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NACSA Says American Enterprise Institute Report on Charter School Application Process Goes too Far, Calls for Focus on Balanced Authorizing Practices

Chicago, Ill. – The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) released the following statement in response to the recommendations in a report on authorizer accountability released today by the American Enterprise Institute:

“The American Enterprise Institute’s report, ‘The Paperwork Pile-up: Measuring the Burden of Charter School Applications,’ identifies an important challenge facing the charter community, but if implemented, the report’s recommendations would go too far and would disrupt the critical balance between autonomy and accountability.

NACSA has helped our nation’s charter school authorizers improve how they do their jobs for over 15 years. We know that charter schools innovate and excel when they have autonomy and that the interests of students and taxpayers are protected when authorizers ask the right questions. That’s why the principles and standards we continue to hone include practices that both protect charter schools’ autonomy and that help protect the rights of students and the interests of taxpayers.

While we agree with the spirit of the paper, its recommendations would tilt current authorizing practices too far in the direction of autonomy and jeopardize students and taxpayers in the process. For example, it asserts that requests for a school to explain its discipline policy are “onerous and inappropriate,” as are requests to address student health services and safety. Requests for a school to present a two-year operational budget and a school calendar are also considered either onerous or inappropriate.

NACSA believes it is appropriate and completely reasonable to understand the operating budget of any organization that will receive millions of taxpayer dollars, including a charter school. Given recent concerns over equity related to school discipline, authorizers have every right to know a school’s intended discipline policy before granting public funds to open a school.

Charter schools and authorizing are receiving increasing attention from interest groups of many persuasions. Some are calling for increased regulation of charter schools. Others, like AEI, are calling for less regulation. None of the groups calling for more and less regulation has the experience working with charter schools and authorizers that informs NACSA’s own [Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing](#). NACSA has conducted 60 in-depth, formative evaluations of authorizers’ practices and managed the evaluation of nearly 500 charter school proposals. We welcome the discussion about how to streamline the charter application process and agree that some authorizers’ application processes have become too lengthy and burdensome.

To enable the creation of new charter schools that serve students well, it is essential that we maintain the balance of autonomy and accountability. Too much or too little of one or the other jeopardizes all charter schools and, more importantly, jeopardizes the students those schools are intended to serve.

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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