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Issue 1 | 2021



Utah's Charter Schools:

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BOARD CHAIR

Message



BY ANYA YEAGER, BOARD CHAIR, UAPCS

Dear Charter Colleagues,

What a crazy year it's been! In the best of times, being a charter school leader can be demanding, but COVID has presented a whole new layer of difficulty to our roles and responsibilities. From figuring out the dynamics of social distancing kindergarteners to teaching online and maintaining a connection with employees and families, it has been challenging – to say the least!

Nonetheless, it has also been incredibly inspiring to see how our schools and team members have risen to the

occasion. We have all learned new skills and been forced to think outside the box. As charter school people, we are great at that. We have always been innovators and thrive on creativity. Congratulations on not just surviving, but thriving, and giving our charter students and families an amazing experience. Your hard work does not go unnoticed and we bow our hats to you. 🎩

Warmly,
Anya Yeager
Board Chair, UAPCS





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— Dr. Joe Heywood, USOE Specialist

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— Rick Veasey, Lakeview Academy Director

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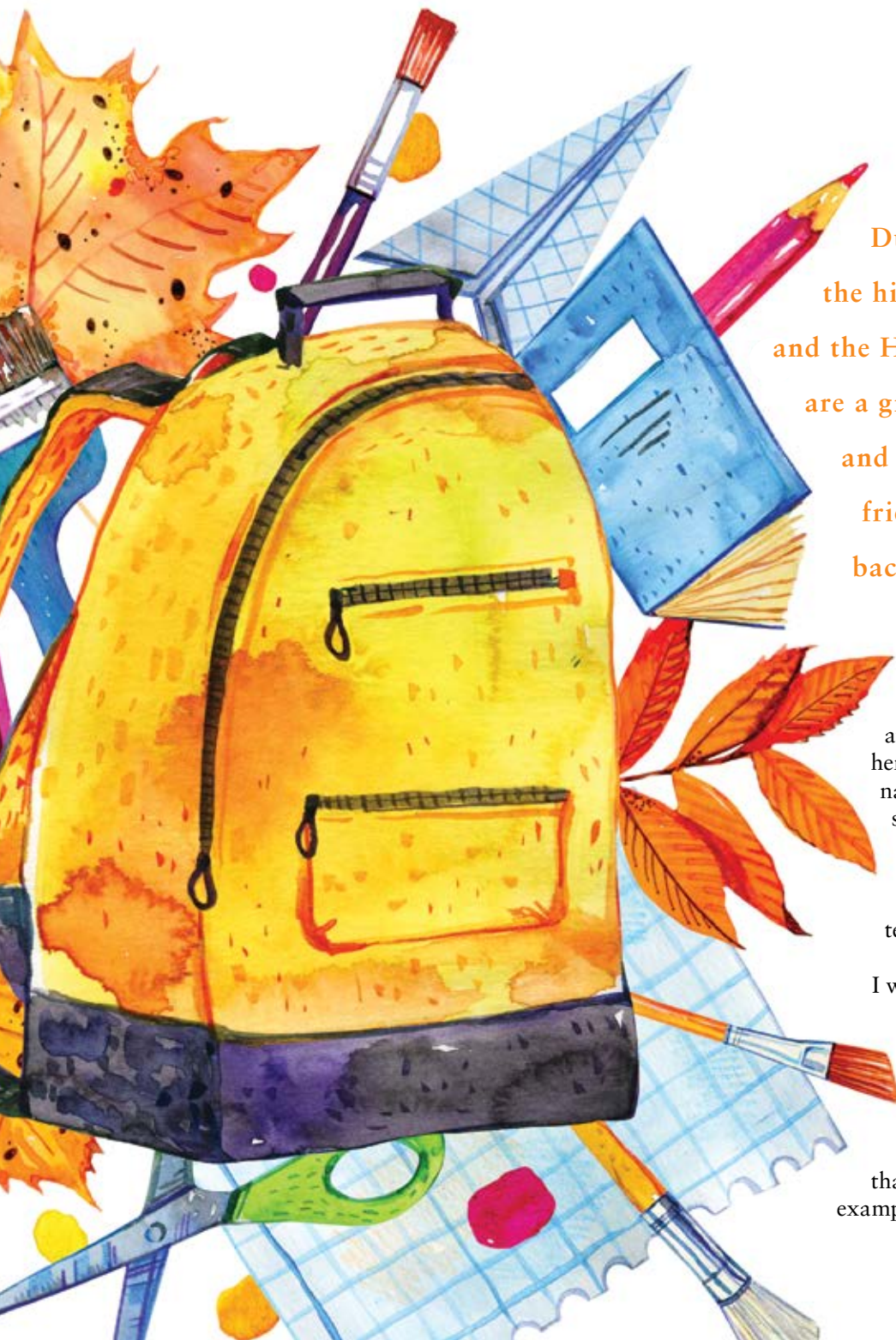
— Kara Salisbury, Wasatch Charter School Administrative Director

