

Promising Practices Research Proposal

Washington Charter Schools Association

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January 14, 2022

Introduction

Charter schools in Washington State started with an explicit mission to serve students and families who are often under-represented in high-performing schools. This has pushed charter schools in the state to “design on the margins” and build schools where students with disabilities and global majority families can thrive. Washington charter leaders have also embraced the idea that charter schools can offer true alternatives to traditional schools, and this has resulted in a range of learning models for students and families.

As some schools enter their sixth year of operation, the sector has sufficient data and experience to reflect on what works and why. COVID-19 has introduced additional opportunities to test how educational approaches are working for families. Nimble and naturally innovative, Washington’s charter schools have quickly adapted to new learning formats and student learning needs.

This is the perfect time to identify promising practices in Washington’s charter sector and share those out with charter and traditional school leaders, national charter organizations, and advocates. But while most research asks researchers to select what is “promising” in a school site, our research team looks forward to working with selected school leaders to identify what they consider to be best practices in their schools and share how those have been implemented.

Our research team is well-versed in the Washington charter sector and has already spent four years working with charter schools, the Washington Charter Association (WA Charters), and state-wide charter support organizations. Our work in the sector dates back to 2017 when we started working with Washington charter schools as researchers at the Center on Reinventing Public Education. Our first report, [*Are Washington Charter Public Schools Serving Students with Disabilities?*](#) helped shape the narrative that charter schools in Washington were serving as many, if not more, students with disabilities than their neighboring district. We worked side-by-side with charter schools in 2020 to identify promising practices in remote instruction as charter schools quickly pivoted to ensure continuity of instruction at the onset of the pandemic. We worked with leaders so they could share their own findings through webinars with charter and district leaders across the state. Using exploratory interviews with charter leaders opening new schools, we identified [some ways](#) they were problem-solving in the midst of the pandemic. Later in 2020, we talked with charter leaders to understand why families of students with disabilities [were enrolling](#) in charter schools at higher rates during the pandemic. Through interviews and

extensive input from schools and WA Charters, we selected key promising practices and shared those with a national audience in the report [*Promising Practices Drive Progress: Closing Learning Gaps for Students with Disabilities.*](#)

To maximize the reach of our research, our team has created products that are accessible and engaging. We created data visualizations that tell the story of our research, used language that simplifies complex policies, and engaged with audiences at conferences, webinars, and briefings. In addition to charter school leaders and WA Charters, we also have relationships with the Washington State Charter School Commission, Education Service Districts, leaders of traditional public school districts, the Rural Alliance, and the local philanthropic community. We believe we have substantial trust and credibility within the Washington charter school community to support this work.

In addition to our deep experience in Washington State, our research team has conducted research into charter school policies, family experience with school choice, social-emotional well-being, post-secondary transitions, students with disabilities, school accountability, and resource allocation. In addition, our women-led research team is made up of former teachers who are familiar with schools and within-classroom strategies for driving academic improvement. We feel confident that whatever promising practices schools identify, our research team can draw on our expertise and that of content-specific experts in our network. As researchers, we each have over five years of research experience. Our team has expertise in qualitative and quantitative research methods and has led multi-year research and evaluation projects. Our broad knowledge of educational topics, combined with our research expertise and local relationships, places us in an excellent position to facilitate research on a range of topics, depending on the interests and needs of our selected school sites.

Our Approach

We propose a study to research practices that two schools are implementing to meet the academic and/or social-emotional needs of their students. Our proposed research will be informed by the Washington state context and the concerns and perspectives of school leaders, WA Charters, and local communities. Our research approach will account for the fact that practices take time to be fully implemented and are likely to undergo waves of revision. As a result, we are committed to being responsive and nimble throughout the project.

To guide our research, we will use the framework developed by WestEd in [Identifying Promising Practices in Charter Schools: A Framework for an Evidence-Based Approach](#) to help us identify, research, and share promising practices in Washington charter schools. We will work in close partnership with school sites to identify practices that school leaders believe are the drivers of their success. The research team will collect data about the implementation of the identified practices, the contexts in which they are implemented, and their intermediate outcomes for students and the school. As outlined in the framework (Exhibit 1), we will pivot to study new practices if the data do not show positive results.

Exhibit 1. Evidence-based Approach to Identifying Promising Practices



Source: [Identifying Promising Practices in Charter Schools: A Framework for an Evidence-Based Approach](#) WestEd (2019)

We will work closely with practitioners to identify how the identified practices support student learning and/or well-being and to tell their implementation story in a way that is relevant and compelling to practitioners, policy makers, and community members. During our analysis and reporting, we plan to use [guidance](#) from the Center for Universal Education (CUE) at Brookings for scaling and replicating education initiatives. Their [Scaling Strategy Worksheet](#) provides a step-by-step process we will use to identify how leaders' experience can guide other schools. The [Institutional Tracker](#) is an assessment tool that we will use in discussions with leaders about scaling their own practice within their network or school and can help frame how we provide recommendations in our final reports.

