

WILL A NEW CHARTER SCHOOL FAIL? LOOK AT THE APPLICATION

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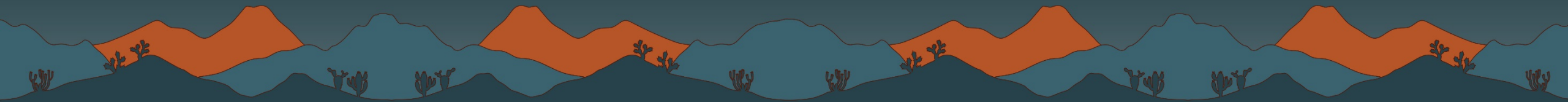
INTRODUCTIONS

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Director of New Schools, South Carolina Public Charter School District

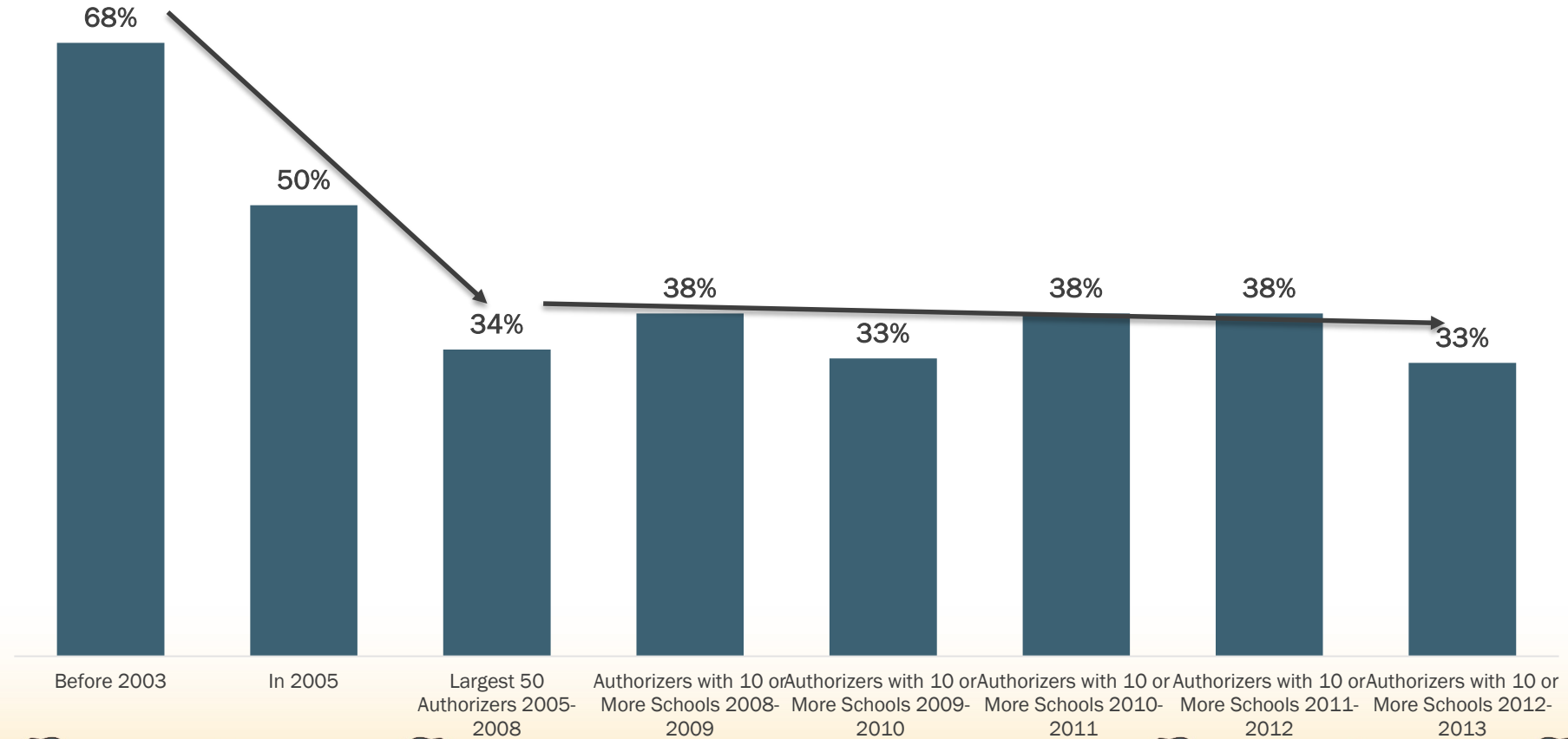
“IF YOU DON’T WANT TO CLOSE A
BAD CHARTER SCHOOL, DON’T
OPEN IT IN THE FIRST PLACE.”

