

SPCSA Governance Overview

Indicators of Distress

Spotting Challenges Before They Grow

Today's Big Question



How can we identify schools that
are **falling off track**...
...and help get them **back on track**?

Guiding Question



Reflective Prompt

What types of **characteristics** come to mind when thinking of **schools in distress**?

Agenda



Why should board members be aware of indicators of distress?



What are indicators of distress?
What is the leadership death spiral?



How can you assess schools for indicators of distress?



Why should....
board members
be aware of indicators of
distress?

This work is based on multi-year research from the National Charter School Resource Center.

Available for download at
www.charterschoolcenter.ed.gov

Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools

Part 2: The Roles and Perspectives of Charter School Leaders and Board Members

September 2021

Identifying Indicators of Distress in Charter Schools

Part 1: The Role and Perspective of Charter School Authorizers

September 2020



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Why Are We Studying Indicators of Distress?



The high cost and low track record of success of comprehensive school improvement efforts meant students remained in low-performing schools for too long.

Identifying struggling schools early and addressing issues before they fester increases the odds that:

01

Efficient Resources

Resources, such as time, effort, and funds, are used efficiently

02

Protected Schools

Schools are closed as a last resort

03

Equitable Access

Students have equitable access to high-quality options

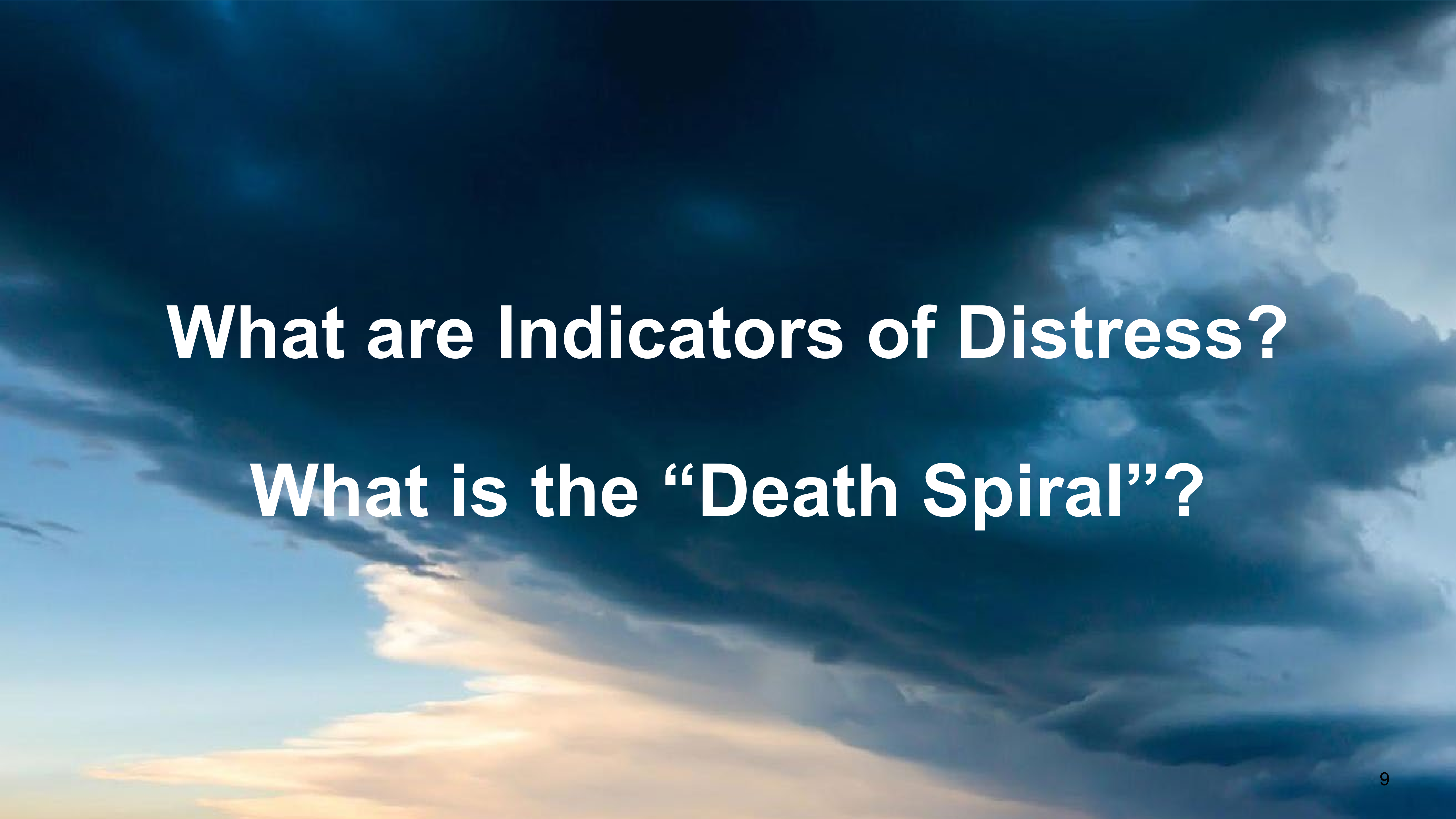
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- Schools are closed as a last resort
- Students have equitable access to high-quality options



