

# BETTER GOALS. MORE LEARNING.

Using Student (re)Engagement Levels to  
Create Meaningful Goals and Measures

A-GAME FOR ALL | VERSION 1





# BETTER GOALS. MORE LEARNING.

Using Student (re)Engagement Levels to  
Create Meaningful Goals and Measures

A-GAME FOR ALL | VERSION 1

# Table of Contents

<b>The Problem</b>	<b>3</b>
Measuring Quality	4
<b>The Solution</b>	<b>5</b>
Four Principles for Measuring Quality	6
Pilots	7
Creating Responsive Goals	8
Step 1: Partner with Schools	9
Step 2: Define Student (re)Engagement Phases	10
Step 3: Review Current Goals	14
Step 4: Create Responsive Goals	16
Step 5: Agree to Measure Quality	19
<b>Use the Best Available Data</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>School Site Reviews</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Professional Judgment</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Appendix A: Examples of Responsive Goals</b>	<b>24</b>

# The Problem

Imagine three siblings, a high school sophomore, a 7<sup>th</sup> grader, and an elementary student with special needs. The parents work multiple jobs and have very little time to spend on the family's educational needs. So Marcus, the sophomore, who delivers groceries to help supplement the family's income, takes on the responsibility of ensuring his siblings get their schooling. In the year of the pandemic, Marcus wakes early, logs his youngest sibling onto the school-provided Chromebook, and sits beside him. Sometimes he also logs into his own classes. But more often than not, he is needed to help his brother stay focused.

*All this responsibility makes it hard for Marcus, a 16-year-old, to engage fully in his own learning. He falls behind in multiple subjects and gets reprimanded by teachers for being late to class. He also loses touch with friends, as there are no sports, clubs, or other activities for the time being. And he worries that when regular school resumes, he might be ridiculed for not being at grade level. So, he picks up more hours at work and decides that school is not for him.*

According to [Missing in the Margins](#)<sup>1</sup> a report by Bellwether Education Partners, upwards of 3 million students like Marcus are missing from public schools since March 2020. And many of those missing students were already at risk for disengaging from school and falling behind their peers.

What programming will a school need to have in place to provide the social-emotional supports needed for Marcus (and the millions of students like him) to be successful?

**How will the school district, state, or charter authorizer know if the program is working and he is back on-track?**



---

<sup>1</sup> Missing in the Margins publication October 21, 2020 Estimating the scale of the covid-19 attendance crisis. By: Hailly T.N. Korman, Bonnie O'Keefe and Matt Repka



## Measuring Quality

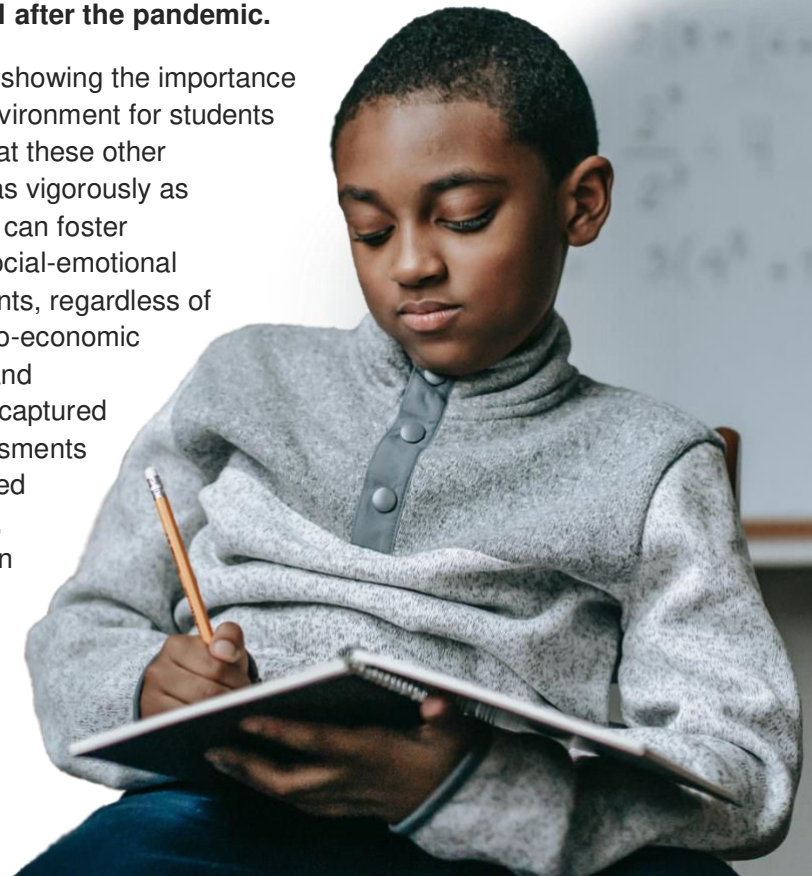
Two years prior to the pandemic of 2020, charter school authorizers had been searching for ways to measure quality in schools that primarily educate students who are at risk of disengaging. Through a nationally funded initiative called the A-GAME<sup>2</sup> (Advancing Great Authorizing and Modeling Excellence), 50 authorizers and authorizer associations have been working to answer the question: “When I walk through different school buildings, I can see differences in quality. How do I quantify them?”

A-GAME originally set out focusing exclusively on measuring the quality of alternative education campuses (or AECs). Members joined as they were frustrated by accountability systems that rely on traditional measures, because they don’t tell the whole story. Schools serving large numbers of disengaged and barely-engaged students typically receive low marks on state and authorizer performance frameworks -- even if they produce positive results for students documented through other measures.