GERARD ROBINSON

FORMER FLORIDA COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION



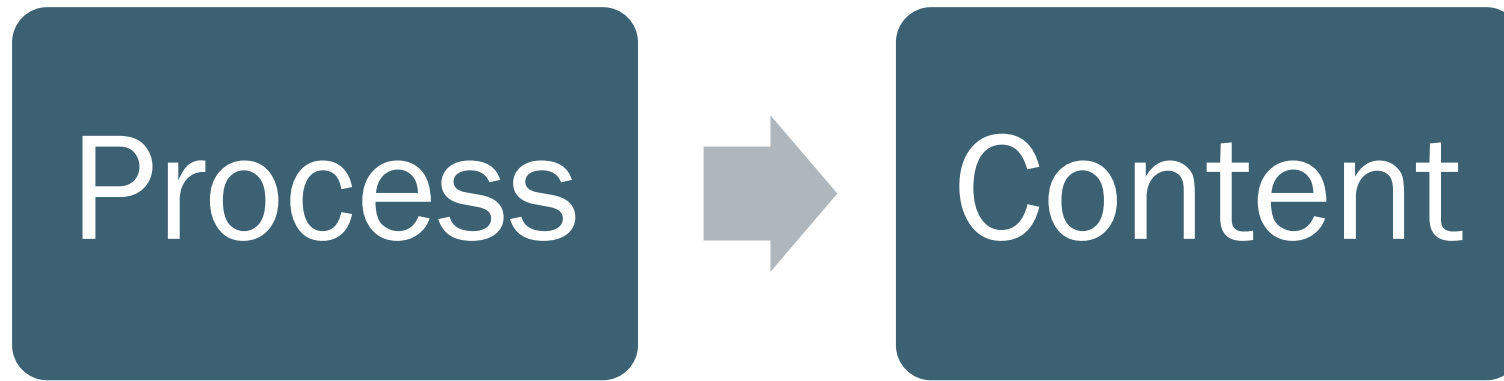
NATIONAL TRENDS IN APPLICATION APPROVAL RATES



FUNDAMENTALS OF APPLICATION DECISION-MAKING



APPLICATIONS: THE NEED TO DIG DEEPER

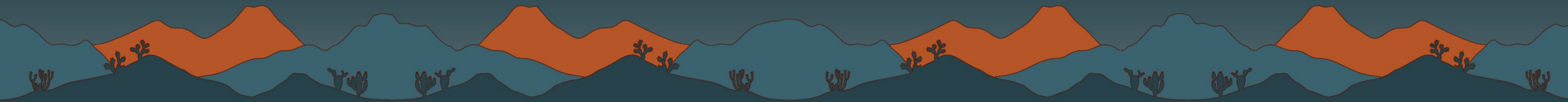


TAKE NOTE!

- 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.

Use your professional judgment!

