WILL A NEW CHARTER SCHOOL FAIL? LOOK AT THE APPLICATION

ANNA NICOTERA
ERIN REDDY
CATHERINE WATT
INTRODUCTIONS

• Anna Nicotera
  Senior Associate, Basis Policy Research and lead author of report

• Erin Reddy
  Associate Director, NACSA

• Catherine Watt
  Director of New Schools, South Carolina Public Charter School District
“IF YOU DON’T WANT TO CLOSE A BAD CHARTER SCHOOL, DON’T OPEN IT IN THE FIRST PLACE.”

GERARD ROBINSON

FORMER FLORIDA COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL TRENDS IN APPLICATION APPROVAL RATES

Before 2003: 68%
In 2005: 50%
Largest 50 Authorizers 2005-2008: 34%
Authorizers with 10 or More Schools 2008-2009: 38%
Authorizers with 10 or More Schools 2009-2010: 33%
Authorizers with 10 or More Schools 2010-2011: 38%
Authorizers with 10 or More Schools 2011-2012: 38%
Authorizers with 10 or More Schools 2012-2013: 33%
FUNDAMENTALS OF APPLICATION DECISION-MAKING

- Clear
- Rigorous
- Transparent
- High-Quality
APPLICATIONS: THE NEED TO DIG DEEPER
TAKE NOTE!

• The findings of the study are limited.

• You should not reject an application simply because it references one of the risk factors from the study.

• This discussion is meant to broaden your perspective, test your assumptions, and assess the rigor of your tools.
STUDY:
“THREE SIGNS THAT A PROPOSED CHARTER SCHOOL IS AT RISK OF FAILING”
STUDY RATIONALE

• While a large percentage of charter schools are serving students well, many are not.

• What strategies are available for improving the charter sector by decreasing the number of low-performing schools?
  1. Support struggling schools with turnaround strategies
  2. Identify and close failing schools
  3. Reject charter applications that are unlikely to succeed
IDENTIFY RISK FACTORS IN CHARTER APPLICATIONS

- Research Question
- Data
- Risk Factors
- NACSA Tools
- Authorizer Reaction
RESEARCH QUESTION

Is it possible to identify easy-to-spot and hard-to-game risk factors in the written content of charter applications that increase the chance that the proposed charter school will struggle academically in its first years?
CANDIDATE RISK FACTORS

1. Does not describe community demographics
2. Intends to serve at-risk students*
3. Does not name school leader^
4. Does not provide per-pupil revenue projection
5. Does not identify external funding source
6. Intends to use a child-centered instructional model
7. Does not intend to offer extended school year or school day
8. Does not describe rigorous educator evaluation plan
9. Does not intend to provide high-dosage, small-group, or individual tutoring*
10. Does not describe plan for using data to drive instructional improvement
11. Does not describe a culture of high expectations
12. Does not plan to hire a management organization (CMO/EMO)^

* and ^, respectively, indicate components that we tested as combinations
STUDY: “THREE SIGNS THAT A PROPOSED CHARTER SCHOOL IS AT RISK OF FAILING”

FINDING 1: FACTORS FOR APPLICATION REJECTION
APPLICATIONS AUTHORIZERS REJECT

Finding 1: There were several factors that increased the chance authorizers would reject the charter application

1. A lack of evidence that the school will start with a sound financial foundation;
2. No description of how the school will use data to evaluate educators or inform instruction;
3. No discussion of how the school will create and sustain a culture of high expectations; and
4. No plans to hire a management organization to run the school.
AUTHORIZER REACTION

Candidate risk factors in charter applications

- Throwing in a myriad of educational plans
- Budgets that rely on unsecured grants
- Failure to demonstrate community need/support
- Absence of a strong diverse charter committee with a wide range of experience
- Plagiarism or applications copied from prior submissions
- Failure to follow formatting instructions/poor grammar
REVISIT YOUR APPLICATION TOOLS

• What questions are you asking in your application?
• How are you assessing applicant answers?
• How will you add rigor in these areas?