What are Indicators of Distress?

What is the “Death Spiral”?

Early Warning Systems and the Death Spiral

Early Warning Systems

- Review past events in a broad context to identify potential characteristics of distress
- Review past events in one's context against characteristics
- Apply characteristics to current events in one's own context to predict potential future events

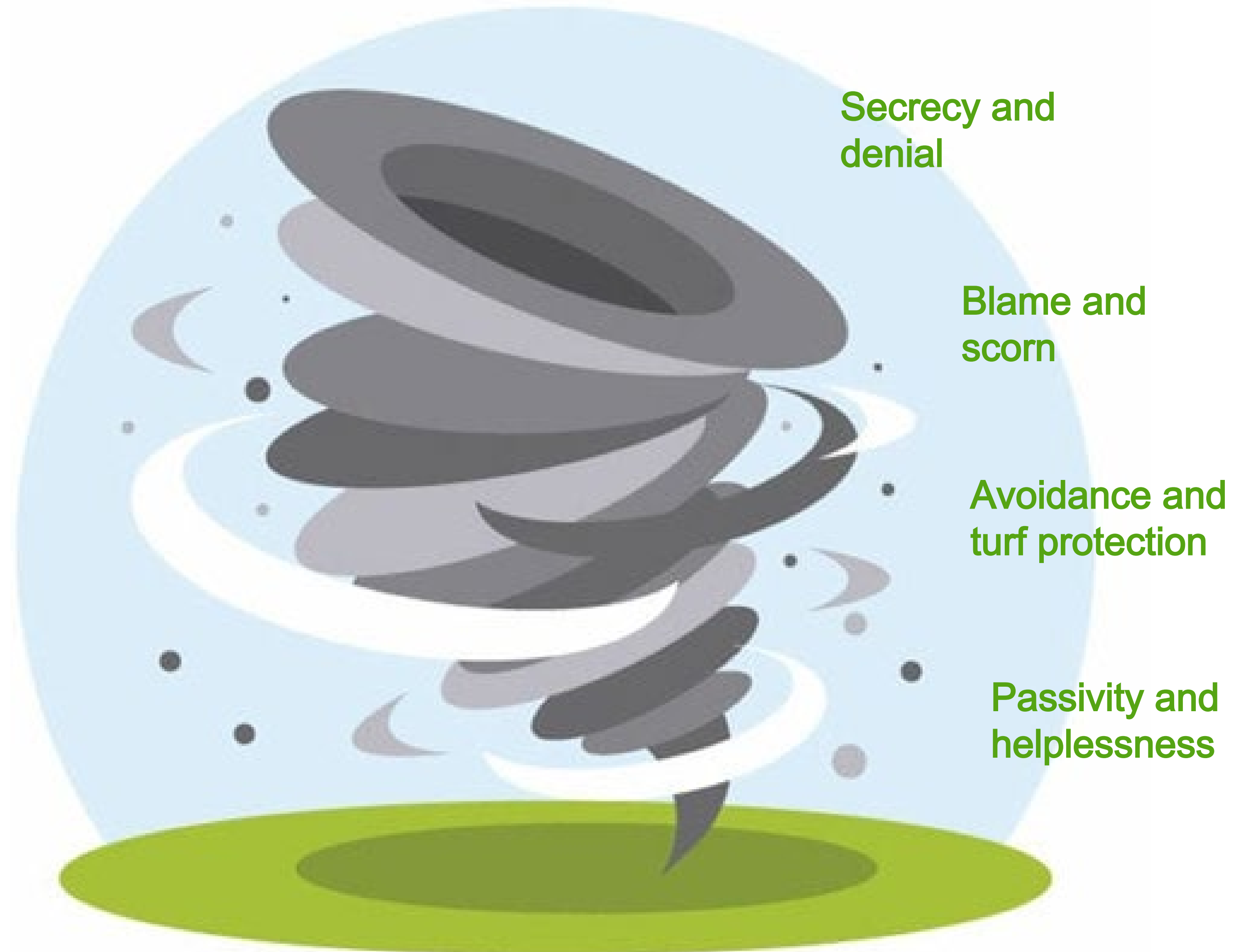
Death Spiral

- Identify organizational decline
- Define the stages of decline *based on leaders behaviors* to determine when and how intervention(s) needs to occur

