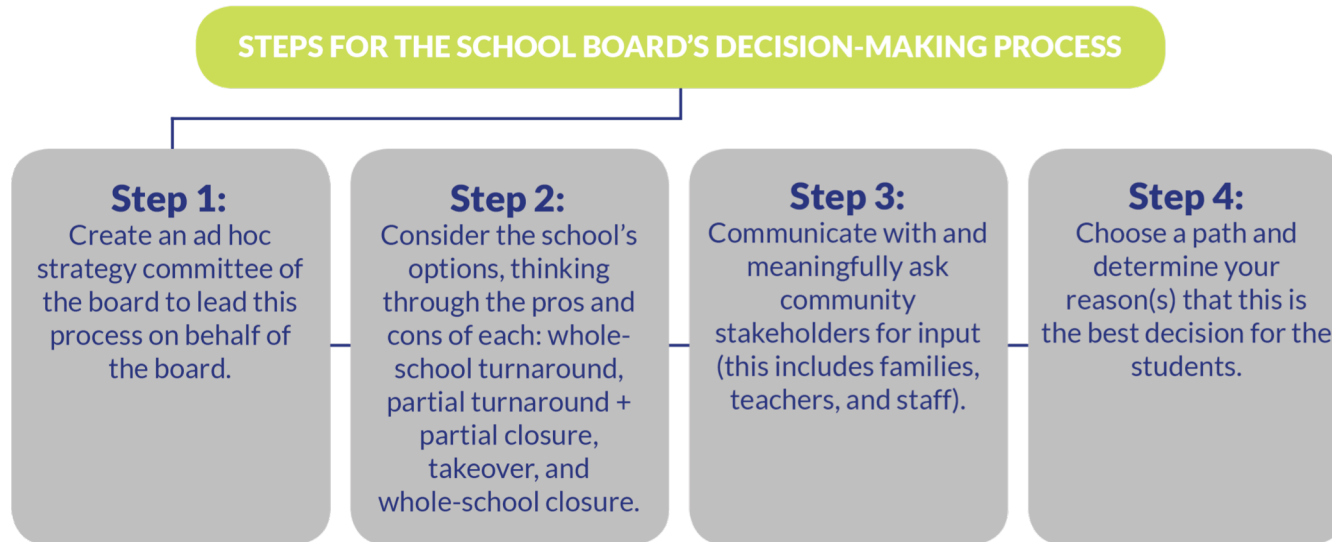
# STEP 3. Determine Whether Your School is on Track to Meet Its Goals



See [page 24-25](#) of toolkit for more detail.



