

# HOW CAN SYSTEMS ENSURE THAT AUTHORIZERS ARE HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

## WHY AUTHORIZING MATTERS

Good charter school policy must be part of the solution to address our public education system's greatest problem: too many children lack access to a transformative education. Getting authorizing policy right is critical because good authorizing has the power to transform the lives of not just a few children, but millions.

When done well, authorizing is a catalyst for charter school quality and growth. Unfortunately, the quality of charter laws and authorizing institutions varies across the country, leading to uneven charter school availability and quality. **With the presence of multiple authorizers comes the need for accountability that ensures all authorizers are prepared for the requirements of the job and doing right by children and taxpayers.**

NACSA's policy resources provide information that helps stakeholders understand common authorizing issues and increase the number of high-quality schools available to their students.

## WHY AUTHORIZER ACCOUNTABILITY MATTERS

There are currently more than 1,000 charter authorizers responsible for monitoring over 7,000 charter schools nationwide. Professional experience, practices, and institutional commitment vary widely among authorizers, leading to inconsistencies in charter quality and growth.

Authorizers play a critical role in balancing rigor with autonomy to ensure that the charter sector serves the interests of students, families, and taxpayers. Therefore, holding authorizers accountable for the results of their portfolios of schools is an essential part of a high-quality public school system that includes charter schools.

### ***State policy should endorse professional standards for quality charter school authorizing.***

State policy should require all authorizers to meet high standards, ideally based on NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*.

### ***A state entity should evaluate authorizers on their practices as well as the performance of their school portfolio.***

In most circumstances, the entity responsible for evaluating authorizers is the state's Department of Education (sometimes known as a State Education Agency, or SEA). In some states, responsibility for conducting evaluations may rest with other parties, such as a legislative committee.

### ***New authorizers should apply, or at least register, in order to authorize.***

Only institutions that have a strong desire, understanding, and commitment to quality should be able to authorize charter schools. Therefore, new school district authorizers and non-district authorizers should be required to apply to the state for the ability to authorize. It is then the state's responsibility to hold authorizers accountable and ensure that the authorizing market does not become oversaturated.

### ***A state entity should enforce consequences for authorizers with bad practices or those with a high proportion of persistently failing schools.***

Authorizers should face sanctions including removal of authority to authorize schools, removal of authority to authorize new schools, and transfer of schools to other authorizers. However, a state policy of authorizer sanctions is counterproductive for the charter sector when there is only one authorizer in the state or particular jurisdiction. In states with limited authorizers, standards can still inform expectations and evaluations, but they must enable efforts to improve practices rather than harming applicants' or charter schools' access to authorizers.

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