Used together: Indicators can help identify schools in distress *and* determine type of intervention(s) necessary *prior to school failure and negative impact on students.*

Leadership “Death Spiral”

Stages of deterioration in trust, confidence, and ability to oversee and implement improvement efforts



Indicators of Distress

Data signaling that a school's performance is declining in a number of areas.



Leadership

Governing Board

Operations

Finance

Talent

Culture

Instruction

Leadership

Governance

Lack of
systemic
leadership
development

Lack of
leadership

Inability to
sustain
leadership

Mismatched
leadership
competencies
to context

Boards'
inability to
hold school
leaders
accountable

Inadequate
board
capacity to
govern

Boards'
deteriorating
relationship
with
authorizers

Inability to
convene the
board



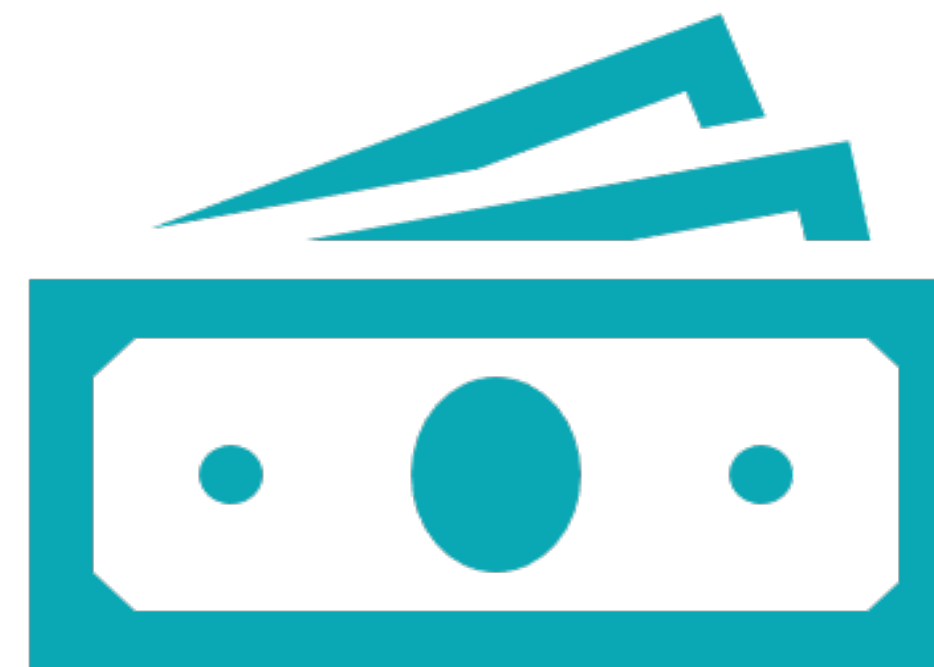
Operations & Finance



Breakdown in
compliance and
reporting functions



Inability to plan and
pivot to needs of
schools



Failure to properly
manage finances