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Utah's Charter Schools:

Giving Every Student, Every Teacher, Every Family the Chance to Find Their Place!

BY ROYCE VAN TASSELL, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF UAPCS



Fall in Utah is lovely. The maples and aspen turn red and yellow.

Dustings of snow start to cover the highest peaks in the Wasatch and the High Uintas. Cool mornings are a great time to read on the porch, and cool evenings almost invite friends over for s'mores around a backyard campfire.

Today, Utah does a good job of telling that story, but it hasn't always been the case. For many, many years, Utah was a little-known backwater, flyover country at best. Sure, WordPerfect was founded here and everyone used it. But Moab, as a national, even international destination, simply didn't exist. Slickrock, Arches, Canyonlands, Zion, etc. – Utah offered all of these treasures, but no one knew, so no one came – until Utah started to tell its story.

I worry that Utah's charter schools face much the same problem. Absolutely great things are happening in our schools, but we are not very good at sharing our stories. It's particularly curious, given that we have more stories and more tools to share those stories than ever before. Let me offer a couple of examples of what I mean.



I say all of this because we need this collective celebration and promotion to counter the false narratives our detractors too often share. When there's a negative story about one charter school – we all get tarred by it. We all find ourselves explaining. And so, we all need to share a constant drumbeat of the good and beautiful that happens in Utah's charter schools.



Over the past couple of years, UAPCS' wonderful communications director, Gina James, has partnered with a professional videographer to tell charter school stories. The two of them have visited more than a dozen schools and helped each school identify various stories that make their school unique.

In each case, the video tells a story of how the school changed one person's life. We have explicitly aimed for stories that highlight the personal, the stories that take all our collective and individual work and focus on direct impacts on a single person. That could be a student, a teacher or a director. But it's always about how one school changed one person's life.

We release the video and promote it on our social media channels. The school it's about does the same. And that's as far as it goes. Parents don't share the story. Teachers don't share it either. Other schools don't share it.

As we've puzzled over why this is, we've noticed a gap in our collective strategy, and this gap seems to explain (at least in part) why we aren't making more of a dent in how the public and policymakers view Utah charter schools. Too few schools (really only a few at most) follow other Utah charter schools' social media accounts. Sometimes we are so consumed by the day-to-day running of our schools and solving those problems that we don't take enough time to celebrate our own wins and achievements.

And I use the word "our" in its most inclusive, broadest meaning. Any win for a charter school in Utah is a win for every charter school. We should all celebrate when charter schools occupy most of the list of the top Utah high schools. We should all celebrate that Beehive Academy consistently ranks as one of the top schools in the country in how it serves low-income and ethnic minority students. We should all celebrate when former charter school students accomplish great achievements.

It's no secret that the Winter Sports School features many Olympic athletes. In two years, we will celebrate alongside them

as those students compete in Beijing. How many of you know that former AMES student, Rhyan White, just won a silver medal in the women's 400-meter medley at the 2020 Tokyo Games?! And isn't it even more amazing that she attended a charter school without a swim program and which focuses quite single-mindedly on academic – not athletic – success!