Importantly, we will use our work with school sites to build internal capacity to maintain cycles of inquiry for leaders, teachers, and possibly family members. We will develop capacity-building goals with leaders in the selected school sites, which will guide how we design data collection

tools and engage with school staff and community members during analysis and reporting. We want to use our partnership with school sites to develop inquiry skills that schools and community members can continue after our research concludes, which is even more critical with the learning disruptions that have occurred from the pandemic.

We propose a three-phase process, summarized in the table below:

Three-Phase Research process

Phase	Overview
<i>Phase 1: Design</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review and refine our research questions & timeline with WA Charters ● Conduct an assessment of the state’s charter sector ● Work with WA Charters and school leaders to identify project sites
<i>Phase 2: Fieldwork</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with selected schools to identify promising practices ● Collect qualitative and quantitative data multiple times a year ● Report quarterly interim findings to stakeholder groups and WA Charters
<i>Phase 3: Analysis & Dissemination</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work closely with stakeholder groups, WA Charters, and a panel of charter school experts to identify key insights ● Present at conferences and produce two to four reports ● Prepare school sites and WA Charters for on-going data collection and analysis

Phase 1: Design

Project Preparation & School Selection

In Phase 1, we will start by reviewing our proposed project timeline and strategy with WA Charters and making adjustments as needed. The research team will then conduct an assessment of Washington’s charter schools and identify the two schools that will be the focus of our study.

To assess the state of Washington’s charter sector, our research team will conduct exploratory interviews with state organizations and sector leaders to identify sector-wide concerns and interests. We will supplement this with school outcomes and enrollment data to make sure we have a firm understanding of the relative strengths and weaknesses of the state’s charter schools. We will round out our analysis with a review of national reports and relevant media coverage.

We will work closely with WA Charters to identify one to two school sites that have the capacity to accommodate onsite research. During this phase, we will conduct exploratory interviews with

a few potential school candidates. We will be looking for schools that are interested in a multi-year research partnership and have the capacity to engage deeply with the research team. We propose working with WA Charters to identify a set of criteria to guide final site selection. Once we have selected the two sites, we will identify existing data collected by schools and conduct an assessment of the school's structure.

In Phase 1, we will also collaborate with the school leader at each site to develop a stakeholder group. The stakeholder group will meet bi-annually with our research team over the course of the study to provide feedback as research progresses. This group will ideally consist of at least one school leader, two teachers, two non-teaching staff members (e.g. social worker or data specialist), two students, two family members, and two community members. This stakeholder group will give feedback on the selection of the promising practice(s), data collection processes, and our analysis. In addition to meeting with the stakeholder group twice per year, researchers will also meet regularly with school leaders.

Phase 2: Fieldwork

Identifying and Studying Promising Practices

We will use the data gathered in Phase 1 to design a study at each of the two school sites with school leaders and stakeholder groups. We propose a five-step process:

1. *Identifying the promising practice(s)*. Following an assessment of the Washington charter school landscape and school selection, we will work with the identified school leaders, stakeholder groups, and WA Charters to identify promising practices. We will start by developing selection criteria based on [WestEd's framework](#) for identifying promising practices in charter schools. We will then meet with each school leader to identify what they consider to be three key promising practices in their school. We will present those three practices to the school stakeholder group for consideration and discussion, and then select the final one to two practices in consultation with the school leader and WA Charters.
2. *Logic model*. We will work with school sites to develop a logic model that illuminates schools' promising practice(s) and anchors it in the lifecycle of the school's approach. We will build a draft logic model for each promising practice identified by the school site. We will draft the logic model based on initial conversations with school leaders to map how the school understands the implementation and impact of their promising practice(s). The research team will use the finalized logic model to work with school leaders to identify research questions.

3. *Comprehensive data collection.* Building off of our development of the logic model, we will identify how the promising practice is implemented and what is needed for it to be effective. In doing so, we will consider the following:
 - Components of the promising practice. Using the logic model, we will identify the key components of each promising practice. These components may include school leadership, staffing, funding, curriculum, school systems and policies, community involvement, and/or the school's local context. Some components may be necessary resources for implementing the practice (inputs), while other components may come about due to the practice (outputs).
 - Quantitative and qualitative data. Following our analysis of these components, we will determine the optimal type of data collection. To minimize the burden on schools during data collection, we will focus on data already collected during regular school activities (registration, existing parent surveys, or state testing). We will primarily use secondary data related to student outcomes, but we may also request enrollment or fiscal data. Depending on the practice and the school's appetite, we may collect new quantitative data using surveys. Qualitative data may include classroom observations, review of curriculum and school documents, interviews, or focus groups to understand implementation and perceived impact. We are committed to ensuring that all of our data collection instruments, particularly surveys and observation tools, are vetted by individuals with diverse backgrounds to ensure we are mitigating bias during data collection.