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

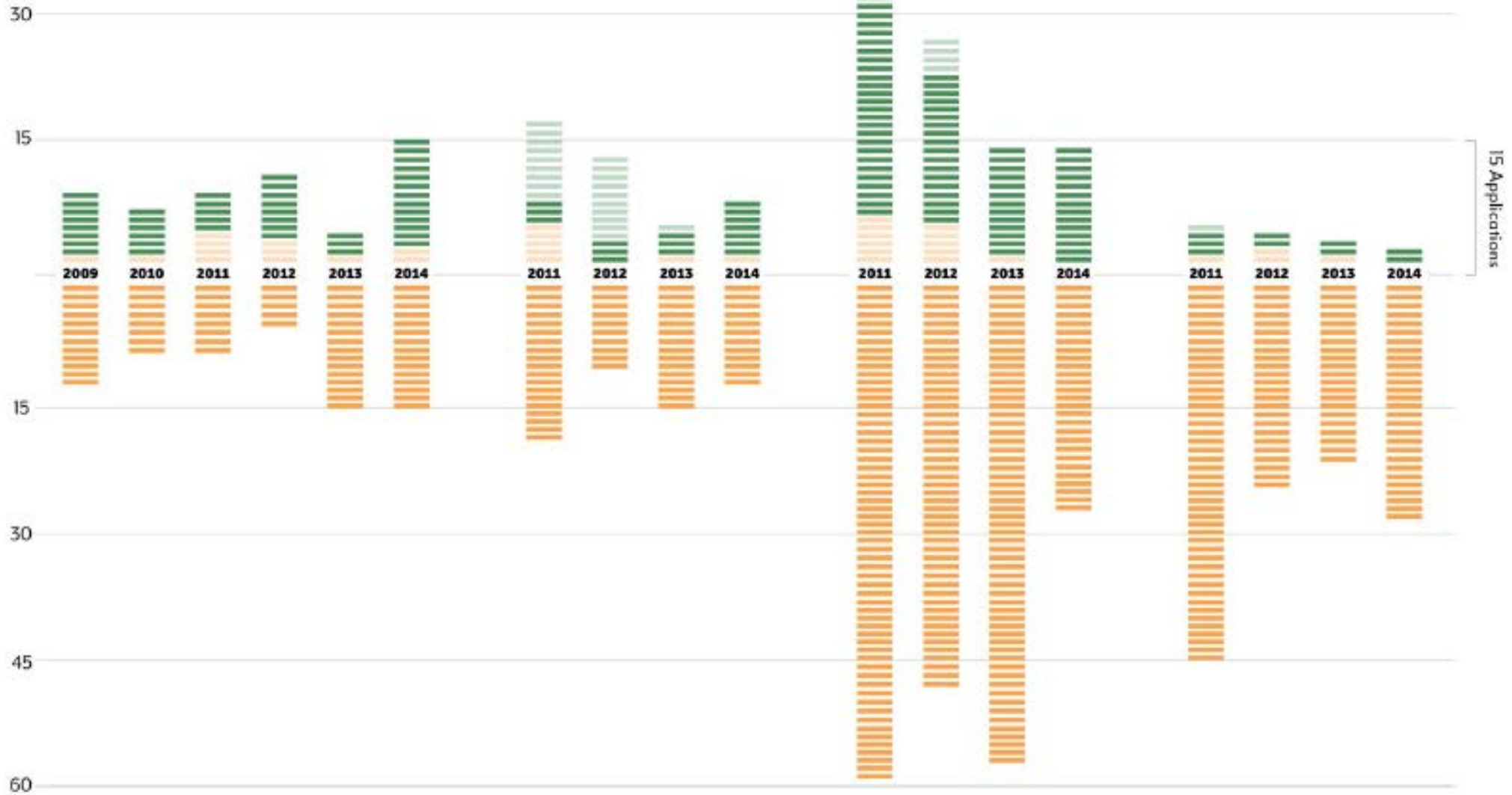
Is it possible to **identify easy-to-spot and hard-to-game risk factors** in the written content of charter applications that increase the chance that the proposed charter school will struggle academically in its first years?

Colorado

Indiana

North Carolina

Texas



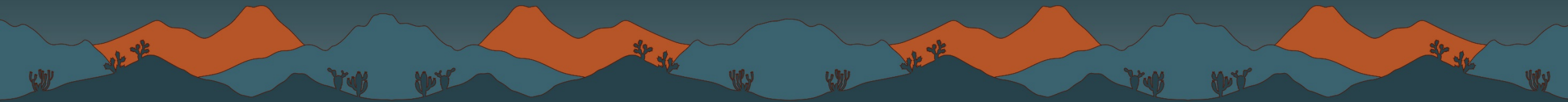
CANDIDATE RISK FACTORS

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.