I say all of this because we need this collective celebration and promotion to counter the false narratives our detractors too often share. When there's a negative story about one charter school – we all get tarred by it. We all find ourselves explaining. And so, we all need to share a constant drumbeat of the good and beautiful that happens in Utah's charter schools.

To that end, UAPCS is asking each charter school to do the following:

- Identify someone on your board and someone on your staff to monitor and expand your school's social media footprint.
- Share your stories.
- Follow every Utah charter school on your social media platforms.
- Share the good news from every Utah charter school on your platforms.
- Encourage your teachers, students, and parents to do the same.

As we share the good that is already happening in Utah's charter schools, we can and will move the needle on how the public views charter schools. They want to know that charter schools serve more special needs children than any Utah school district. They want to know that we go out of our way to serve immigrants and refugees. They want to know how we create safe, inviting, and challenging places for students across the state. Whether that's in Moab or downtown Salt Lake; in Syracuse or St. George; in Ballard or Enoch. Utah's charter schools give every student, every teacher, every family the chance to find their place. Let's shout that message from our collective rooftops! 🎉



Welcome New Directors!*

Canyon Rim Academy – Scott Mastroianni

Freedom Preparatory Academy St. George – Brandon Winn

HighMark Charter School – Shawn Miehle

Merit Preparatory Academy – Jacob Dalton

Spectrum Academy Pleasant Grove Elementary – Paul Lundberg

Spectrum Academy North Salt Lake Intermediate – Peter Grisenti

Spectrum Pleasant Grove STARS – Aubrey Whiting

Entheos Academy Kearns – Nyman Brooks

Salt Lake Arts Academy – Deborah Candler

Vista School – Chris Barnum

Utah Arts Academy – Drew Williams

Ascent Academy West Jordan – Crystal Thomas

Ascent Academy West Valley – Celina Jacobson

*If we missed any new directors, please let us know.



Board Committees that Strengthen Academic Performance

BY JOYLIN LINCOLN, DIRECTOR OF TRAINING, UAPCS

Committees allow boards to operate more effectively by doing deep work outside of full board meetings. They are typically staffed with members who have specific content-rich expertise. This allows for more in-depth discussion and analysis, resulting in well-informed recommendations to the full board. Committees research and frame strategic issues, but it is important to remember that decisions are still made by the full board.

Every committee should have very clear expectations for the operations and communications of the committee. It is recommended that each time a committee meets, they prepare and submit a one-page report to the full board. This report should include those in attendance, recommendations, a high-level overview of the discussion, and action steps.

The number one priority of every charter school board is accountability for the academic performance of the school. This purpose should be a priority that is woven through all committee meetings.

Academic Excellence Committee: This committee is laser-focused on academic performance. They are tasked with measuring organization outcomes against charter goals. They should spend most of their time diving into academic benchmarks and looking at data directly related to the performance of the school.

School Leader Support & Evaluation Committee: This committee designs and develops systems and processes that support the school leader and assists them in perfecting their job. One component is a clear yearly evaluation of the school leader that is transparent and includes measurable outcomes. It is very difficult for this committee to separate

the leader of the school from educational outcomes. A school leader cannot be adequately evaluated without looking at the school's academic performance.

Governance Committee: This committee is very similar to the School Leader Support & Evaluation Committee, with one small difference. Their priority is the board. They are focused on ensuring that the board sets policies, creates conditions, and distributes resources within their school for improving student achievement. They accomplish this priority by leading the board's recruiting strategy, conducting new board member orientation, organizing the annual retreat, assessing the board's strengths, and securing all necessary board professional development with a focus on academic results.

Finance/Audit Committee: Often we think the focus of this committee is strictly to create the upcoming fiscal year budget, present budget recommendations to the board, monitor implementation of the approved budget, recommend sound financial policies, and ensure the audit is conducted each year. These are very important responsibilities, but without ensuring that the budget is directly tied to the academic outcomes of the school, it doesn't matter how good they are with a spreadsheet. This committee is where the rubber hits the road. Ask yourself: does the school adequately allocate funds to ensure the academic goals of the school can be achieved?

