

# EducationBoardPartners

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## Board Level Academic Dashboards

### Step 2: Design a clear, simple dashboard

#### Overview

Once the board has approved the academic goals and metrics for the school, the school performance committee and school leadership need to design a dashboard that will show progress toward those goals as well as flag challenges and successes throughout the year, enabling the school leader and board to make corrections.

Once again, think about the dashboard of your car. It tells you the most critical, concise metrics you need to keep your car safely on the road. Likewise, your academic dashboard should provide laser-like focus on a small number of key indicators.

Note: If you have not read the CBP Academic Dashboards Tool, Step 1: Set Goals and Metrics for Measuring Progress, STOP. Turnaround. You must set academic goals before you create your dashboard.

#### Design Considerations

The design of your dashboard is very important. Remember, a board level–academic dashboard is a **concise, simple and visual** (e.g., graphs, charts, etc.) snapshot of data that clearly illustrates *“Yes, we are on track to achieve our annual academic goals”* or *“No, we are NOT on track to achieve our annual academic goals.”*

Since the dashboard’s purpose is to communicate information clearly and concisely, below are a few considerations you should keep in mind.

- 📌 **Keep it *concise***: While school performance committee members will want to delve more deeply into the background information for some metrics, the full board should focus on whether the school is on track to meet each goal. Often this can boil down to a yes or no answer.
- 📌 **Keep it *simple***: Information on the dashboard should be accessible to board members whether or not they have statistical or academic expertise. Board members will have varying levels of comfort with academic data.

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*Keep it **visually appealing**.* Select a design that can—independent of text—answer the questions. Board members should be able to look at the dashboard and **see** whether the organization is on track to achieve its goals.



*Keep it **focused**:* Each visual element on the dashboard should clearly answer one or—at a maximum—two questions. Do not make any one graphic too complex.

If you are tempted to add more complexity, build two separate but related dashboards: one for the school performance committee, with more detailed data, and one for the full board with a concise snapshot of progress toward goals.

## Technology & Formatting Considerations

- ❑ Consider staff expertise, available software, and ease of making updates when choosing the technology to create the dashboard. While advanced options are available, a simple computer spreadsheet application will be sufficient for most schools.
- ❑ Choose consistent colors and fonts throughout the dashboard, and—if possible—assign each color to have some visual significance. The dashboard will appear more polished and, most important, easier to interpret. Some examples of color and font dos and don'ts follow.

### DO:

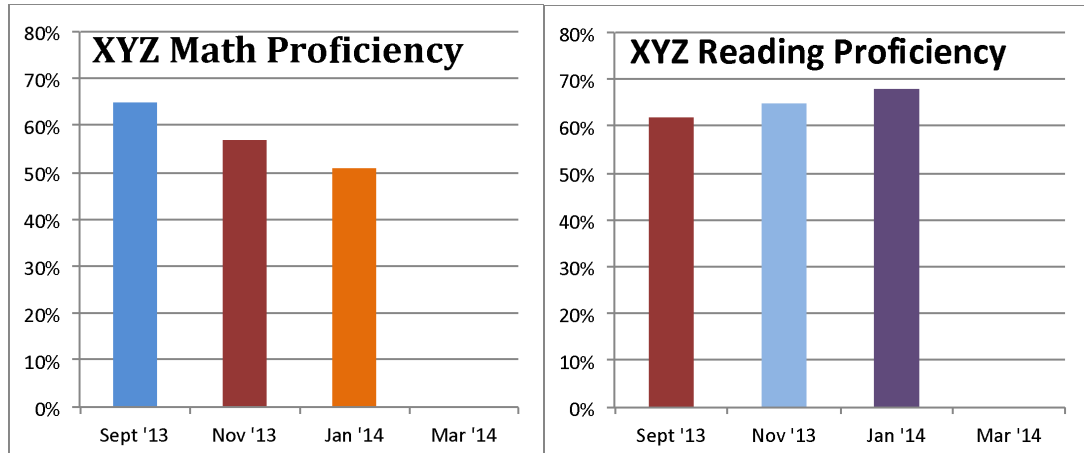
Goal	On Track?
MS MATH PROFICIENCY > 75%	 NO
MS READING PROFICIENCY > 75%	 YES

chool ABC includes a handy cheat-sheet of school demographic information at the top of their dashboard. This reminds board members that the middle school campus has twice as many special education students as the high school campus and that a much higher percentage of high school students are from low –income households.