Misappropriation of
funds

Indicators Within the School



Talent

- Hiring challenges, turnover
- Teacher capacity decline



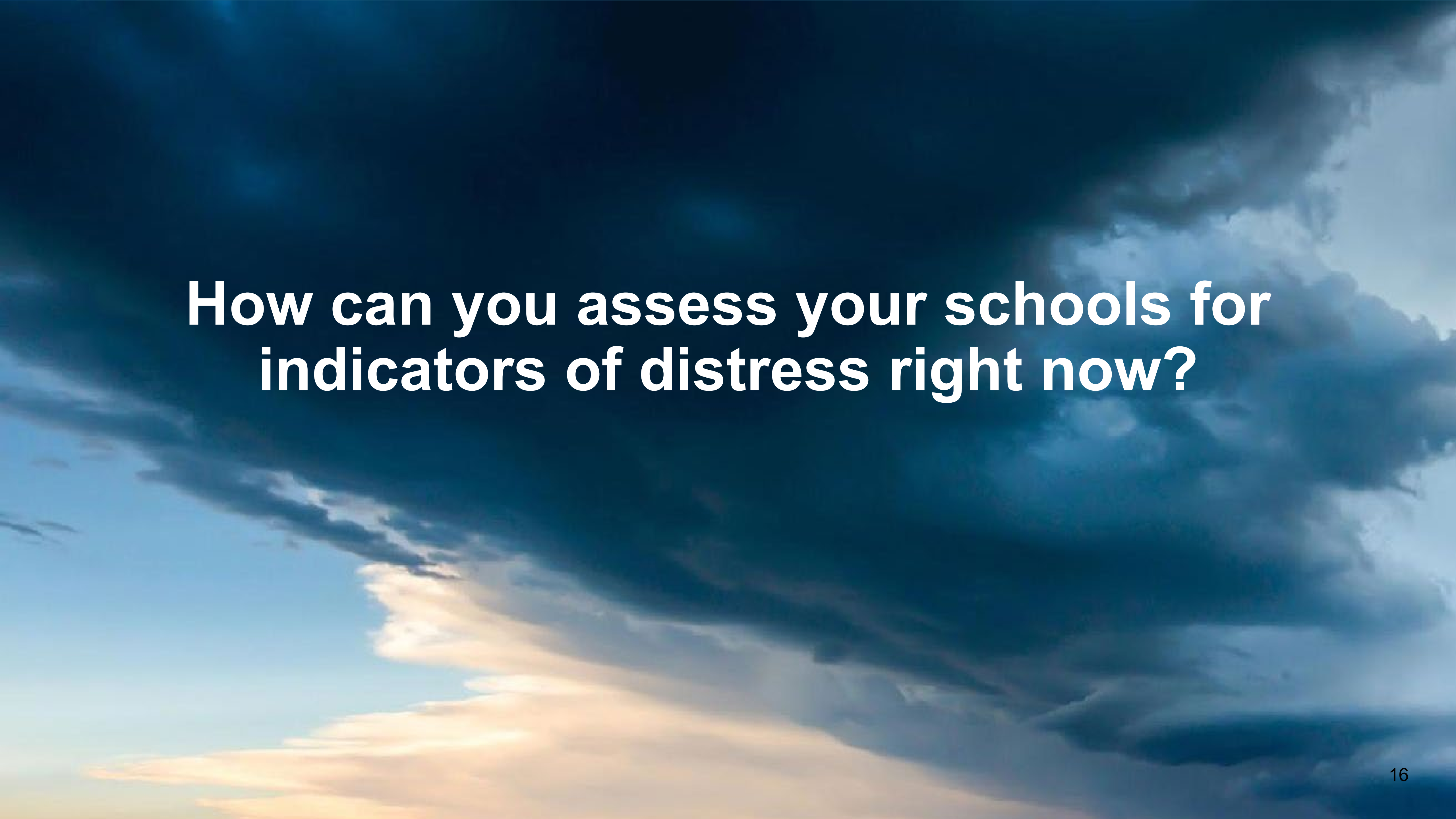
Culture

- Lack of connection with students, families
- Inhospitable professional culture



Instruction

- Lack of focus on instruction
- Cohesion/alignment issues in curriculum, standards, assessments



**How can you assess your schools for
indicators of distress right now?**

“

Decline generally does not stem from a single factor; it results from an accumulation of decisions, actions, and commitments that become entangled in self-perpetuating dynamics.

— Rosabeth Moss Kantor, 2003

Assessing Schools for Indicators of Distress

This tool helps **assess Indicators of Distress** at the school and system levels.

It can be used to **determine the need for interventions** by:

- School Leaders
- Governing Board Members
- Authorizers



Assessing Schools in Distress

Using Indicators of Distress for Early Identification of
Schools in Need of Support