It is key that charter school boards continue to monitor school activities to ensure that annual progress is being made, achievement gaps are closing, and the public is kept informed about student progress. Schools that make academics a focus of all their committees will continue to impact the purpose of their school and academic growth for all students. 🌟



Tackling Social Media

for Your School

BY EMILY ASHBY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF UTAH

Are you overwhelmed by the thought of using social media for your school? Do you have social media accounts but aren't sure how to utilize them? You are not alone. Fortunately, utilizing social media effectively isn't as daunting as it may seem and can help schools increase enrollment, connect with students and their families, and aid in fundraising. Here are answers to FAQ and a few quick tips that may help.

1. Where do we start?

Facebook & Instagram

Most schools have set up Facebook and Instagram accounts which are a great place to start and adequate for most schools. Attempting to utilize too many social media accounts such as Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, etc., is not only time-consuming but typically unnecessary.

(One exception may be a middle or high school where administrators want to use TikTok or a similar app to connect with students.) Just keep in mind that most parents/guardians would rather have you spending time with their children instead of posting on every social media platform.

If you are a new school that doesn't have Facebook and Instagram set up, be sure to get them running as soon as your school is authorized. Mountain Sunrise Academy in Saratoga Springs was able to get the word out about their new charter school to local families, government, and businesses by creating their Facebook and Instagram accounts quickly and sharing floorplans, blueprints, photos, and videos of progress being made. This not only built relationships within their community, but increased enrollment applications. It also gave the new Executive Director a chance to introduce herself.

Review Your Accounts

If your school already has social media accounts in place, how can they be used to reach your goals more effectively? Begin by looking at your pages objectively. Can your audience tell who you are, what you do, and where you are located? If not, make these changes sooner than later. Social media won't be helpful if users don't know where you are located or how you are different from other schools in your area.

The next question to ask when reviewing your school's social media accounts is, "What is the first impression we are leaving about our school?" Is it negative, neutral, or positive? A few details to help create a positive impact are using clear, colorful photos and clean, easy-to-read fonts. Keep in mind that 80% of people say they can remember what they see compared to what they read and hear. Images are a key way to share information about your school.

2. Who should manage the accounts at the school?

For consistency, it is best to have a staff member or trusted volunteer who will be around for a few years to manage the accounts. It also helps if the person who oversees the accounts has a desire to do it, likes social media, and knows a bit about it.

Tip: Use a general school email address as the login username so that when the person running your social media account leaves, you still have access to the account. Be sure to record the passwords used and change them when someone quits, leaves, or no longer manages the accounts.

3. We don't have time or know-how to run social media. Why should we?

If your school isn't on social media, you are likely missing out on opportunities to be discovered by potential families interested in your school, keep your parents and school supporters informed about school information, and build a positive culture and community online. If your school isn't on Facebook or Instagram, it is likely the schools you compete with for students use these platforms, which gives them an advantage in your area.

4. Need a boost with fundraising? Social media can help.

Not only is social media a great resource for schools to let users know about how they can donate, but also, it makes it easy for fans of your school to share details of fundraising events with their friends, family, neighbors, church groups, and work colleagues.

To make it even easier, Instagram has created donation buttons that allow users to donate directly to

your school! Once your nonprofit (aka school) is vetted by Facebook and Instagram, you will be added to a list of nonprofits to which users near and far can choose to donate. Donations can be given through a button on your school's main profile or when a "Donation" sticker is added to a story or reel.

Another option for fundraising is to crowdfund using a social platform like Kickstarter. This can be especially useful if your school wants to complete a specific project like building a new playground.

5. How often should we post?

The real question is, "How often do you need to connect with and/or share information with your audience?" For some schools, it may mean posting once a week when they give their community an update of everything happening at the school. For others, it may mean two times a week during September, once a week in October, and twice a month in November and December. Most social media managers are relieved to hear they don't need to post every day to be effective. In fact, posting too often can be overbearing and turn your audience away from your feed. The important principle to remember is that we are all bombarded with information coming in every direction so focus on what is meaningful to your audience and post accordingly.

