

NACSA releases recommendations on accountability measures for alternative charter schools

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers ([NACSA](#)) today released *Anecdotes Aren't Enough: An Evidence-Based Approach to Accountability for Alternative Charter Schools*, a [report](#) that sets out recommendations for appropriate accountability systems for this growing segment of the American education sector.

Alternative schools—whether charter or traditional—are schools whose mission is to serve special populations including adjudicated youth, dropouts, pregnant teens, and recovering addicts.

Over the years states have struggled with defining and implementing accountability systems for the academic performance of these schools. Charter school authorizers, the entities that approve and oversee charter schools, have been left to make high-stakes decisions about these schools without adequate guidance from state policies. Addressing this issue is critical to the success of NACSA's [One Million Lives](#) campaign to improve educational options for the nation's children.

In order to assist the charter sector in navigating these difficult waters, NACSA convened a working group comprised of authorizers, operators, and researchers in order to define the parameters of good practice. Their recommendations are the centerpiece of today's report.

"School leaders serving disadvantaged youth often claim that 'Our kids are different, and standardized tests can't measure what we do.'" said NACSA Senior Advisor [Nelson Smith](#) who led the organization's working group. "But authorizers have to hold all charter schools accountable for performance. Our report makes clear that there are ways to do this job with rigor, even for schools whose students may not do well on conventional measures."

The report recommends that authorizers:

- Set a high bar when identifying a school as an alternative school;
- Be open to different but detailed approaches;
- Provide specialized oversight, tailoring oversight and monitoring to the circumstances of alternative schools;
- Make the charter contract the central instrument of accountability forming a solid basis for evaluating the alternative charters with academic and non-academic goals, as well as both traditional and non-traditional measures of academic performance.

According to Smith, "It is important for authorizers to judge performance using a range of measures, and to set targets that focus on the improvement in student learning and success in moving toward college and career readiness."

Smith said there needed to be a recognition that these schools engage students differently than traditional schools. A one size fits all approach, he added, does not work.

The next stage of this project will address needed changes in state policies that affect accountability for alternative charters.



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The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is committed to advancing excellence and accountability in the charter school sector and to increasing the number of high-quality charter schools across the nation. To accomplish this mission, NACSA works to improve the policies and practices of authorizers—the organizations designated to approve, monitor, renew, and, if necessary, close charter schools. NACSA provides training, consulting, and policy guidance to authorizers. It also advocates for laws and policies that raise the bar for excellence among authorizers and the schools they charter. In late 2012, NACSA launched its One Million Lives campaign to give one million more children the opportunity to attend a great school. Visit www.qualitycharters.org

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