**The results of this work can inform how authorizers, school districts, and states evaluate the quality of all schools during and after the pandemic.**

A-GAME embraces a growing body of research showing the importance of providing more than an academic learning environment for students at extraordinary risk. And -- most important -- that these other dimensions of school quality can be measured as vigorously as academic outcomes. Using these tools, schools can foster environments where students’ well-being and social-emotional learning is front and center, and where all students, regardless of ability, home language, race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, are nurtured, challenged academically, and validated. Outcomes of these programs are not captured in proficiency rates on state standardized assessments or through growth scores alone; they are captured through leading indicators such as engagement, grades, well-being surveys, and improvements in each of these measures over time.

Finally, and not without consequence of its own, when states suspended student assessments in the spring of 2020, traditional measures became suddenly unavailable for the current and short-term future. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers



---

<sup>2</sup> Advancing Great Authorizing and Modeling Excellence (A-GAME) is a three-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education through a Charter School Program Dissemination Grant for the explicit purpose of developing and disseminating resources and tools to help charter school authorizers in the oversight of alternative education campus charter schools. The project is co-directed by the National Charter Schools Institute (Institute) and Momentum Strategy & Research (Momentum). Details can be found on the National Charter Schools Institute website. [www.charterInstitute.org](http://www.charterInstitute.org)

(NACSA) recommended that state assessments should be administered in the spring of 2021, if possible, but that the results should not be used for accountability purposes. Given that the core of most state and authorizer accountability frameworks are growth and proficiency, and that these measures rely on continuous state assessment results, charter school authorizers must use other means to measure school quality for at least three years.

The A-GAME team views this as a call to action for charter school authorizers to lead the way by measuring school quality more expansively during the pandemic and after. It is an opportunity to re-envision accountability frameworks.

## The Solution

We know that it's rare to see amazing academic gains in a short period of time from students who have been fully or partially disengaged from school. So we believe in measuring what is being accomplished on several tracks at once. That requires creating **RESPONSIVE GOALS** that measure the entire school population, in both academic excellence and social-emotional well-being.

Setting responsive goals begins by identifying students' level of engagement within the school. Simply put, **(re)ENGAGEMENT PHASES** are distinct levels determined based on the student's previous engagement with school using verifiable data such as enrollment, attendance, discipline records, prior grades, and social-emotional survey results.

Honoring that some students have been disengaged from meaningful learning since March 2020, when schools across the country shuttered their doors, there has been a large national cry for differentiated instruction to address learning loss. Rather than lowering the percent of students expected to be proficient, which is the current process and which does not close gaps or hold schools accountable for all students, the A-GAME proposes creating separate metrics to measure the achievement and growth of students based on achievable targets. This approach ensures that schools get credit for engaging all students, regardless of where they start, and that schools are held accountable for seeing that all students remain engaged, demonstrate progress, and succeed.

Compared to fifteen years ago, when standardized testing and frameworks were mandated in law, today's understanding of data collection, analysis, and "data informed instruction" is far more sophisticated. Measuring school quality can involve much more than comparing state assessment scores and average daily attendance rates. A-GAME has identified the following principles to ensure that schools are measuring quality in a responsive manner and meeting the students where they are.







## Four Principles for Measuring Quality

### 1. **Start with the student and work with the school**

Systems for measuring quality should recognize student starting points and ensure that all students are included in the accountability metrics.

### 2. **Measure what gets done**

Any school that welcomes struggling students and gets them back on track should be recognized instead of penalized.

### 3. **Use best available data**

Meet standards and use national comparisons. Avoid relying on comparisons to local averages that simply show half the schools, by definition, underperforming.

### 4. **Tell the whole story**

Schools need reliable metrics for motivation, engagement, social-emotional well-being, and readiness for real-world work, in addition to valid measures of academic achievement and progress.

Our first two years of work has shown that this is more than theory; it's actionable. We are currently piloting development of responsive goals with ten charter authorizers and their schools that serve students who are at risk of disengaging. There are a mix of urban and suburban schools and one non-charter school.



## Pilots

Charter School Authorizers	Schools
Atlanta Public Schools	Purpose Built Schools
Colorado Charter Schools Institute	New Legacy
Delaware Department of Education	Positive Outcomes
Detroit Public Schools Community District	Pathways Academy
Los Angeles County Office of Education	Da Vinci RISE High North Valley Military
Missouri Charter Public School Commission	De LaSalle Learning Center
New York State Education Department	New Dawn Charter Schools New Ventures Charter School
Pillsbury United Communities	Minnesota Online High School
Riverside County Office of Education	Gateway Charter Leadership Military Academy
Thomas B. Fordham Foundation	Columbus Collegiate Academy Columbus Collegiate Academy: West Campus Dayton Leadership Academies Dayton Early College Academy DECA Prep KIPP Columbus Phoenix Community Learning Center ReGeneration Schools Bond Hill Sciotoville Community School United Preparatory Academy United Preparatory Academy - East
Hillsborough County Public Schools	Seminole Heights High School West University Charter High School

While the substance of each pilot is unique, they have one thing in common: creating measures that capture aspects of school quality we have heretofore only been able to see.

This resource guide is intended to help in measuring quality for all schools, especially those that have diverse populations and those seeking to avoid relying on state assessments as the sole marker of quality. If a school has a high population of “At-Risk” students or is designated as an alternative education campus, you may want to refer to “Measuring Quality, A Resource Guide for Authorizers and Alternative Schools.”<sup>3</sup>

We know that schools are too often identified as low-quality simply due to the population they serve. And right now, we also know there’s a temptation to suspend accountability altogether -- lowering standards and expectations in the absence of test data.