Creating a posting plan can also be helpful when deciding how often to post, and it doesn't have to be complicated. For example, sit down for an hour at the beginning of each month and make a list of all of the information that you would like to share on social media. This would include upcoming meetings, events, schedule changes, etc., as well as content that can help your school to reach its goals. Decide which photos and text would clearly present the information you want to share, which days would be best to post the information, and create a basic calendar to remind you when to post. (Note: There are third-party apps where you can schedule posts but be prepared to pay a fee for their services. Combining information into one post may be more time and cost-effective.) Keep in mind that having content relevant to your audience is more important than how often you post.

What do you think? Are you ready to jump in and tackle social media for your school? If in doubt, just remember the inspiring words you tell your students: when something is new and seems difficult, roll up those shirt sleeves, and look ahead to the positive impact this resource can have on your school. 🌈

Emily Ashby is an Associate Professor at the University of Utah. She served as a founding member of the Mountain Sunrise Academy, a Utah charter school. She has helped hundreds of small organizations tackle digital marketing through 1:1 meetings, classes, presentations, and training events. Connect with Emily on LinkedIn at [linkedin.com/in/emilysmithashby](https://www.linkedin.com/in/emilysmithashby).

Charter School Accountability Framework

BY JENNIFER LAMBERT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, UTAH STATE CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD

NOTE: UAPCS supports charter schools throughout the state. The majority of schools are chartered through the State Charter School Board. For those schools with a different authorizer, we encourage you to take a look at the oversight requirements of your authorizer as well.

This summer, the State Charter School Board voted to adopt adjustments to the Charter School Accountability Framework. Fortunately, this isn't a new process, but a refinement so we can better support you and provide accountability we believe will mean every student has access to an excellent education that meets their unique learning needs.

Over the past year, we learned that elements within the framework led many schools to believe that it was preferable to fly under the radar or that oversight only leads to closure. Not only are these beliefs wrong, but they can also have a negative effect on schools and their performance. We never want to see any of our directors in a position where they feel lost or without an ally. We believe that by

reframing the model, we can better support you in your work.

With this renewed context about what good charter schools do, you'll notice a few changes in how the model is implemented. We've created a new graphic (see below) that illustrates the different paths LEAs take to get to Good Standing. Every school is on the road to Good Standing, even when

they are sent a Notice of Concern or are on Warning. We hope that some schools even become examples to other public schools around the state and become High-performing. We are increasing the number of professional development offerings available to you, your teachers, and your governing boards. These include many local and national experts that will help you navigate to Good Standing. We



sincerely hope that you'll join us, not just in providing unique learning opportunities, but in leading all of Utah's schools to become better.

A comprehensive review is a requirement for all SCSB schools. State code explains that charter schools need to be evaluated every five years. We are so excited to get to engage in this process with you during this coming year. The pandemic made it very difficult to conduct these reviews, or to gather data, but it was provided a good opportunity to refine the comprehensive review process. This review has taken several different forms over the years, but we are excited about the adjustments that we have made this year.

First, we started by creating a rubric for each of the standings. The rubric is currently available on our website. (See QR Code at the end of the article.) One of the challenges we wanted to address was the uniqueness of each of Utah's charter schools. It is difficult — and in some cases impossible — to compare two schools that might serve different grades or have different models. Our aim in this refining process was to write the expectations that would be general enough to apply to each school — regardless of model, and so as many schools as possible would be considered in Good Standing.