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**DON'T:**



The “DO” example above employs consistent fonts and a meaningful color scheme, while the “DON’T” example uses inconsistent fonts and seemingly random colors that confuse the eye.

- Align the dashboard’s size with its intended use. For example, a dashboard that will be presented in paper form should be large enough to read when printed on a standard sheet of paper. A board level–academic dashboard should fit on one page. A dashboard for the school performance committee may be a few pages longer. If you plan to share your dashboard electronically, you may have more flexibility around format and sizing.

## Examples

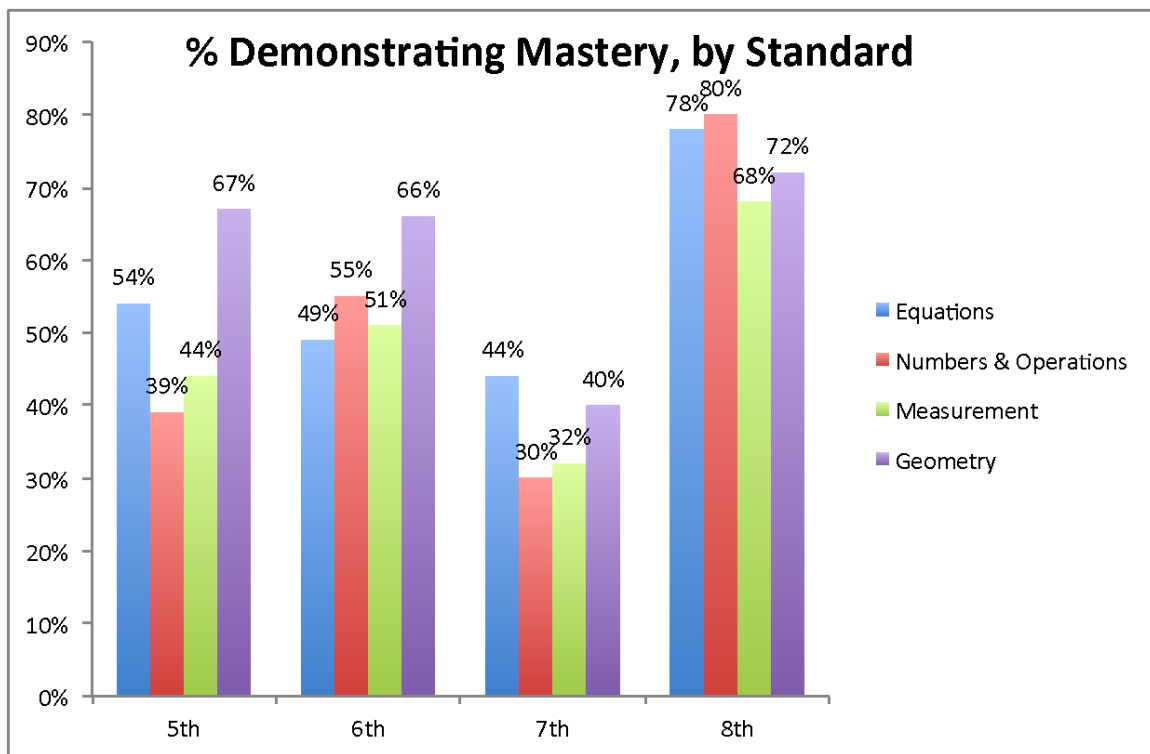
The visual examples below demonstrate a variety of approaches for reporting the outcome of this goal: “By the end of school year 2014-15, at least 75% of middle school students will be proficient in mathematics, as measured by the DC-CAS assessment.”

First, Example A is an example of what NOT to do (below).

### EXAMPLE A: School ABC

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The graph above has a number of features that make it inappropriate for a Board level– dashboard.

- ❓ Example A provides too much information and the data is too far ‘in the weeds’ for a useful board level– discussion.

The board generally should not look at student performance on particular standards, but rather a thoughtfully chosen measure as explained in Step 1.