Instead, authorizers should adopt rigorous, attainable goals based on measures of the work that schools are doing to engage students, support their social-emotional well-being, and prepare them academically. It is the school’s responsibility to clearly articulate its programming and the desired impact, and the authorizer’s role to ensure that the accountability system measures the actual impact.

These “responsive goals,” as we call them, can and should be considered during high-stakes decision making in the same way that absolute achievement has been.

[Appendix A](#) contains examples of responsive goals by domain.

Through our A-GAME pilot work, we have identified the following steps to create responsive goals.

## Creating Responsive Goals

**Step 1:** Partner with Schools

**Step 2:** Define Student (re)Engagement Phases

**Step 3:** Review Current Goals

- a. Identify all currently used goals in the state and authorizer frameworks and charter contract.
- b. Define which goals are non-negotiable (or measurable if state assessment data is unavailable).
- c. Specify each goal’s intent--what is it meant to measure?
- d. Articulate what shortcoming the current goals have for the school (e.g. AEC population is a small portion of school population).

---

<sup>3</sup> Measuring Quality, A Resource Guide for Authorizers and Alternative Schools <https://nationalcharterschools.org/a-game-grant/documents-deliverables/>

#### **Step 4: Create Responsive Goals**

- a. Determine what success looks like for each goal by engagement phase.
- b. Gather and incorporate community input.
- c. Refine goal list,

#### **Step 5. Agree to Measure Quality**

Though the outlined steps appear to be linear, we've found that steps 2-4 can be iterative and/or intertwine with one another, depending on the school's model.

The sections below provide more detail on each step in the process.

### **Step 1: Partner with Schools**

Schools need to be “at the table” from the beginning, in developing a strong accountability system. It takes longer, and is sometimes messy, but having conversations with school leaders, students, teachers and families, will produce an accountability system with a shared understanding of quality. Being a little vulnerable and taking time to build trust help ensure that the authorizer is being responsive to the community it serves -- and helps the school tell their story.

State laws may limit the flexibility authorizers have to make high-stakes decisions with data outside the state' accountability system<sup>4</sup>. But if the authorizer is able to collaborate with schools in accountability planning, schools often report feeling validated.

---

4 Minding the Gap: How State Policies Can Create Conditions for Innovation in Alternative Education Accountability - <https://nationalcharterschools.org/a-game-grant/documents-deliverables/>



"As a community-based authorizer, we engage in open and transparent conversations with AECs in our portfolio to develop responsive goals. Coming to the table as learners allowed our schools to be more with us and went a long way toward building trust. This results in more meaningful goals that better match the support needed in AECs to help students learn, grow, and thrive, while at the same time building greater buy-in and understanding of accountability metrics for the schools we work with. Partnering with AECs has opened our eyes to strong accountability measures that we may not have thought of but get to the heart of what it takes to achieve outside the box results for vulnerable students.

**David Frank**

New York State Education Department  
Charter School Office

## Step 2: Define Student (re)Engagement Phases

School quality measures should recognize student starting points by identifying students' incoming academic skills and progress, life challenges, attitudes, social-emotional needs or well-being, and/or any other factor that may impact students' capacity to engage in learning. A-GAME refers to these distinct student groups as "(re)engagement phases" or "engagement levels."<sup>5</sup>

A number of factors, listed below greatly increase the likelihood that youth will disengage from school and fail to graduate on time, if at all. While the majority of students enrolled in alternative education campuses experience at least one of these circumstances, all schools serve some number of students with these experiences.

**We believe all schools should be given credit for how well they educate these students, as well as students who do not have such severe challenges, regardless of their race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, English learner status, or special education status.**

---

<sup>5</sup> The initial concept of (re) Engagement Phases was developed by Momentum Strategy & Research in collaboration with a variety of alternative education campuses, and refined further during the A-GAME pilot work.



## Characteristics of Students Likely to Disengage from School

- Students who have previously dropped out of school;
- High school students who are more than one year behind their same grade peers, based on the accumulation of credits required to graduate;
- Any student who is two or more years behind their same grade peers in more than one core subject area (such as English language arts and mathematics), based on valid and reliable academic assessments;
- Expelled students;
- Students who are or have been chronically absent, regardless of excused or unexcused absences (using the ESSA definition and including truant students)<sup>6</sup>;
- Students who have three or more avoidable enrollment occasions in a two-year period, such as when they switch schools in the middle of the year or between grades;
- Adjudicated youth (current or previous);  
Students who are in the foster care system or under supervision of the courts;
- Students experiencing homelessness<sup>7</sup> or housing instability;
- Students who have drug or alcohol abuse issues;
- Students who are pregnant and/or parenting; and/or
- Students who have experience with one or more of the following conditions that directly impact their ability to function in school:<sup>8</sup> trauma; mental health; behavior health.

[Box 1]

Schools may know about some of these issues when students first enroll. If not, they can measure a student's capacity to engage in school by analyzing student behavior within the first few weeks of school.

When determining student engagement phases, the authorizer takes the role of "external validation" and the school of "primary data collector." Here are examples of records and information that can be used to help determine the engagement level for students.

---

6 For simplicity, this category is intended to capture all types of absences, including out-of-school suspensions.

7 Using the McKinney Vento definition.

8 As with the chronic absenteeism category, the wording here is meant to consolidate a number of student circumstances, such as experiencing abuse or neglect, having an incarcerated parent or primary family member, experiencing the death of a parent or family member, as well as to provide flexibility for the school and their authorizer.