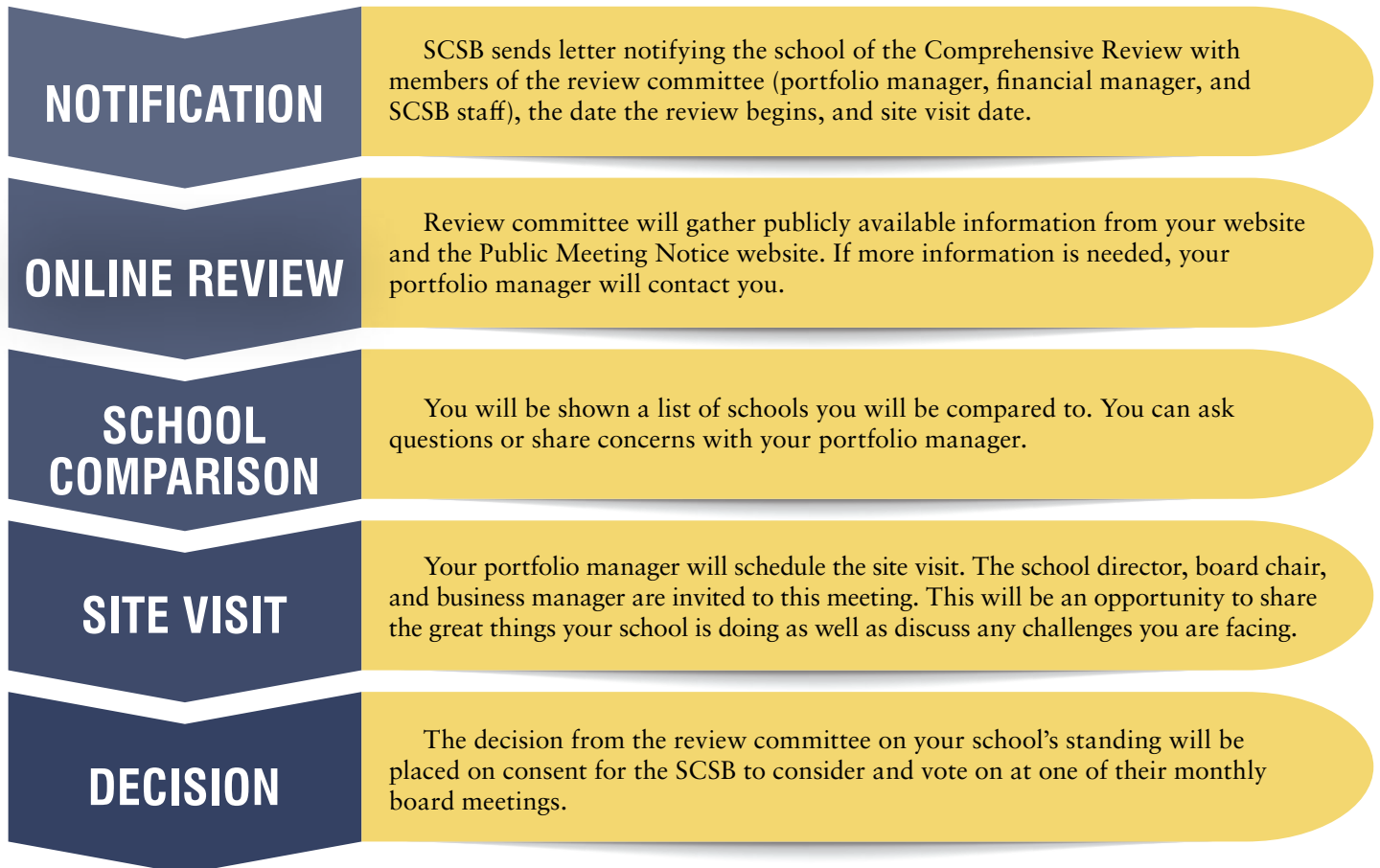
Our second aim in refining the process was to take as much work off your shoulders as possible. We didn't want you to have to compile lots of information. As long as your board meetings are uploaded and complete, and you're getting your other reports done on time, we are going to be able to prioritize that information. In some cases, there might be additional information that is needed, but we foresee that being rare. This is a great opportunity to reflect on the excellent work you've done over the past five years, and to strategically plan for the next five.