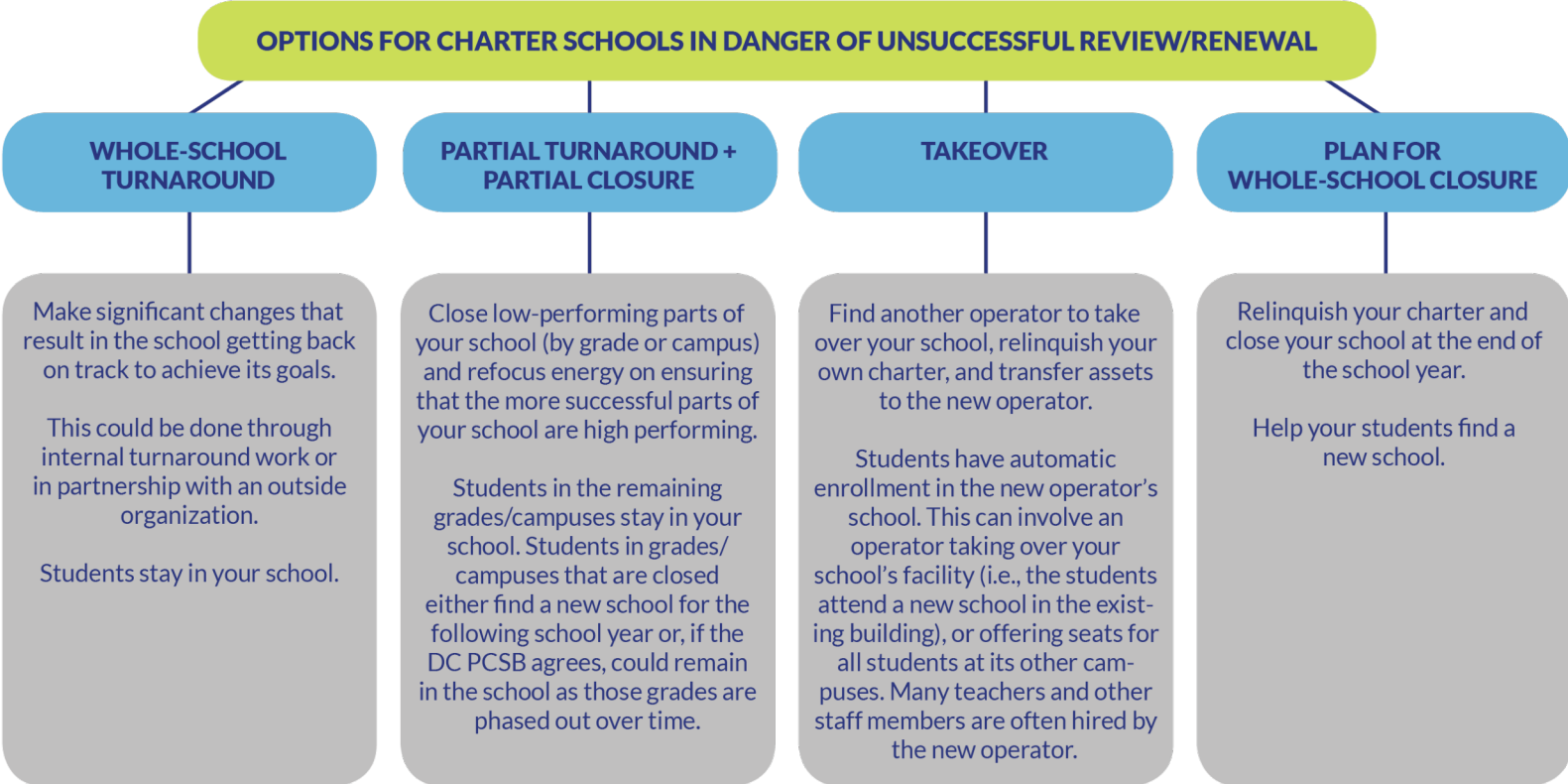
# III. What do we do if our school is not on track to meet our goals?



## Step 1: Create an ad hoc strategy committee of the board to lead the process:

- Ad Hoc Committee includes board chair, parent board member, and other board members who bring diverse skills and perspectives needed in this process.
- Write ad hoc committee job description. See toolkit [page 68](#) for a sample job description.