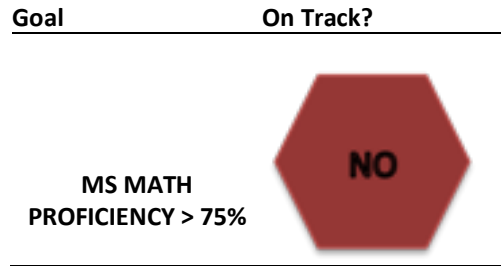
- The board (usually) does not need to see data disaggregated by individual grade level.
- The graph is too complicated and not easily absorbed at a glance.
- Despite the excessive amount of information, this graph does not tell the board whether targets are being met.

On the other hand, the graphic below provides an example of what an appropriate board-level indicator might look like.

## EXAMPLE B: School ABC

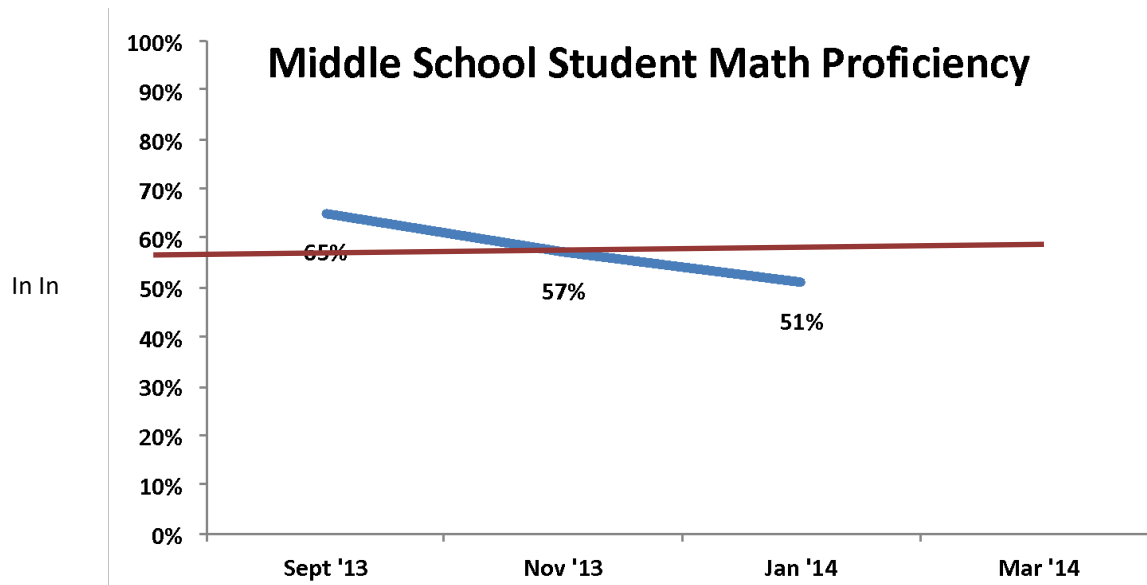
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Here is another example, more detailed than the last. This example is probably more appropriate for school performance committee-level reporting:

EXAMPLE C: School ABC



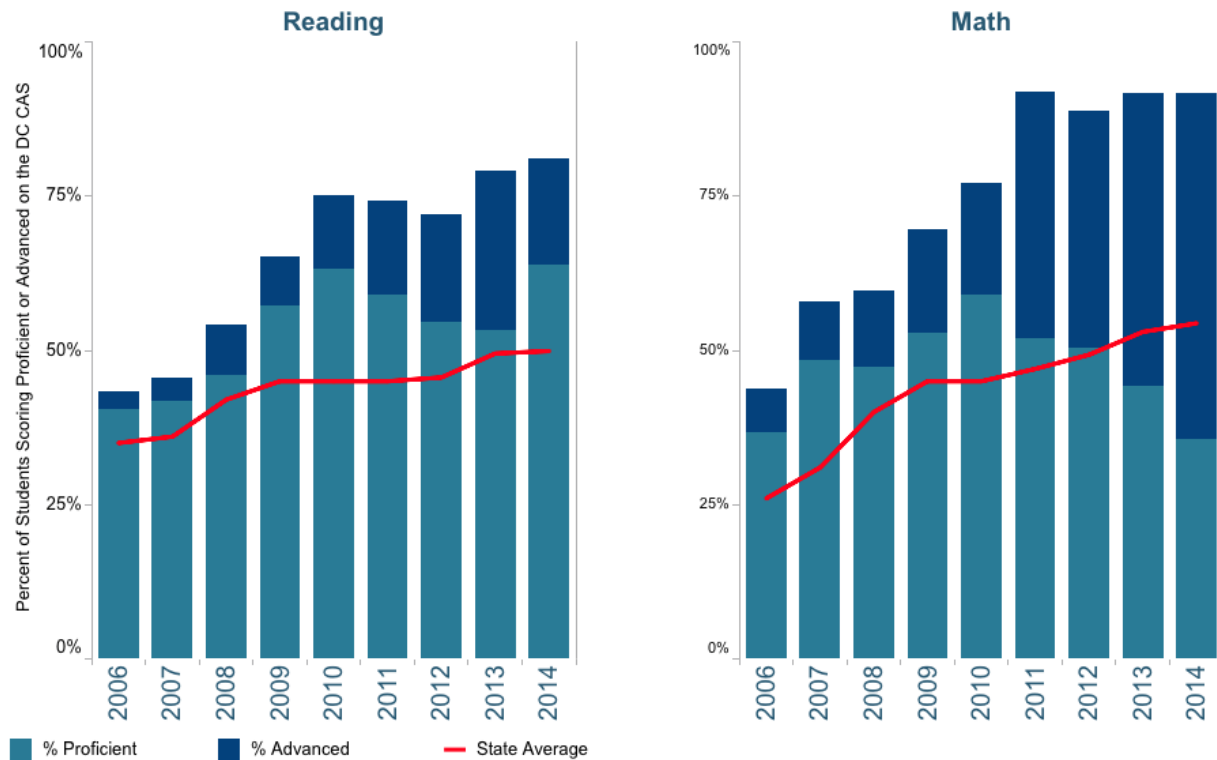
In examples B and C above, it is immediately clear (even without any context) that the school is not meeting the intended targets. In Example C, it is additionally clear that middle school students are moving in the wrong direction.

Example D: Looking forward by reviewing trend data.

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Consider including long term–trend data as a part of your dashboard to inform decisions going forward. Sometimes it is hard to see the forest from the trees. This end-of-year data would not be a dynamic part of the dashboard, but perhaps included at the end of the dashboard, reminding the board of past trends as they make decisions<sup>1</sup>.