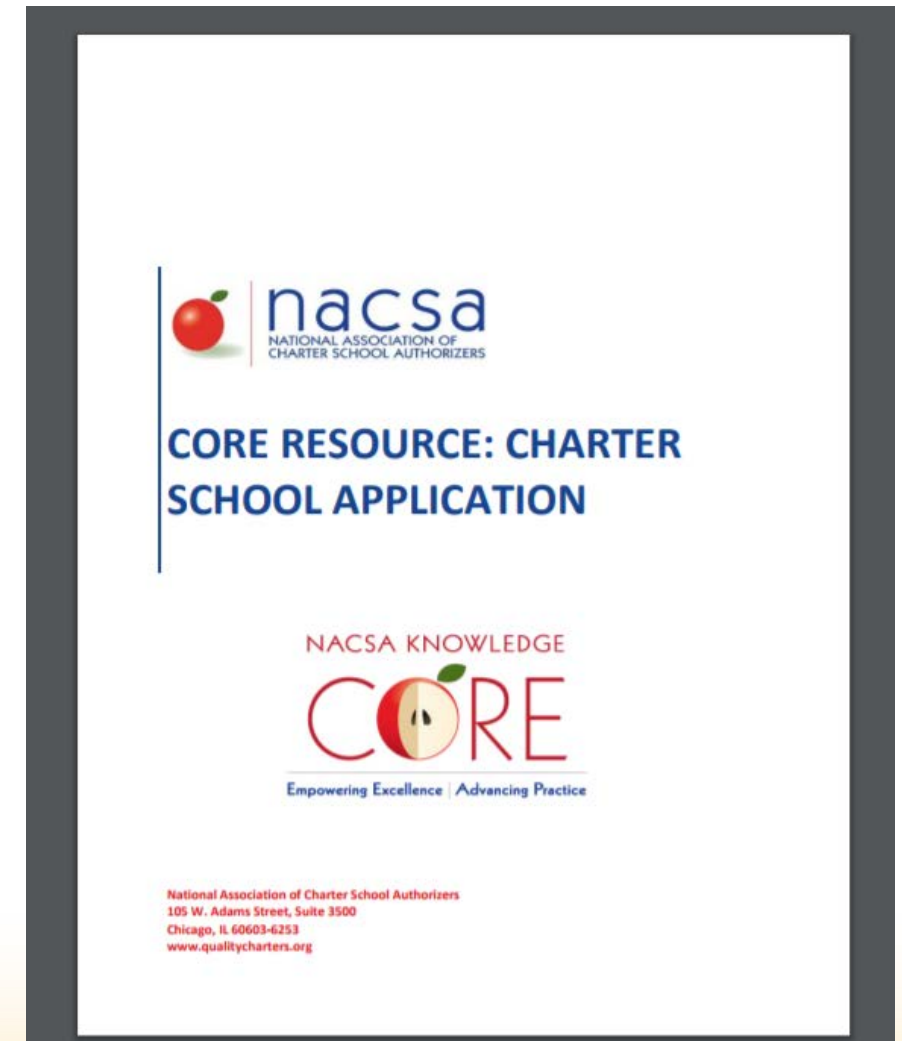
AUTHORIZER REACTION

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

Viable start-up budget

Processes for financial
planning, accounting,
purchasing, and payroll

Contingency
plan

Thoughtful
assumptions

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

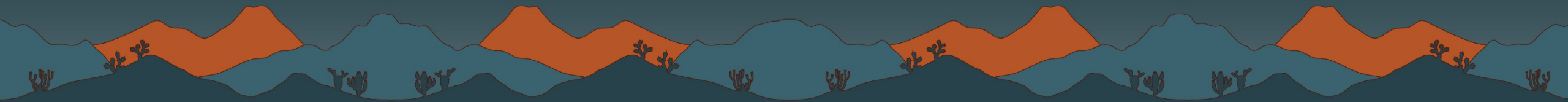
Serving student with special needs

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*



RISK FACTORS FOR LOW PERFORMANCE