# Step 2: Explore Your Options



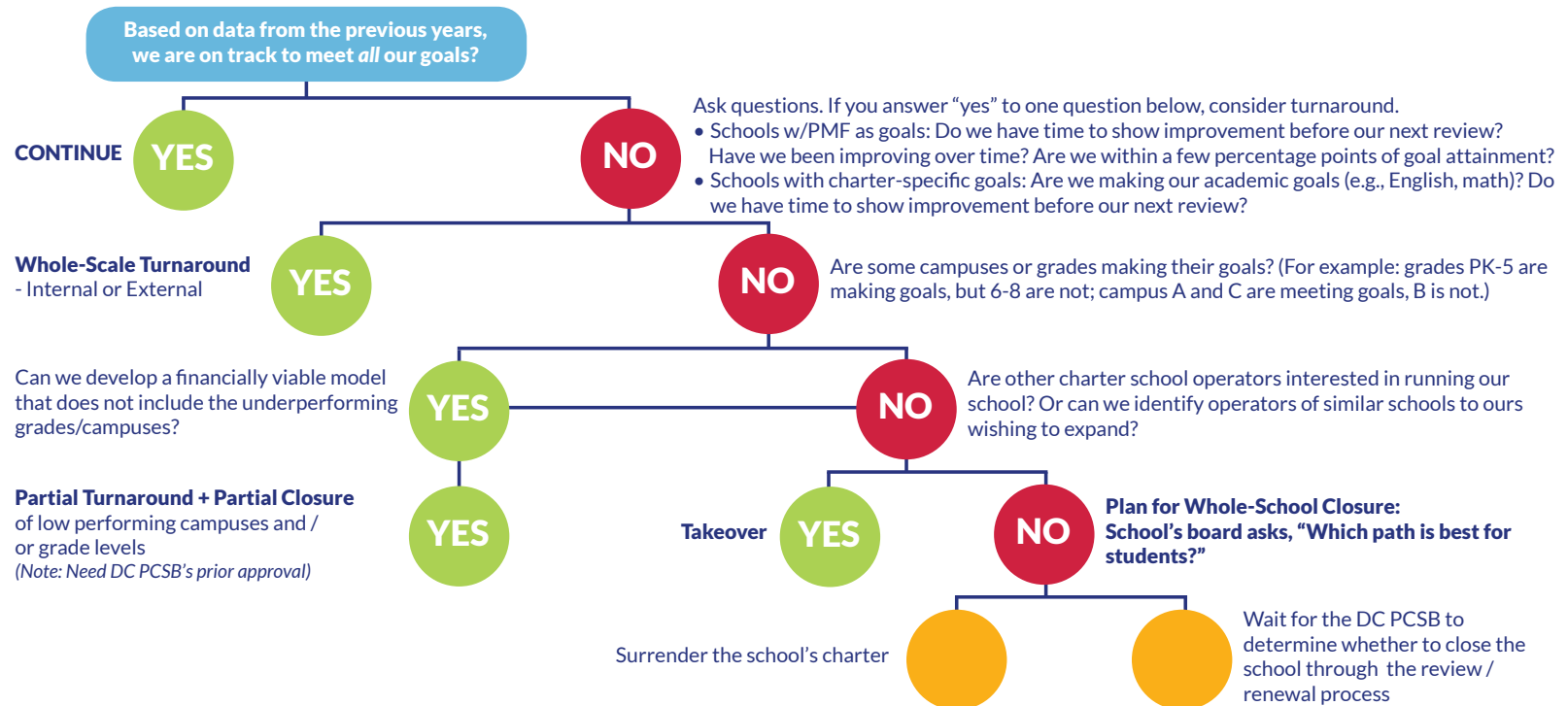
Note that the board may pursue a fifth option, which is to take no action and undergo the DC PCSB review / renewal process. The risk to this path is that if the DC PCSB Board votes to close your school, and you have no contingency plan or research in place, your students will pay the price.

Explore your options deeply by completing the self-study on [page 29-31](#) of the toolkit.

Once the board understands its options, have an honest conversation about how to move forward. Consider this decision tree to guide the conversation.

## Decision Tree Based on Progress Toward School Goals

By November of each year in a review cycle, the school’s board should vote on a plan.



## STEP 3. Communicate with and Meaningfully Ask Your Stakeholders for Input

- Build community-wide understanding of review/renewal and the school's chances for continuance during a review or renewal process.
- Solicit authentic, community-wide input early on how to best proceed. Listen to your community's insights or ideas about what is and is not working to ensure that the board is accurately addressing the right problems.
- Communicate to DC PCSB the community's opinions on how they think the school should proceed.
- Boards often hold these decision close because of destabilization fears. But this risks not having buy-in for the decision you make. Openness is usually the right path.

### Charter school stakeholders could include:

- Families and students
- Teachers and staff
- City Council members
- State Board of Education members
- Advisory Neighborhood Commission members
- School partners, such as feeder preschools or high schools
- Neighbors and neighborhood organizations
- Nonprofit organizations, partnership organizations, religious organizations
- DC agencies, businesses, landlords, or vendors nearby

# STEP 4. Choose a Path Forward

**WHOLE-SCHOOL  
TURNAROUND**

**PARTIAL  
TURNAROUND +  
PARTIAL CLOSURE**

**TAKEOVER**

**PLAN FOR  
WHOLE-SCHOOL  
CLOSURE**



# Whole-School Turnaround: Make significant changes that result in the school getting back on track to achieve its goals

Could include the following steps:

1. **Determine if you have time to turn around the whole school given your date of review/renewal.** Should initiate as soon as possible (Year 2 or 3) and no later than the beginning of Year 4. Turnarounds begun in year 5 are very risky; even if DC PCSB continues the school it would likely be with very strict conditions that could lead to school closure in future years.
2. **Consider your options in the context of review or renewal.** Remember, DC PCSB has discretion at review to continue the school if you do not meet your goals but have a credible turnaround underway. It does NOT have discretion at renewal. If you pursue turnaround for renewal, you will need strong confidence in your plan for reaching goals. If you miss hitting your goals at renewal, the DC PCSB has no choice but to close your school.
3. **Identify what is required to meet your goals** ie PMF scores, etc.
4. **Determine if the school needs internal or external turnaround** and execute. (See toolkit [page 38](#) for a summary process for selecting school turnaround options.)
5. **Oversee turnaround efforts closely**, monitoring data throughout the year and course correcting immediately when needed.
6. **Announce turnaround plan to the community and update on progress.**

For more information on whole-school turnaround, see toolkit [pages 37-43](#).

