

A good education provides opportunities for children to fully develop and enjoy a good life. Yet too many children in America don't have those opportunities because they don't have the chance to attend a good school. This is a crisis with devastating and lasting implications for today's children and future generations.

Charter schools can be a big part of the solution by providing many more children with the chance to attend a great school. We need to be honest, however: many charter schools are excellent, but some are failing. While we have a moral obligation to provide more children with an opportunity to attend new, good schools, we also have an obligation to not have them attend a failing school.

NACSA is working with a broad coalition to give one million more children an opportunity for a better school and a better life by closing failing charter schools and opening many more great charter schools.

Providing more seats in great charter schools requires charter school laws that promote smarter growth and stronger accountability. Every community is unique, and new policies need to reflect the history and experiences of each state. While addressing these contextual factors, NACSA is advocating for the following policies in state charter laws.

Smarter Growth

Establish an alternative authorizer. Each state should establish a statewide authorizer whose sole function is to authorize charter schools. Authorizing is complex and requires expertise, scale, and capacity. Yet, across the country, we have too many small authorizers, including many school districts and state education departments that authorize only a few schools. As a result, these authorizers often lack the expertise and capacity to evaluate proposals well or to adequately oversee their schools. Frequently, they make decisions based on politics, not solid analysis. Some states also have too many authorizers, and many of them are too small and don't implement strong practices. A statewide authorizer has the best opportunity to develop sufficient capacity and expertise to make smart approval decisions and maintain high standards. Having only one type of authorizer is too limiting; but having too many authorizers undercuts quality. A mix of a small number of authorizers, including one statewide authorizer, best promotes high-quality growth.

Require statutory authorizer standards. In the twenty years since the first charter schools opened, we have learned a lot about what it takes to approve, monitor, and renew charter schools. That knowledge is reflected in well-established professional standards. States can promote high-quality charter schools by requiring authorizers to follow these professional standards. Authorizers that follow national authorizer standards are better able to decide which applicants are likely to succeed. They are also more likely to protect taxpayer dollars and look after student interests, such as special education services and fair admissions processes. Already identified by name in many state charter school laws, legislatures should require authorizers to meet or exceed NACSA's own *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*.

Strong Accountability

Hold Schools Accountable

Define in statute performance expectations for school renewal. Too many charter schools continue to operate despite years of failing performance because too many state laws do not define what level of performance is expected. States that have public school accountability systems that contain multiple measures should automatically close a charter school that repeatedly fails to meet minimum performance thresholds, unless the authorizer makes an affirmative decision to keep the school open because of special circumstances.

Allow authorizers to close schools that fail to meet the expectations set for them in their charter contract. Many state charter laws currently require authorizers to renew schools that are making *reasonable* progress toward, but not meeting, the academic, financial, or operational requirements of their charter contract. That standard is too vague, too low, and needs to be raised. Authorizers should have the option not to renew the charters of schools that fail to meet the terms of their charter contract.

Hold Authorizers Accountable

Hold authorizers accountable for the performance of their schools and their authorizing practices. The purpose of authorizing is to establish and support excellent charter schools. Authorizers should be accountable for the quality of schools they approve and oversee. Authorizers that repeatedly approve new schools that fail and allow those failing schools to stay open should lose the ability to approve more schools and, possibly, lose their authorizing powers all together.