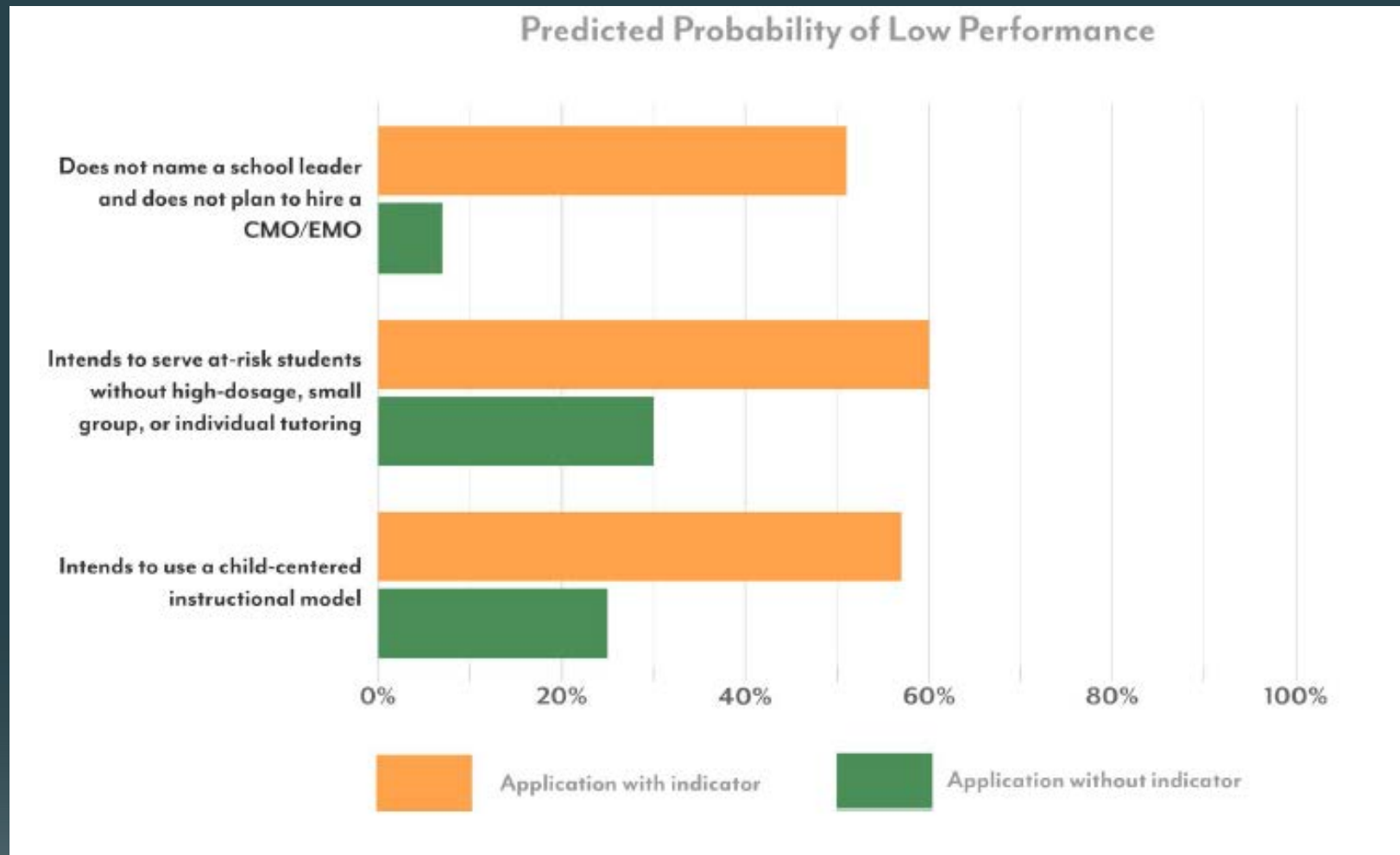
Finding 2: Despite the high percentage of applications that were rejected, there were 3 factors in approved applications that increased the chance that the proposed schools would be low-performing

Stand-alone
school does not
name a school
leader

High-risk
students; low-
dose support

Child-centered
academic model

RISK FACTORS FOR LOW PERFORMANCE



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.