## **Partial Turnaround + Partial Closure: Board closes low-performing grades/campuses, reallocates resources to more successful parts of the school**

### **Steps for exploring partial turnaround + partial closure:**

- 1. Analyze your school's data and look at trends.** Are some grades/campuses performing well and others consistently underperforming? If yes, go to step 2.
- 2. Determine if partial turnaround + partial closure could improve your school's effort to pass review or be renewed.**
  - E.g.: If you have adopted the PMF as goals, what is your average PMF over time if you separate the elementary and middle school PMF scores? Does that increase your chances of being renewed?
- 3. Determine if there are other reasons weighing for or against this option.**
  - E.g.: If closing certain grades/campuses (and therefore lowering student enrollment) causes the school to be financially unsustainable, this might not be the right path forward.

Step continue on slide 16.

## Partial Turnaround + Partial Closure (*Continued*)

4. **Meet with DC PCSB staff to discuss options.** DC PCSB staff can help schools analyze data and brainstorm options.
5. **Communicate with stakeholders to provide updates and solicit input to inform the board's decision.**
6. **Vote on a path forward and execute your communications plan.** Take a charter school board vote in public and inform all stakeholders.
7. **Execute closure plan** for the targeted grades/campuses and **monitor progress** of remaining grades/campuses to ensure on track for review/renewal.
8. **Hold the school leader accountable for results.**
9. **Share progress with the school community.**

For more information on partial turnaround + partial closure, see toolkit [pages 44-47](#).



# Takeover:

## Board finds new operator to take over the school

Steps for exploring takeover may include:

- 1. Decide whether takeover is the right path for students.**
  - Solicit input from the community.
  - Charter school board votes to search for a new operator.
  - Board notifies DC PCSB about decision to relinquish the charter.
- 2. Design a process the board will use to choose an operator.**
  - Create board structures and calendars to manage this work.
- 3. Identify priorities and release a Request for Proposals (RFP).**
  - Identify school operator qualities and characteristics that are most important to your board, teachers and staff, students and community.
  - Share these qualities with your full community.
  - Write a RFP that asks questions about potential operators' alignment to priorities.
  - Post the RFP publicly according to procurement procedures.

Step continue on slide 18.

## Takeover (*Continued*)

4. **Evaluate prospective operators.**
  - Create a rubric and evaluate operator responses against key criteria.
  - See the prospective operator's schools/work in action through site visits.
  - Consult and communicate with DC PCSB.
5. **Charter school board votes on a new operator** at a public board meeting.
6. **Execute communications plans**, ensuring families, teachers and staff, elected officials, and all other stakeholders know the board's decision.
7. **Finalize asset acquisition agreement.**
8. **Current board continues to oversee the school** throughout the school year, and oversees the successful closure of the existing school.

For more information on takeover, see toolkit [pages 47-53](#).

# Make a Plan for Whole-School Closure: Board relinquishes its charter and closes the school at the end of the school year

1. **Make a decision to close the full school** through one of two paths.
  - Path A: The board of the school votes to relinquish the charter.
  - Path B: The DC PCSB board revokes the charter or does not renew the charter.
2. **Create and execute a communications plan** that updates the community on next steps.
3. **Read the DC PCSB and OSSE Closure Manuals** which outline all steps required to wind down the school and ensure students find a new school.
4. **Mitigate disruption.** Anticipate anxiety of school stakeholders and do what you can to proactively support staff and families.
5. **Confirm commitment from charter school board members** through February of the following year.

For more information on whole-school closure, see toolkit [pages 54-57](#).

# Conclusion

- As a reminder, read the full toolkit to get the essential information, tips, and supports you need to navigate this process. This summary is a beginning, but not enough alone.
- FOCUS and DC PCSB are available to support charter school board members in analyzing data, understanding its implications, and identifying the options for moving forward to ensure DC charter school students have access to the excellent education they deserve.



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