Once we have identified the promising practice and optimal data collection methods, we will be able to determine whether we need to submit an application to an independent Internal Review Board (IRB). Typically, IRB requests are needed only when collecting data from minors.

4. *Informative analysis.* Our analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data will first focus on what they tell us about implementation in that school. We will present our data to school leaders and stakeholder groups to make sense of the findings together. Once we have determined that the practice is successful, we will analyze our data with an eye toward replication and scale using the CUE [guidance](#). We will use our analysis to elucidate not just how these specific schools implement their practice, but what charter schools in Washington and other states can learn from these schools' experiences. We will complete analysis after each cycle of data collection in the fall, winter, and spring. Our first year analysis will look across the 2022-23 year, while the final analysis will look across the two study years (2022-2024).
5. *Iterative feedback loop.* To ensure that our research informs how schools continue to improve their practice and aligns with stakeholder perception of success, we will meet

quarterly with WA Charters, regularly with the school leader, and biannually with the school-based stakeholder group. One of the stakeholder group meetings will occur before school starts in the summer of 2022 and 2023 and then following data collection in the winter of each year. These meetings will be opportunities for researchers and the school team to review the logic model together, for the research team to relay findings, and for school stakeholders to offer suggestions and insights. These meetings will also give us the opportunity to support schools as they improve their existing data collection routines and build new ones.

If preliminary data suggest that the promising practice is not resulting in desired outcomes, we will work with school leaders to identify a new promising practice and repeat the steps identified here. If that is the case, we believe that the process will still have been informative for school leaders and the stakeholder group because it will have helped build internal capacity to conduct inquiry and data collection routines.

Phase 3: Analysis & Dissemination

Making sense of our findings & public reporting

As noted in Phase 2, we will review emerging findings with WA Charters, school leaders, and school stakeholder groups. We will also conduct a formal briefing at the end of the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school years with a panel of national charter school experts to determine which findings are most applicable to the national charter school landscape. Some of these experts may include Kareega Rausch from the National Association of Charter School Authorizer, Lauren Morando Rhim from the Center for Learner Equity, or Sonia Park at the Diverse Charter Schools Coalition.

As analysis unfolds, we will look for opportunities to publish op-eds and present interim findings to practitioners and policy makers. Once data collection is complete in early spring 2024, we will develop two to four briefs each focused on a specific promising practice. These practitioner-focused briefs will be aimed at charter and district school leaders, CMO/district leaders, and local and national charter organizations. Additionally, we will write an Executive Summary that synthesizes our findings from the project. The Executive Summary will be aimed at policy makers, philanthropic organizations, and advocacy organizations and will focus on what this audience can do to create an environment to support the identified promising practices. We will also consider writing scholarly versions of our findings for submission to the Journal of School Choice and other academic outlets.

We will use our own contacts to disseminate our findings. These include contacts at *Seattle Times* and at national organizations like National Alliance for Charter Schools, National Association of Charter School Authorizers, state charter associations, and PIE. We also propose

contracting with a communications professional who will help us place our work in national media outlets and trade publications.

The following are possible methods of disseminating our findings from this research:

1. Written publications: The 74, CRPE, Phi Delta Kappa (trade publications), Journal of School Choice (academic journal)
2. Conference presentations (national and local): National Alliance for Charter Schools Conference, WA Charters Conference, CCSA, NACSA
3. Internal briefings: Washington charter schools, WA Charters, the Washington Charter School Commission, and local funders

Project Timeline

	Activity	Timeline
<i>Phase 1</i>	Review project proposal with WA Charters	Winter 2022
	Conduct assessment of the WA charter sector	March 2022
	Identify participating schools	April 2022
	Create stakeholder group and, identify existing data collection structures	May 2022
	Identify promising practice and vet with stakeholder group. Create promising practice logic model.	May to June, 2022
<i>Phase 2</i>	Develop data collection instruments	June to Sept 2022 & 2023
	Fall stakeholder group meeting	August/ September 2022 & September 2023
	Fall data collection: 2022 & 2023	Aug-Nov 2022 & 2023
	Briefing with stakeholder groups and WA Charters	Dec 2022 & 2023
	Spring data collection: 2023 & 2024	Jan-May 2023 Jan-Feb 2024
	Annual briefing with stakeholder groups, WA Charters, other WA specific stakeholders, and panel of national charter school experts	June 2023 March 2024
<i>Phase 3</i>	Proposal for school sites' ongoing data collection routines	May 2024