- **Attendance Records:** Available to authorizers are prior and first quarter attendance records, which can give a snapshot view of student engagement, especially during remote learning. Students who have missed 10% or more of the first month or quarter of school, would be considered “chronically absent” and disengaged.
- **Proficiency Level and Learning Loss:** Using a diagnostic assessment, schools often determine which students are in need of remediation or intervention. These results can help identify students who are far behind academically. For students returning from remote learning, measuring spring 2019 to current results can determine learning loss, or non-gains.
- **Referrals:** Internal records of incidents that result in a referral and some form of behavior intervention will identify students who are acting out and missing class time due to behavior.
- **Social-emotional Well-being Surveys:** A multitude of surveys have been developed to assess child and adolescent social-emotional skills development, motivation toward or engagement in school, as well as psycho-social adjustment. Surveys chosen should align with programming offered at the school, and someone with expertise in measurement should assist the school in identifying valid and reliable survey or observation instruments.
- **Experts -** To verify student characteristics that put them at risk of disengagement, it is advisable to hire an external consultant who can verify highly sensitive information and report back in aggregate to the authorizer, to protect the student’s rights under FERPA and HIPPA.

Once the school has determined the data and information that will be used to identify the students’ levels of engagement, it must then identify how students will qualify for each engagement phase. The number of engagement phases used by schools may range from three (most common thus far) to five, based largely on the schools’ observations of their students’ patterns over time, and the authorizer will need to agree that the school’s system will produce verifiable data.



The following descriptions were provided during the A-GAME's regional networking events as one example of students' engagement phases, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic:

- **Fully Engaged:** Attends regularly, is close to or at grade level, has few or no behavior incidents, shows relatively strong social-emotional well-being, and has few or no at-risk indicators.
- **At Risk of Disengaging:** Has spotty attendance but is not chronically absent, is not at grade level in one or more core subjects, has some behavioral referrals within the first month of school, has some indication of struggling social-emotionally based on the survey, or has one or more at-risk characteristics.
- **Disengaged:** Is chronically absent, is not at grade level in one or more core subjects, has behavioral referrals within the first month of school, is struggling social-emotionally based on the survey, or has multiple (or acute) characteristics in box 1.

With the onset of the coronavirus pandemic, it became evident that engagement phases would apply more broadly, in light of increased stress and anxiety affecting all students. Even robustly-engaged students have been pulled away from studies by isolation and economic uncertainty. Here is an example of COVID-related engagement phases.

- **Fully Engaged:** Attends at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  of their online sessions, completing  $\frac{3}{4}$  or more assignments, passing  $\frac{3}{4}$  or more competency-based assignments, and communicating with instructors and social-workers/engagement specialists on an as-needed basis.
- **At Risk of Disengaging:** Attends some online sessions, completing half or fewer of class assignments, and often misses scheduled communication with instructors and social workers/engagement specialists.
- **Disengaged:** Does not log into any classes. The school is unable to locate them despite multiple (documented) attempts to reach the student and the student's family and friends.

Schools are encouraged to tailor these concepts to their own circumstances. Here is a draft example of how De La Salle, a charter high school authorized by the Missouri Charter Public School Commission, has grouped students into (re)engagement phases through our pilot work together:

- **On-track** when first enrolled at school: These students are usually first-time freshmen, with some transfer students. All are within half a credit (or a semester's course) of being at grade level.
- **Off-track** when first enrolled at school: These students are transfer students from other high schools. They arrive at the school needing between 1-6 credits to be on-track.
- **Severely off-track:** These students either enroll needing 7 or more credits to be on-track and are older than 17, or enroll with external priorities that limit their ability to take a full-time course load. They may enroll in the self-paced program called Missouri Options, which allows for credit-recovery and flexible schedules.



A critical part of our work as authorizers is to build trusting relationships with charter school leaders. We are leaning into our relationships with schools more than ever before to better support staff, students, and families. By staying student focused, we are able to prioritize what is most important to our work.

**Corey Loomis**

Riverside County Office of Education

### Step 3: Review Current Goals

The first step is to determine which goals are non-negotiable because they are required by federal, state, or local law -- for example, the four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is still mandated by many states. Other non-negotiable goals may be a function of state standards or the school's specific mission, such as a certain math proficiency score required for a STEM-focused diploma.

Once determined which goals ARE negotiable, the authorizer and school should examine them closely to ensure clarity as to their purpose and their shortcomings. For students who have a history of full engagement, per the (re)engagement phase process and when state assessment data is available, there is no need to abandon traditional goals. They work well for this population. However, reviewing all current goals allows the school and authorizer to articulate exactly what they were meant to measure, who they measure well, and, more importantly, who they leave out.

Because most traditional goals are based on assessments that are administered once a year, traditional goals may only capture students who are enrolled for a full academic year and are at or close to grade level. And then they tend to measure students against a single "average" rather than a meaningful goal.