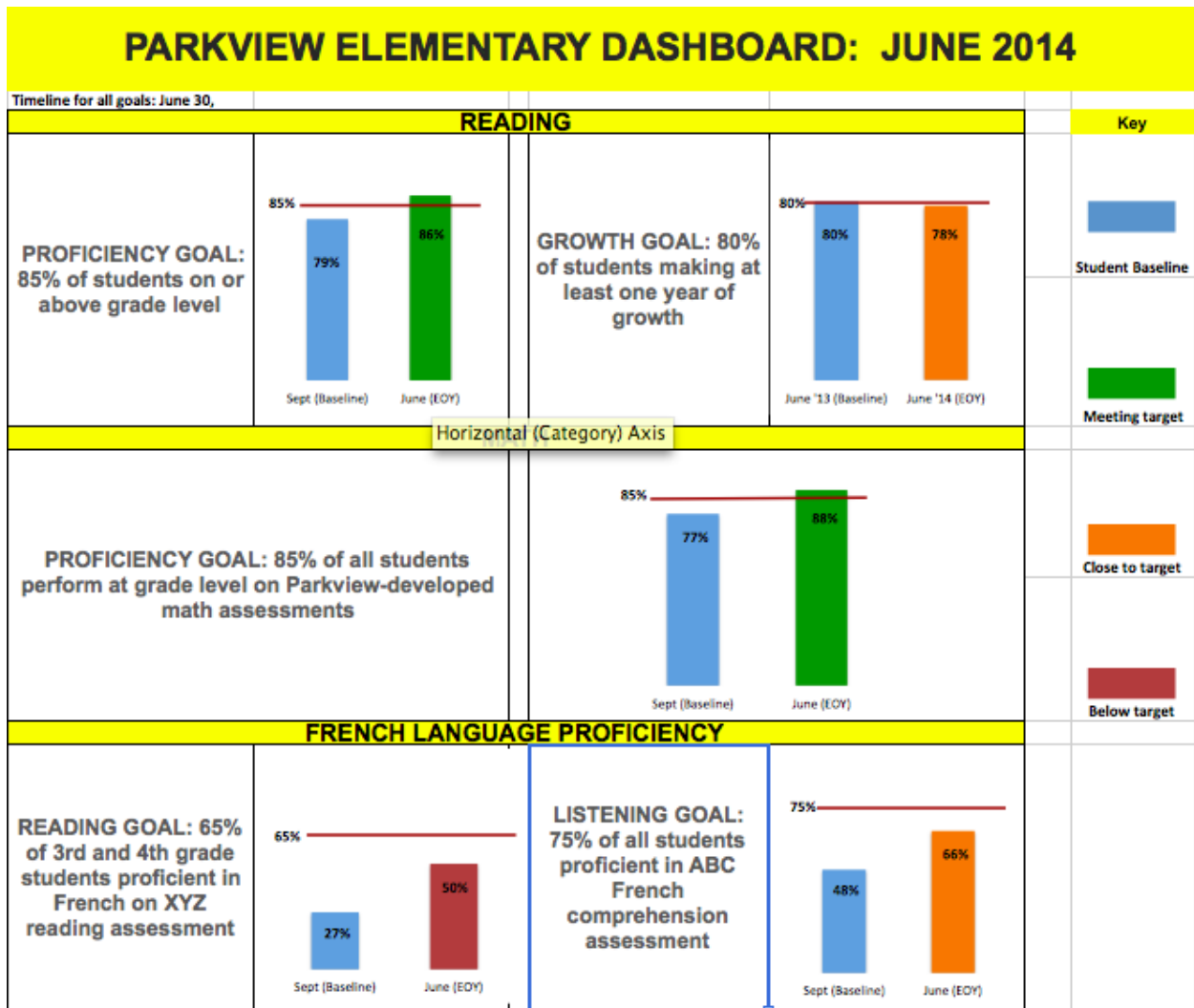
<sup>1</sup> FOCUS website, <http://www.focusdc.org/data>

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## Examples of Complete Dashboards

Putting all of the goals together, school performance committees and boards can use visual data to gauge whether the school is on track to achieve its goals. The example below is for Parkview Elementary School, a French bilingual elementary school. After looking at the dashboard, answer the key questions that follow.



Key questions for board members:

- Can you identify the areas where this school is and is not on track to achieve its year-end goals?
- What questions might you ask the school leader after looking at this dashboard?

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Another example follows: Capital Science and Tech Academy Public Charter School's mid-year board academic dashboard. Note that the goals are end-of-year goals but this dashboard updates the board mid-year to allow the school leadership and board to monitor mid-year progress.

CAPITAL SCIENCE AND TECH ACADEMY DASHBOARD: MARCH 2014				
CAMPUS DEMOGRAPHICS				
	Low Income	ELL	SpEd	Tot. Enrollment
Middle	88%	25%	18%	250
High	70%	10%	30%	200
DASHBOARD METRICS				
Subject	Measure	Goal	On track to achieve goals?	
			Middle School	High School
READING	Interim Assessment	Reading proficiency > 75%	YES	YES
	MATH	Interim Assessment	Math proficiency > 75%	NO
Interim Assessment		Math proficiency of low income students > 56%	NO	YES
COLLEGE READINESS	SAT	12th grade students scoring at least 500 in math and reading > 50%	N/A	YES
	Graduation	12th grade students graduating = 100%	N/A	Data will be available as of June 10th 2014
	College acceptance	Students accepted to college > 80%	N/A	YES



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Key questions for board members:

- Can you identify the areas where this school is and is not on track to achieve its year-end goals?
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As you can see from the examples, there is more than one effective way to create a dashboard. School goals, available resources, and the ability to digest academic data varies by school, and these should all be considered when designing a dashboard. Your first version of a dashboard will most likely NOT be your last version of the dashboard. It will evolve over time, reflecting changing goals and practical experience.

After sharing the first draft of your dashboard, you may want to elicit feedback from your board members. Was this too much data? Too little? What were the key takeaway metrics, and what questions did they want answered that they did not see in this version? With ongoing collaboration and a key focus on results, your charter school will build a board level– academic dashboard that blends the science of data with the art of presenting it in a way that is *useable*.