	Promising Practice Briefs (2-4)	June 2024
	Executive Summary	June 2024

Project Deliverables

Deliverables	Intended Audience	Potential Outlets
Regular meetings and briefings	- Bi-annual briefings with stakeholder groups - Quarterly briefings with CSP director - Regular meetings with school site leaders (TBD)	NA
Reports about the promising practices (2-4)	Charter schools leaders, district leaders, CMO leaders	Phi Delta Kappa EdWeek Conference presentation Academic journal(s) WA Charters website
Executive Summary	Policy makers, philanthropic organizations, and advocacy organizations	The 74 EdNext

About the Research Team

Dr. Sivan Tuchman and Georgia Heyward will be co-leading research and project management. They are experienced education researchers who bring expertise in quantitative and qualitative research methods, program evaluation, survey design, interviewing, and writing. Both have led multi-year, mixed methods projects and have extensive research experience with charter schools. Our two-person, woman-led research team offers a range of content expertise in areas that include Special Education, school leadership, social-emotional learning, multilingual learners, post-secondary pathways, and family experience of school choice.

Dr. Tuchman and Ms. Heyward worked together for four years as researchers at the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE). During that time, they collaborated closely with WA Charters, charter school leaders, and the Washington State Charter School Commission to study [special education](#) in Washington charter schools, [identify best practices](#) when serving vulnerable students, track [charter school responses](#) to COVID-19, and analyze [changing enrollment patterns](#).

They interviewed school leaders, teachers, families, and ecosystem experts and in the process developed deep relationships with schools and state-wide charter support organizations. In several of their reports, they used an exploratory research design to identify and report promising practices identified by school leaders. They also have experience sharing promising practices with charter leaders and traditional public school leaders. Their research work at CRPE has been published on CRPE's *The Lens*, in academic journals that include the *Journal of School Choice* and the *Peabody Journal of Education*, and in media outlets such as *The 74* and *Seattle Times*.

Dr. Tuchman and Ms. Heyward previously resided in Washington State but are currently living in California and Virginia. Georgia Heyward maintains a secondary residence in Washington, and both are committed to traveling to the state to conduct research. Their budget reflects a reduced hourly rate to accommodate additional travel costs.

Sivan Tuchman, PhD

Dr. Sivan Tuchman is an education consultant focused on school choice and special education. Sivan completed her PhD in education policy at the University of Arkansas where she researched policies affecting students with disabilities. Her dissertation was about how various policies affect the identification of students for special education. Over the last five years, Sivan has led large qualitative studies of charter schools across the country with a focus on those related to students with disabilities and school choice. She has also led projects related to charter school accountability and school redesign. As a consultant, her recent clients include the SUNY Charter School Institute, ASK Academy, SRI, Edunomics Lab, and Luminary Labs. Sivan also spent eight years teaching special education in private, charter, and traditional public schools, as well as coaching general education teachers to support students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Sivan holds a PhD in Education Policy from the University of Arkansas Department of Education Reform, a BA in Sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, and holds a California Educational Specialist credential in mild/moderate disabilities.

Georgia Heyward, M.Ed.

Georgia Heyward is a researcher and policy analyst who has worked in education research for six years. Her work has focused on the implementation of innovative initiatives at the state, district, and school level. She was a senior research analyst at the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, where she led multi-year mixed methods and qualitative research projects focused on family experience of school choice, the implementation of district-wide school choice reforms, Washington charter schools, career pathways, and post-secondary transitions. She has also been a Research Fellow at Georgetown University's Edunomic Lab, where she conducts research on resource allocation strategies at the district and state level. On contract, she has been leading the design, implementation, and evaluation of a social-emotional training program for adolescents and the caregivers of adolescents. Prior to working in education research, she was a teacher and school administrator for ten years. She

started her career as a bilingual teacher through the New York City Teaching Fellows and holds a New York State Professional Certificate in Elementary Education. She then worked at a secondary school for five years, giving her teaching experience across the K-12 continuum. Georgia Heyward has an M.Ed. in Education Policy from the University of Washington, a Certificate in Strategic Data Management from Harvard University, and a B.A. in Sociology from Evergreen State College.

Budget

This is an estimated budget. The final budget will be based on the research design for each site.

Estimated Project Budget

	Cost Breakdown	Total Cost
Researcher labor	\$140/hour 20 hours/month each	\$162,400
Travel to and within WA (8 trips, 3 days each)	Sivan: \$9,000 Georgia: \$15,000	\$24,000
Communications	Dissemination support: \$3,000 Copy editing: \$1,600	\$4,600
Transcription	\$75/hour (\$1.25/min) 30 hour/site	\$4,500
Interview & document translation	\$100/hour	\$1,000
Survey software	\$25/month	\$300
Interview compensation	\$15/interview 30 interviews	\$450
IRB review (if necessary)	\$1000	\$1,000
		Total: \$198,250