Alternatively, we may see traditional goals that look like this:

**At least 60% of all students will meet their expected growth norms on an externally validated assessment.**

**At least 60% of all 9th graders will be on track to graduate in four years.**

**At least 60% of all students will be proficient on the state assessment.**

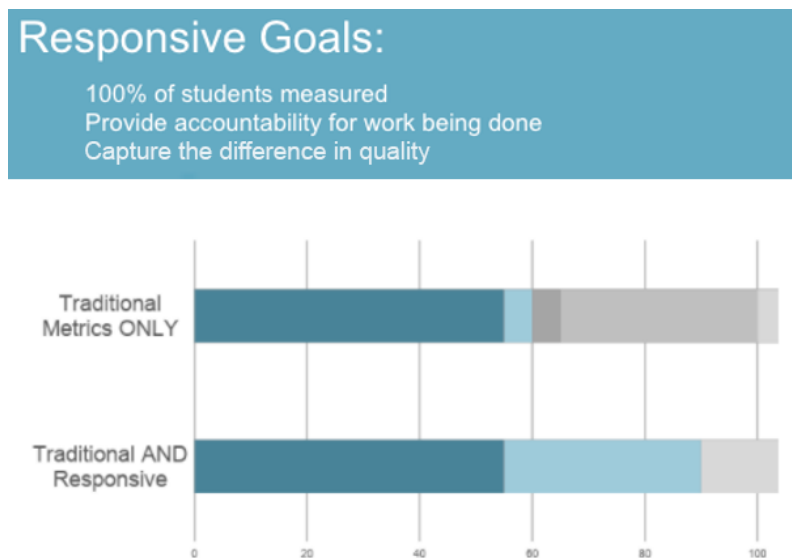
When goals are created like this, the assumption is that 40% of the students will not meet the goal. Why are we ok with that? What happens with the other 40%? How does this approach close the achievement gap and motivate schools to focus on all students? Rather than build an accountability system that assumes some students will not succeed, the A-GAME approach is to include these students in reasonable goals that are differentiated to measure gains and other leading indicators.



While not all students will meet the goal, 100% -- or as near to 100% as possible -- will be included in the accountability system's assumptions.

In Figure 1, the dark blue portion of each bar indicates traditional students and light blue reflects those who are at-risk of disengaging from school. The grey portion shows the proportion of students that are not captured by traditional accountability. When responsive goals are added to the accountability system (the bottom bar), we see that far more students are included in the accountability system, and have the potential to reflect their success.

**Figure 1. Illustration of how responsive goals capture more students than standard accountability goals.**



Using a third-party facilitator, such as the A-GAME leadership team, can help the two parties come to an understanding of a need for new goals and what they truly want to measure, as well as walk them through the process for how to do this well.



Our work with A-GAME was extraordinarily helpful. Naomi and the team facilitated several exercises that helped us reimagine our work with alternative high schools (and really all charter schools) through an equity driven lens. This step was critical to moving our work forward and provided tangible next steps to focus on with schools. The process brought great energy to the specific need for alternative accountability.

**Erin E. Anderson**

Osprey Wilds Environmental Learning  
Center

## Step 4: Create Responsive Goals

Once the authorizer and school agree that new goals are needed to capture all students, and understand what they truly want to measure, they can begin to develop goals that measure the school's success and quality. From the examples above, can we improve the percentage of students included in a school's accountability system by using other measures to measure the success of the remaining 40%?

Responsive goals measure all students based on where they are upon enrollment and the school's ability to catch students up as necessary. They are goals on a continuum and not binary cut scores with a "met" or "not met" Rating. Rather, they set a target at an achievable "floor" and a goal at an aspirational point, to emphasize continued improvement and avoid low expectations.

Our approach with responsive goals is to not add any new assessments or spend more on technology, but to focus on teaching and learning and to create ways of measuring internal assessments for validity and reliability. In essence, we flip the saying "what gets measured, gets done" to "what gets done, gets measured."

This requires authorizers and schools to think in specific, tangible terms about expected outcomes of programming intended to (re)engage students, close opportunity gaps, and support students on their academic and personal journeys. The approach is two-fold:

- Authorizers and schools develop growth goals that include leading indicators and quantify the progress and achievements made by students who are far below grade level and/or disengaged from school.
- Authorizing practices shift from only seeking "externally validated assessments" to also building systems to become "external validators" of school-administered assessments and data.

This second bullet is extremely important for authorizers to consider now, with state assessment data unavailable.

Within the process of setting responsive goals are a number of sub-steps: brainstorming new goals, arriving at a definition of success, gathering community input, and refining goals as needed.

### Brainstorm new goals

When we work with schools and authorizers, we start by learning what the school already does internally and brainstorming ways to create goals that measure the same outcome of the traditional



goal while honoring the student's previous trajectory. The array of (re)engagement phases within the school forms the basis for determining appropriate measures. These may include leading indicators, which show the progress on measures that have been shown to lead to a student reaching grade level standards.

