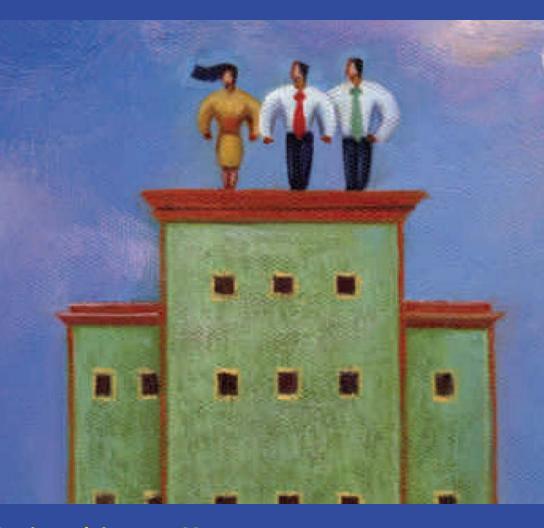# nacsa
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Anecdotes Aren't Enough:

AN EVIDENCE-BASED APPROACH TO ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALTERNATIVE CHARTER SCHOOLS

Nelson Smith, Senior Advisor, NACSA

Ernie Silva, Director of External Affairs, SIATech (California)

Naomi DeVeaux, Deputy Director, D.C. Public Charter School Board

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What do we mean by "Alternative"?

- **Poverty?**

- **History of low academic performance?**

- **Special education?**

- **Limited English Proficient?**

A possible list...

- **Dropouts**
- **Persistently truant**
- **Adjudicated youth**
- **Pregnant or parenting teens**
- **2+ years behind in HS credits**
- **Chronic behavioral problems (expelled/multi suspended)**
- **Substance abusers (and/or their children)**
- **Students with extraordinary skills deficiencies**
- **History of abuse/neglect/homelessness**
- **Refugees**
- **Recently-arrived immigrants (esp. if deficient in home language)**
- **Highly mobile**
- **Emotional or psychological disorders**

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How many to qualify?

- **Colorado: 95%**
- **California:**
  - **ASAM – 70%**
  - **Dropout Recovery – 50% (but…)**
- **Texas: 75%**
- **DC: 60% (tent.)**
- **Arizona: Mission only - no threshold**
- **Florida: District designates**

Standard Measures

- **Achievement tests**
  - **Compared to other AECs?**
- **Growth**
  - **Normed for AEC populations?**
- **Graduation rates**
  - **5-6-7 year cohorts?**
  - **Other cohorts?**
- **Index measures**
  - **With different weights?**

Non-standard measures

- **Student-level**
    - **Suspension rates**
    - **Punctuality (CA)**
    - **Improvement in attendance from last site**
- **Re-engagement**
- **Workforce readiness**
- **Postsecondary outcomes**
- **Life Skills**
- **"Progress toward treatment" (MI)**
- **Hope survey**

Authorizer challenges

- **Are different tools and processes needed?**
  - *Application*
  - *Assessments*
  - *Monitoring*
- **Does the contract prevail?**
- **How to maintain rigor while acknowledging the reality of "alternative" school populations**

Graduation Rate Alternatives

- **Limits of extended cohort**
  - **24 Year Old Opportunity to Graduate**
    - **Six years after the 9th grade cohort**
    - **Ten year cohort needed to acknowledge school's efforts**
    - **Complexity for state and other data systems**

- **Issue: who is the cohort?**
  - **Single Year "Eligibility for Graduation Cohort"**
  - **Single Year "Reengagement Cohort"**
    - **Commitment to school?**
    - **What time period demonstrates commitment?**

PCSB's Dilemma

- **60 LEAs on 109 Campuses**
  - <u>**Performance Management Frameworks/Common Accountability Measures**</u> **for the 50 Local Education Agencies (LEAs) serving: early childhood, elementary, middle and/or high schools**

- **But what do we do with our "Alternative Schools"?**
  - **6 schools offer adult education programs**
    - **No high school diploma but GED, ESL, and/or Certificates in Technical Education**
  - **3 Alternative Education High Schools**
    - **Mission caters to students unsuccessful at traditional schools**
  - **1 ungraded school designed for students with disabilities**

Step 1: What is "alternative"?

- **Offer a traditional high school diploma**

- **Gives the state assessment (mandated by law)**

- **Schools must have a "SIGNIFICANTLY DIFFERENT" population**

Step 2: What is "significantly different"?

- **Gathered self-reported data on "at risk" indicators:**
  - **Special Education levels 3 & 4 (highest levels)**
  - **Over age by two or more years**
  - **Incarcerated**
  - **Homeless**
  - **Pregnant and/or parenting (mothers only)**
  - **Adjudicated (foster care, court system)**
- **Limitation: Could not get student-level data**
- **Concern: Do not want "traditional" schools to be considered "alternative"**

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Step 2: What does the data say?

- **Stand alone risk factor (mission-specific)**

- **School A: 54%**
- **School B: 0% (school serves 100% SWD)**
- **School C: 60%**

- **School D: 42%**
- **School E: --% (not it top percentile)**
- **School F: --% (not in top percentile)**

Step 3: Create a definition

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Schools will be designated as eligible for the alternative accountability framework if the percentage of their students who are identified as having at least one of the following risk factors is at least 60%: receiving special education services at levels 3 or 4; over-aged and under-credited for their grade level; pregnant or mothering; currently or formerly incarcerated; homeless; or currently in foster care. Addition: At least 50% of their students have exclusionary incidents at previous school.

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Step 4: Create Accountability Plans

One-size accountability for Alternative Accountability is difficult, given the myriad of schools that fit into this definition:

- **Special Education (alt state assessment)**
- **High School**
- **Middle School**

Step 4: Create Accountability Plans

- **Less or no emphasis on state assessment**

- **Short-term outcomes**

- **Long-term goals (5-year graduation rate)**

- **Competency-based diploma**

Key Recommendations for Authorizers

Set a high bar. Identify schools for alternative accountability based on whether a school has a large percentage of students with extraordinary learning difficulties, acute risks to their ability to succeed, or a documented history of academic failure that leaves them significantly far behind their age group in high school credits.

Be open to different but detailed approaches. Make sure that application processes and documents indicate openness to alternative methods and scheduling. Require specific plans for measuring student progress and school performance. Proposed budgets should reflect additional costs such as counselors and service providers.

Make the charter contract the central instrument of accountability. Whether the state creates specific accountability policies for alternative schools or not, authorizers should create charter contracts that form a solid basis for evaluating the alternative charters in their own portfolios. The contract should spell out academic and non-academic goals, as well as the specific metrics that will gauge the school's performance, including both traditional and non-traditional measures.

On critical indicators of performance, authorizers should:

- Establish proficiency targets that reflect students' starting points; evaluate results according to an appropriate comparison group, such as alternative schools serving similar populations and grades.

- Expect schools to administer "short-cycle" assessments that look at student learning at the beginning and end of a given school year, and perhaps several times mid-year, to establish their academic growth.

- Evaluate graduation rates over a longer period of time than the conventional four-year cohorts, and give schools credit for re-engaging students who have dropped out.

- Weigh attendance and truancy in light of students' rates at prior schools.

- Look at multiple measures of college and career readiness, including the ACT and SAT tests, industry certifications, and if possible, actual postsecondary student success.

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