ADDING RIGOR – SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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.

ADDING RIGOR: AT-RISK POPULATIONS

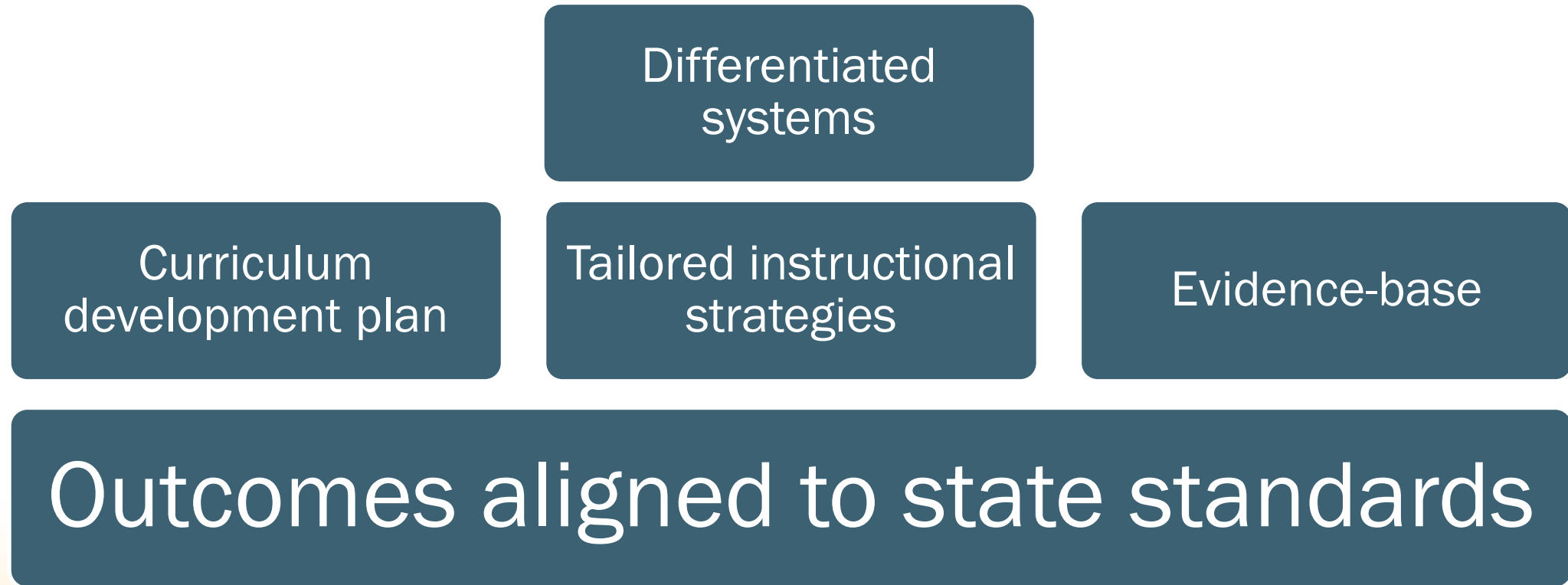
- Sound explanation of **evidence** from which the projection of anticipated special populations was derived.
- Comprehensive and compelling plan for **appropriate identification of students who are performing below grade level** or at risk of academic failure or dropping out, and a detailed plan for 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



USE YOUR INTERVIEW – DIGGING DEEPER ON CAPACITY

Topic	Question
School Leadership	What are the primary qualifications you are looking for in the school leader?
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?

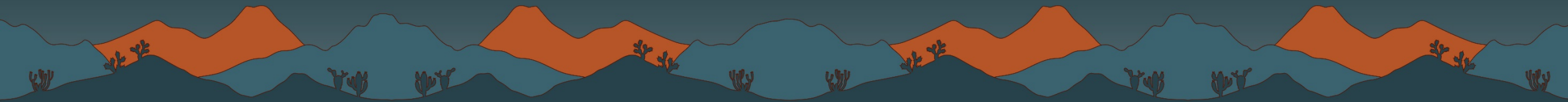
STUDY LIMITATIONS

- 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?





nacsa

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