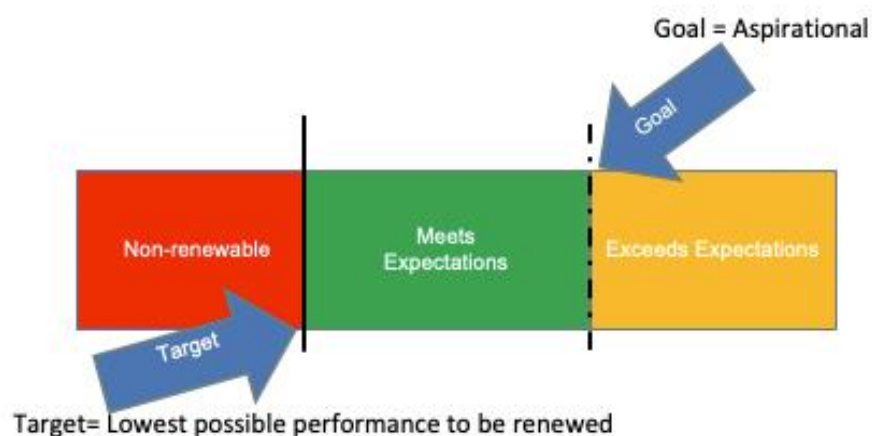
For example, to capture all students in a graduation rate, an authorizer and school may determine that a four-year graduation rate, or on-time graduation rate, is appropriate for fully engaged students, while an extended 5- or 6-year graduation rate is appropriate for students at-risk of disengaging but close to their cohort age and without external demands that would require them to participate in a shorter school day (e.g. work, parenting, counseling). A final group of severely over-aged and under-credited students may require a credit-recovery approach, which is best captured in the Leaver graduation rate, which captures all qualifying seniors (identified by credits not age) and their graduation success. One leading indicator that would show that students are indeed making progress toward graduating within the 5- or 6-year timeframe is an increase in the credit attainment rate over the rate the students maintained at their prior high school for new students. An increase in credit attainment shows that the school's programming is 1) engaging the students; and 2) helping students make steady progress toward the ultimate goal -- earning a standard diploma.

## Defining Success

Once new goals are identified, the authorizer and school determine what success looks like for each goal by engagement phase. In the graduation-rate case above, the goal might be expressed as a *credit earning rate*, not typically included in traditional frameworks, but useful in a school with diverse student trajectories toward college and career readiness. The goal would read: Students will earn sufficient credits toward graduation. Embedded in this overarching goal are three metrics, disaggregated by (re)engagement phase:

<b>On-track</b>	Student maintains on-track status (6 credits per year in a 24 credit high school)
<b>Off-track</b>	Student increases credit attainment over prior school by at least 1 credit per calendar year (allowing for credit recovery during summer session)
<b>Severely off-track</b>	Student increases credit attainment over prior school by at least 2 credits per calendar year (allowing for credit recovery during summer session)

**Figure 2.** In this example, we can change the target from 60% to 95%. As we have differentiated by (re)engagement level, it is reasonable to expect 95% of only those students who are on-track to earn 6 credits per year, and 95% of those off-track to earn up to 7 credits per year, and 95% of those students who are severely off-track to earn up to 8 credits per year (depending on their prior credit earning rate).



At the same time, a target can be set that is used for renewal decisions. This would be set at the previous target, 60% in this case. We have not lowered standards, but have added a goal much higher than the target, included all students in the measurement, and given the school credit for the work that it is doing to (re)engage and catch up students who fell off-track during the pandemic or for other reasons described above. ([See Appendix A for more examples of responsive goals](#)).



## Community Input

Once responsive goals have been drafted, the authorizer and school share the goals with the school community for input. This can be done in a number of ways but may include sharing it with teachers, students, and parents through focus groups.

## Refine the Goals

After receiving community input, the school and authorizer refine and finalize the goals as appropriate.



Our office greatly values the relationships we have established with the charter schools in our portfolio. As an authorizer, compliance monitoring is certainly an important part of the work, but catching schools doing something wrong is no fun. It's more enjoyable and inspiring to recognize schools for doing something innovative and effective. Students and families are better served when all stakeholders are pulling in the same direction.

**John Carwell**

Delaware Department of Education

## Step 5: Agree to Measure Quality

In this final step, all parties should feel confident in the goals that have been created for the school. Creating attainable responsive goals will mean the school gets proper credit for motivating students who are at risk of disengaging, which will result in students improving their performance, improving their social-emotional wellbeing, and ultimately completing high school.

In measuring quality, the authorizer's role may change from only accepting externally validated assessment data to also validating internally produced assessment data, such as transcripts and grade point averages (GPAs), end of course exams, and student work in portfolios or essays. Learning from IB and AP scoring, and recognizing that teaching is an honorable profession of skilled educators, inserting a validation process into a process already in place will not distract from learning but rather enhance and double-down on student outcomes, thus allowing the authorizer to measure quality.

# Use the Best Available Data

When setting any kind of goal, it's essential to use the best available data in establishing baselines and targets. Responsive goals that use student (re)engagement phases will often require historical data from current or prior schools -- and that is sometimes difficult to acquire. Over time, the data can be revisited and perhaps aggregated across schools to refine benchmarks based on students' incoming characteristics.

Authorizers with multiple schools or with access to multiple schools' data (such as a school district authorizer) should look across all schools' data to establish typical ranges for students' incoming characteristics-- academic, non-academic, and demographic. Similarly, they should analyze outcome data for all students in similar engagement phases, both as a whole and comparing schools with similar percentages of students in each engagement phase. Over time, this level of analysis will deepen understanding of student success among similarly defined engagement phases across all schools--allowing for truly student-centered systems for measuring quality.

As part of A-GAME, a Data Visualization site<sup>9</sup> was created to provide authorizers with some "typical" results for students attending AECs. The data provided was collected from state department of educational websites, as well as the National Center for Education Statistics website. For the first time, AECs are isolated from general education schools and their results are aggregated to provide a summary of typical (or average) alternative school performance. The results can be used to help charter authorizers and AECs set relevant performance standards for their alternative schools across the country. The data reported on this site will be updated and additional measures will be released on a regular basis. In addition, new features for reviewing the data based on different student and school characteristics will be added in the near future.

On track for completion by July 2021, a new site with all school data, not limited to AECs, will be created for public consumption. This data will allow for authorizers to use national benchmarks when considering what to use when creating goals.



The collaboration with the A-GAME and charter school leaders offers us an opportunity to refocus our thinking on how schools can best capture and reset goals to promote and highlight successful student outcomes based on data, experience, and personalization.

