NACSA and AEI Launch Monograph Detailing the Promise and Challenges of Charter School Growth

For Release:  
April 6, 2009

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National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) President Greg Richmond along with Director of Education Policy Studies Fredrick M. Hess of the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) unveiled a new monograph today entitled, "Learning to Succeed at Scale," which explores ways the charter school sector can invest in and develop high quality schools and replicate high quality authorizing practices.

The monograph, funded by NACSA and authored by Hess and Monica Higgins of Harvard’s Graduate School of Education, was the subject of a discussion hosted at AEI that also featured charter school leaders Mike Feinberg, co-founder of the KIPP Academies and Donald Hense, Founder and Chairman of the Board of the Friendship Public Charter School in Washington, DC.

“This monograph looks beyond traditional aspects of charter school authorizing, examining lessons from the broader world of education and the private sector and answering big questions about how charter organizations manage their internal structures and replicate quality practices,” said Richmond. "Charter school authorizers are in a unique position to bring high quality school operations to scale. It is time to meet this challenge."

"Even the best charter schools and authorizers too rarely look beyond the world of K-12 for smart ways to manage quality control or growth. Instead, they rely on culture, strong personalities, and good intentions in their efforts to boost their impact and serve more children. We have tried to offer a more strategic, useful approach to growing the provision of excellent charter schools at scale," said Hess.

In this monograph, Higgins and Hess suggest strategies that nontraditional educational organizations can use to help themselves “grow smart,” especially when it comes to talent management. The most successful charter ventures to date have been boutique-style operations that are extraordinarily reliant on talent and passion, philanthropic funding, and exhausting work schedules.

Higgins and Hess propose that in order to grow effectively, these ventures must first reconsider, and appropriately retool, the factors that fueled early success. Specifically, ventures would benefit from creating ‘intrapreneurial’ roles to challenge talented employees, building external social capital networks, adopting an ecosystem perspective toward alumni, and organizing to learn.

As more districts seek to use independent public schools to invigorate their portfolio of schools, the onus is on the charter sector to improve practices and innovate educational options. Some of the most successful authorizers are in a dialogue with their most effective school groups to create a blueprint for a robust expansion strategy. Scale is the goal, and the charter school sector must be willing to address it.

To obtain copies of the monograph, please visit http://www.qualitycharters.org/files/public/Hess_Higgins_monograph.pdf