• Charter School Application
• Evaluation Criteria
• Interview Questions
FACTORS FOR REJECTION – FINANCIAL FOUNDATION

- Financial Transparency
- Criteria for contractors
- Processes for financial planning, accounting, purchasing, and payroll
- Contingency plan
- Thoughtful assumptions
- Viable start-up budget
- Administration vs. Governance

Sound Financial Foundation
FACTORS FOR REJECTION – USE OF DATA

- Mission-specific goals
- Quality interim assessments
- Qualified staff
- System for collecting & analyzing data
- Corrective action plans

Performance Management
FACTORS FOR REJECTION – SCHOOL CULTURE

- Ethos
- Implementation
- Serving student with special needs
- A Day in the Life

Create and sustain culture
STUDY:
“THREE SIGNS THAT A PROPOSED CHARTER SCHOOL IS AT RISK OF FAILING”

FINDING 2: RISK FACTORS FOR LOW PERFORMANCE
Finding 2: Despite the high percentage of applications that were rejected, there were 3 factors in approved applications that increased the chance that the proposed schools would be low-performing.

- Stand-alone school does not name a school leader
- High-risk students; low-dose support
- Child-centered academic model
RISK FACTORS FOR LOW PERFORMANCE

Predicted Probability of Low Performance

- Does not name a school leader and does not plan to hire a CMO/EMO
- Intends to serve at-risk students without high-dosage, small group, or individual tutoring
- Intends to use a child-centered instructional model

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

Application with indicator
Application without indicator
AUTHORIZER REACTION

Factors from charter applications that lead to academically struggling schools:

- Weak/inexperienced leadership on charter committee and/or by the school lead
- Utilization of EMOs/CMOs with poor track records
- Failure to establish strong academic goals and means for attainment
- Failure to define and adhere to a specific mission for the school
RISK FACTOR 1: LACK OF IDENTIFIED LEADERSHIP

Charter applicants that propose a stand-alone school without naming a leader have a.....

51% likelihood of low performance in their first years of operation.
If no candidate has been identified, the applicant MUST, at a minimum provide a sound and detailed:

1. Job description or qualifications
2. Hiring timeline
3. Hiring criteria
4. Recruitment and selection process
RISK FACTOR 2: HIGH RISK, LOW DOSE

Charter applicants that propose schools intended to serve at-risk students without putting into place high-dose academic programs have a...  

60% likelihood of low performance in their first years of operation.
• Sound explanation of evidence from which the projection of anticipated special populations was derived.

• Comprehensive and compelling plan for appropriate identification of students who are performing below grade level or at risk of academic failure or dropping out, and a detailed plan for providing services to such students.

• Explain how the school will meet the learning needs of students who are performing below grade level and monitor their progress. Specify the programs, strategies, and supports you will provide for these students.
RISK FACTOR 3: A CHILD-CENTERED CURRICULUM

Charter applicants that propose schools that will deploy child-centered, inquiry-based curriculum—such as Montessori, Waldorf, and Paideia—have a 57% likelihood of low performance in their first years of operation.
ADDING RIGOR: ACADEMIC MODEL

- Outcomes aligned to state standards
- Differentiated systems
- Curriculum development plan
- Tailored instructional strategies
- Evidence-base
USE YOUR INTERVIEW – DIGGING DEEPER ON CAPACITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>School Leadership</td>
<td>What are the primary qualifications you are looking for in the school leader?</td>
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| At-Risk Populations    | How will you ensure that at-risk students are still learning even if they are in in-school suspension or are suspended?  
                         | Who provides tutoring / enrichment?  
                         | When will tutoring happen?                                                                                                               |
| Academic Model         | What is the plan for working with students who are not meeting expectations?                                                             |
|                        | How do your proposed goals align with the expected levels of school performance set out by the authorizer?                               |
|                        | What types of remediation do you expect students to need?                                                                                   |
STUDY LIMITATIONS

• We don’t know how rejected applicants would have performed.

• Since authorizers are rejecting 70% of applications, these results should enhance, not replace, a rigorous review.

• Findings do not indicate a causal relationship between risk factors and future school performance. The results are the probability that a school will struggle.

• Sample was not large enough to examine differences between types of authorizers.
WHAT’S NEXT?

• Conduct technical assistance session for applicants with clear application guidance.
• Set forth clear expectations.
• Recruit evaluators with significant expertise from across the nation.
• Conduct evaluator orientation/training.
• Ensure a fair and transparent process.
• Budgets analyzed by national charter school finance experts.
QUESTIONS?