**Delia Castillo**

Los Angeles County Office of Education

---

<sup>9</sup> <https://nationalcharterschools.org/a-game-grant/data-visualizations/>

# School Site Reviews

Critical to the A-GAME approach are site reviews. Visiting schools provides insight when data alone cannot.



Take, for example, the photos above. Often you can “see” the difference in quality that traditional goals are often unable to capture. The schools represented on the left and the right may both have the same report card grade (often an “F” in an AEC or enrolling high percentages of previously disengaged students). It was this conundrum that initiated the need for the A-GAME. We believe that by using responsive goals that measure what the school does to meet the needs of all students, will further align what we see with the accountability metrics.

Most authorizers conduct periodic site reviews with their charter schools. During these reviews, authorizer staff and/or third-party reviewers visit the schools to gather qualitative evidence to support the quantitative data mentioned above. Investing resources in conducting periodic site reviews allows the authorizer to confirm whether the quantitative data is an accurate portrayal of the schools’ teaching, learning, and climate. This is exceptionally important for schools with disengaging or disengaged students, where performance on standard measures, such as four-year graduation rates or proficiency on state assessments, may not accurately portray the quality of instruction. Likewise, a relatively low attendance rate may or may not be indicative of a less than stellar school climate.

The primary purpose of site visits is to inform authorizing decisions. The decisions may be imminent (whether a school is ready to open or whether the charter should be revoked or renewed) or far-off (if

a visit is routinely undertaken in the second or third year of the charter). Visits are intended to gather evidence against a certain framework; review and analyze documentation that is better understood on site; explain the results of other data, such as test scores or attendance rates; assess the school's progress toward achievement of charter goals; and develop a profile that can be provided to the school, showing both its progress and its challenges. In essence, the site visit "holds up a mirror." Similarly, site visits assure that an authorizer has "seen for herself" when a failing school must be closed. In these cases, the site visit creates powerful, story-based evidence supporting the authorizer's decision.

When using data from a site visit to support a decision for closure or non-closure, the site visit must use protocols and rubrics for structure. Site visits can be scheduled on an annual calendar, announced well in advance, or unannounced. While most site visits are to the campus itself, a visit to the "home office" or other venue may be useful when a charter network is involved.

Although the principal value of site visits is to illuminate school performance and assist in authorizing decisions, they can also have direct benefits for authorizing practice. Taking part in a well-structured visit and/or analyzing reports from contracted site review teams can develop authorizers' analytic skills and sensitivity to critical information.

When compiling the different evidence together to make a decision about renewal, the authorizer has the responsibility to weigh all factors, highlight the strengths and weaknesses, and identify and reconcile areas of inconsistencies. This is a heavy responsibility, requiring significant confidence in the quality of the measures used and the validity of the data. This report provides several ways to improve the school and authorizer experience when measuring schools with at-risk of disengaging or disengaged students but recognizes that the authorizer's background knowledge and experience is a critical factor.







## Professional Judgment

Authorizers should include expert(s) that understand at risk of disengaging or disengaged students on their review team and, together, cultivate sound judgment about the quality of the schools.

When schools defy convention, they pose a particular challenge for authorizers who believe that approval and renewal decisions result from checking boxes. But as the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) found in its Quality Practice Project, the strongest authorizers rely, to a surprising extent, on professional judgment.<sup>10</sup>

*“Professional staff is not bound by protocols, templates, or other authorizing tools that limit their decision making. Staff has a clear belief and orientation that such tools assist, not dictate, decisions...”*

*Such authorizers,*

*“Create and use protocols and processes that allow for nuanced discussions and collect numerous qualitative and quantitative data to inform and justify decisions with evidence.”*

In the case of schools with disengaged students, that judgment can be tested because “good” work may have different contours from that found in standard schools. Extra care must be taken to assure that staff, consultants, and site visitors agree on the meaning and weight of metrics. Content experts should be enlisted to help guide the discussions.

---

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.qualitycharters.org/research/quality-practice-project/practices-that-matter/authorizer-culture-characteristics/>

## Appendix A: Examples of Responsive Goals

Responsive goals should tie directly to traditional measures in their purpose -- whether it is to measure achievement, growth, career and college readiness, climate, etc., but be designed with the immediate results in mind. Here are some examples taken from current work with authorizers and schools.

### Academic Proficiency

Traditional Measure: Proficiency rate on state standardized assessment.

Responsive Measure: Earning a C-average (2.0 GPA) or higher in core academic subjects for a short period of time (not cumulative) in school is a motivating factor that can result in better engagement and, ultimately, proficiency on state assessments and college entrance exams.

*While a C-average may seem low, a “C” is considered an average score and a passing grade. Expecting 95-100% of all students to earn a 2.0 is a goal that encompasses all students and is a realistic expectation. To guard against grade inflation or transcript tampering, authorizers will need to build in validation processes. Such processes may include audits, access to student work, and approval of school-wide scoring rubrics.*

Engagement Phase	Metric	Theory of Action
<b>Fully engaged</b>	Earn a C average or 2.0 for the year	Students fully engaged do not require interventions or support that would interfere with taking a full course load and remaining on track for matriculation to the next grade level.
<b>At risk of disengaging</b>	Earn a C average or 2.0 or better in 3 courses, completed in one semester	Students in this phase require some level of on-going academic intervention or social-emotional support. Creating a schedule that allows this work to occur will result in students receiving the support they need while also progressing academically.
<b>Disengaged</b>	Earn a C average or 2.0 or better in one course, completed in one semester	Students in this phase spend most of the day in activities to support long-term investment and engagement in school. Provides an opportunity to bond with an adult and peers, be successful in school and improve self-esteem, and frees up the schedule for counseling, wrap-around services, parenting, work-study, or an internship.