We're looking forward to starting these reviews with several schools this month, and nearly 30 LEAs over the next year. Please feel free to reach out to your portfolio manager if you have any questions. 🇺🇸



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Comprehensive Review At-a-Glance





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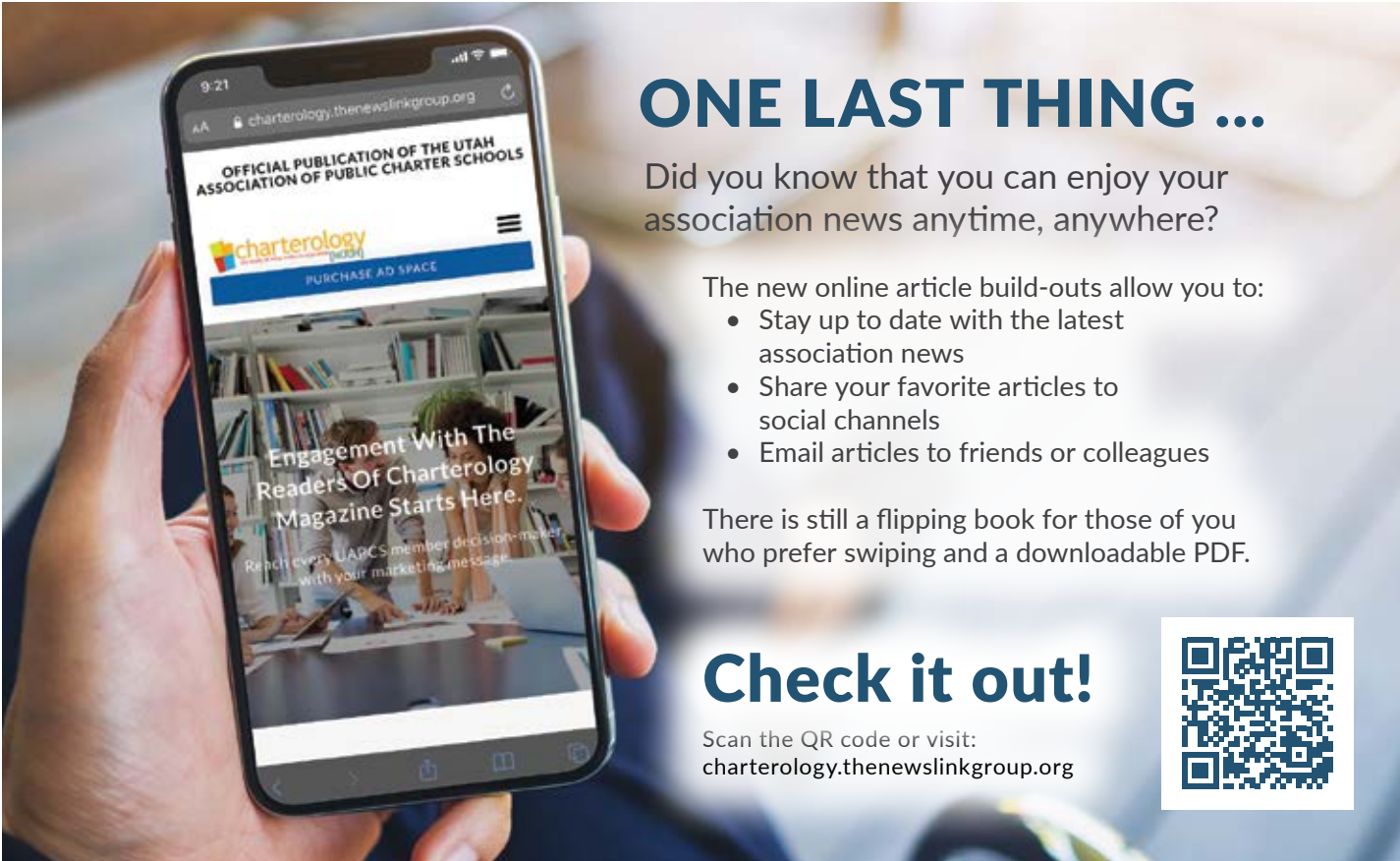
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Did You Know?

Utah is home to the longest skidmark of all time.

Bonneville Salt Flats

The Bonneville Salt Flats comprises 30,000 acres of desolate, densely packed salt pan. The spot's incredibly flat and smooth terrain makes it a popular destination for speed-seeking land racers since 1914. Racing takes place at part of the Bonneville Salt Flats known as the Bonneville Speedway. There are five major land speed events that take place at the Bonneville Salt Flats. Bonneville "Speed Week" takes place mid-August followed by "World of Speed" in September and the "World Finals" take place early October.



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