July, 2023

Checklist of “Look Fors” in Schools

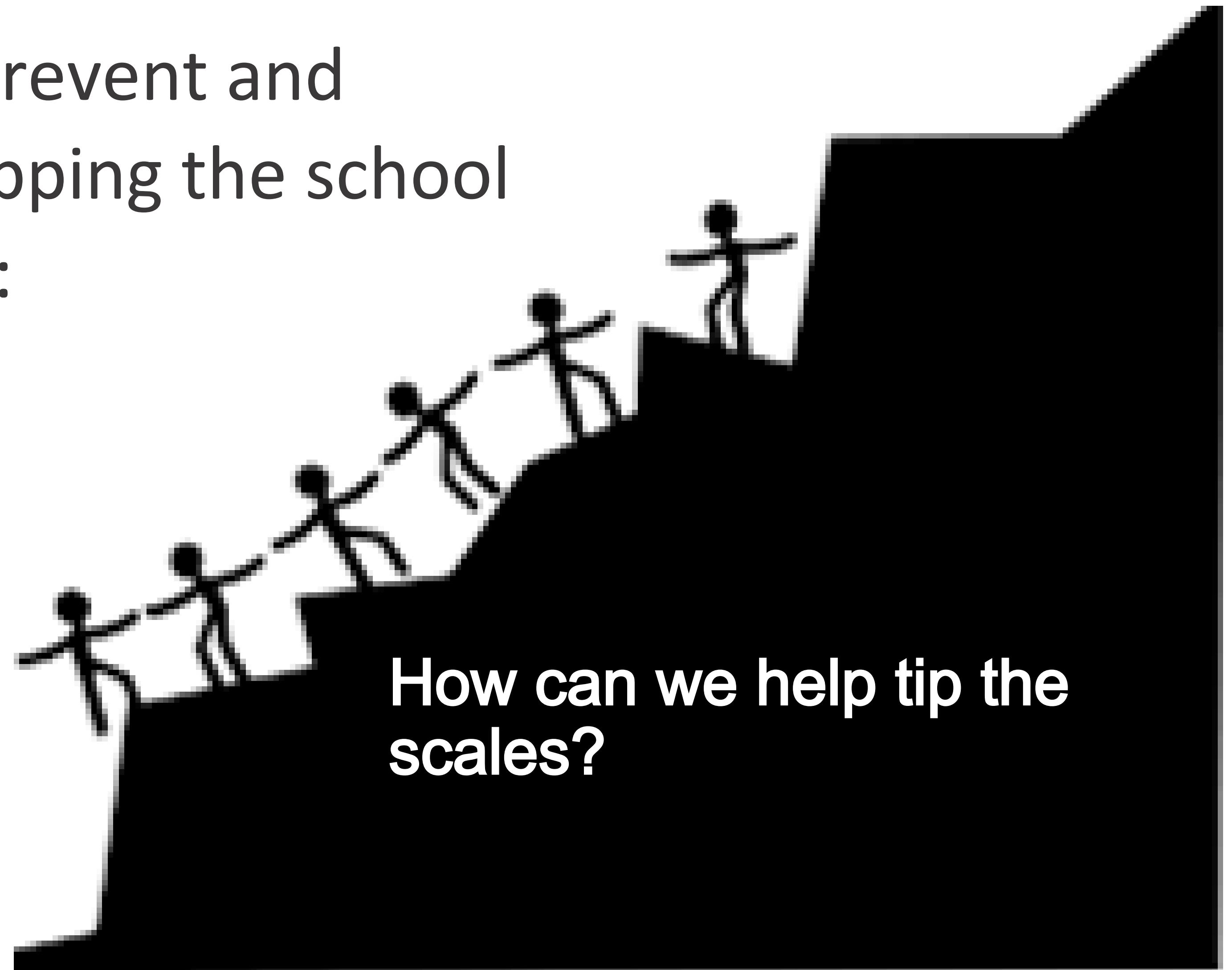
Leadership		
Indicator of Distress	Evidence of Indicator in Practice	Schools in My Portfolio Have Exhibited Evidence of This Indicator (check all that apply)
Mismatched leadership competencies to context	Leader's inability to gain respect/trust of staff or families	☐
	Leader's inability to respect/trust staff	☐
	Leader's failure to demonstrate instructional leadership as necessary; for example, by taking minimal interest or time in classroom instruction	☐
	Leader's failure to manage time efficiently and appropriately	☐
	Core school operational or instructional tasks drop in quality	☐
	Leader is unable to create or maintain effective teams	☐
Inability to sustain leadership	High or increased leader turnover	☐
	Lack of leadership pipeline development	☐
Lack of leadership	Leader is unable to make decisions	☐
	Lack of academic and organizational leadership	☐
	Decreased frequency or quality of communication with authorizer or delays responding to authorizer requests	☐
	Leader is not present at the school for significant amounts of time or to the extent that staff work or school functions are negatively impacted	☐
	Leader is not accessible to families, board, or authorizer	☐

The Best time to be on the lookout for Indicators



Schools that were able to prevent and mitigate challenges from tipping the school into distress did two things:

1. Anticipated changes or challenges, and more importantly
2. *Addressed them when faced*



Reach out for further information:

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