## Academic Growth

Traditional Measure: Growth rate on state standardized assessment using median growth percentile (MGP) or value add model.

Responsive Measure: Growth in grade level content as measured by student mastery of content through unit-level post-test (e.g., iReady, STAR, text-book provided unit exams, district or school-created benchmark exams).

*When using school-created or formative assessments, such as benchmarks, it is important that the school and authorizer agree on the use as an accountability measure in addition to instructional tools. It is equally important to decide on business rules that clearly outline how often students may take an assessment to demonstrate mastery and a process for verifying results.*

Engagement Phase	Metric	Theory of Action
<b>Fully engaged</b>	MGP of 50 or greater or Growth indicator on externally validated assessment equal to national norms	Students fully engaged would increase at the rate of national norms on state assessments or externally validated assessments.
<b>At risk of disengaging</b>	Growth on externally validated assessment score equal to national norms	Students are significantly behind in core subjects and may not show improvement from year-to-year on state assessments.
<b>Disengaged</b>	Growth between a pre- and post-test in English or math course	Students are significantly behind in core subjects and long assessments may not capture growth. Student may also either not show up for the tests, may not take tests seriously, and or may have serious anxiety.

## Student Motivation and Engagement

Traditional Measure: 60% of students will have an in-seat or daily attendance rate of 92% or greater.

Responsive Measure: All students will meet or exceed their attendance goal, based on incoming (or beginning of year) attendance rate.

Engagement Phase	Metric	Theory of Action
Fully engaged	All students beginning the year (or enrolling) as a “fully-engaged student” will achieve an attendance rate of at least 92% during each term enrolled	Fully engaged students do not struggle with as many external factors or have the skills to cope with challenges that keep them from attending school regularly.
At risk of disengaging	All students beginning the year (or enrolling) as an “at risk of disengagement” student will either achieve an attendance rate of 92% each term enrolled or improve their attendance rate by at least 15 percentage points over the prior term (or school, for new students)	Students in this phase have some level of buy-in and/or have seen some success but continue to require some level of on-going academic intervention or social-emotional support to get them to engage fully and attend more frequently.
Disengaged	All students beginning the year (or enrolling) as a “disengaged” student will either achieve an attendance rate of 92% each term enrolled or improve their attendance rate by at least 10 percentage points over the prior term (or school for new students)	Students in this phase have not yet bought into school as a safe, supportive place and/or have many external factors that interfere with making school a priority. The school’s priority for these students is to get them to come (engage) in smaller intervals and during that time provide opportunities to bond with an adult and peers, be successful in school and improve self-esteem, and gradually increase their time spent on campus (or online).

## College and Career Readiness

Traditional Measure: SAT/ACT score at college-ready levels

Responsive Measure: Complete and submit FAFSA form

*It is important that the measure is valid for the outcome. For example, we have relied on SAT and ACT to determine college readiness. While these scores predict academic achievement, which is important, they do not predict college enrollment or persistency. More aligned to college readiness, including enrollment and persistence, is successful completion of FAFSA forms, as students learn the real cost of college and whether they are eligible for financial aid, scholarships, and loans that can put college in reach.*

Engagement Phase	Metric	Theory of Action
Fully engaged	95% of the students complete their FAFSA	Students fully engaged do not require interventions or support and will complete the FAFSA which research shows will increase the student's chances of attending college.
At risk of disengaging	95% of -risk of disengaging students complete the FAFSA with some school assistance	Students in this phase require some level of on-going academic intervention or social-emotional support. Creating a schedule that allows this work to occur will result in students receiving the support they need to complete the FAFSA.
Disengaged	95% of disengaged students will complete the FAFSA with substantial help from the school	Students in this phase spend most of the day in activities to support long-term investment and engagement in school. The school provides an opportunity to bond with an adult and peers, be successful in school and improve self-esteem. They will receive the support they need to complete the FAFSA.

Traditional Measure: On-time Adjusted Cohort Graduation Rate (ACGR)

Responsive Measure: Extended ACGR or Lever rate.

*For students who enter a school already off-track from their cohort, trying to catch them up may not be the best approach both academically or social-emotionally. Instead, focusing students on their path to high school completion, and keeping them engaged, motivated, and supported should be recognized when determining quality measurements.*



Engagement Phase	Metric	Theory of Action
Fully engaged	95% of fully engaged students will graduate within 4 years of entering 9th grade for the first time (on time graduation rate)	Students fully engaged do not require interventions or support that would interfere with taking a full course load and remaining on-track for graduation.
At risk of disengaging	95% of at risk of disengaging students will graduate within 5, 6 or even 7 years of entering 9th grade for the first time (extended graduation rate)	Students in this phase require some level of on-going academic intervention or social-emotional support. Creating a schedule that allows this work to occur will result in students receiving the support they need while also progressing academically and graduate.
Disengaged	95% of disengaged students will graduate within one year of becoming eligible to be a senior based on credits. (Lever rate)	Students in this phase spend most of the day in activities to support long-term investment and engagement in school. The school provides an opportunity to bond with an adult and peers, be successful in school and improve self-esteem, and frees up schedule for counseling, wrap-around services, parenting, work-study, an internship and allows them to graduate.





WWW.CHARTERINSTITUTE.ORG/AGAME