



WHAT ARE AUTHORIZERS STRONG (AND WEAK) AT?

RESEARCH FINDINGS ON AUTHORIZING

Meghan Hokom – NCSRC
Sean Conlan – NACSA

Sherry Tracewski – NACSA
M. Karega Rausch – NACSA

SESSION AGENDA

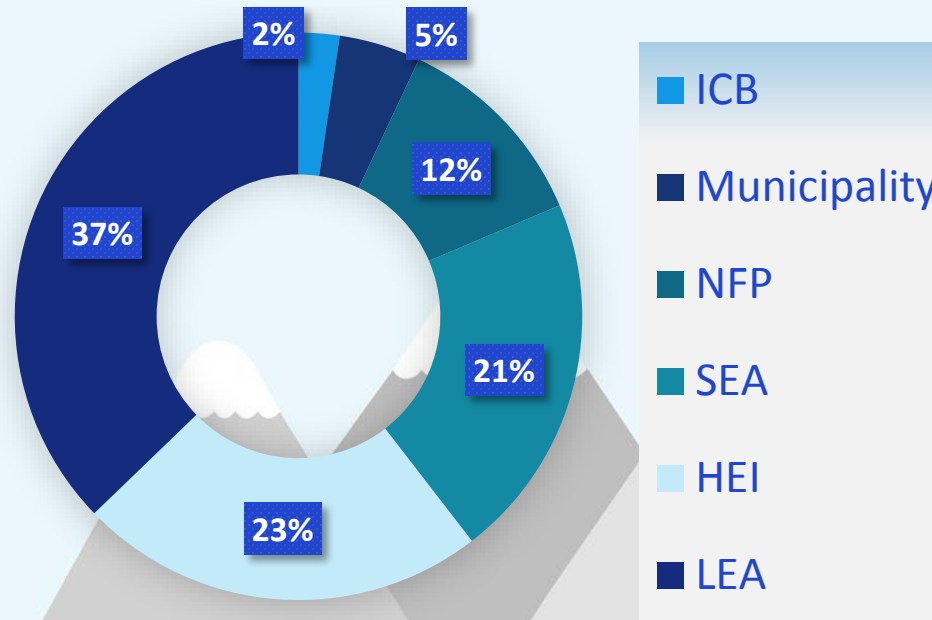
- Open Conversation About Initial Things We See in the Data
 - Treat this session as initial results we should collectively examine, challenge, and discuss
- Present and Discuss Overall Findings
- Present deeper dive on strengths and challenges in performance management and discuss
 - School openings
 - Ongoing monitoring
 - Intervention/revocation

Member Check:
Process researchers use to (in)validate findings from people (a) involved in the study and/or (b) close to the findings



ABOUT NACSA'S AUTHORIZER EVALUATIONS: SAMPLE

- 42 Authorizers (2009-2014)
- 88% have 10 or more schools
- Authorizers currently oversee 52% of all charters and 43% of all students in the country
- Meaningful percentage among all authorizing types



ABOUT NACSA'S AUTHORIZER EVALUATIONS (CONT'D)

- Intensive formative assessment of professional practices
- Evaluated against criteria articulated in NACSA's Principles & Standards
- Examines 5 Broad Areas (and 29 sub-areas) of Authorizing Practice
 - Application Decision-Making
 - Performance Management Systems
 - Performance Based Accountability
 - Autonomy
 - Organizational Capacity

MOST RECENT DOMAINS AND SUB AREAS

1. Application Decision-Making

- Things like evaluating educational, organizational, and business/financial plan; applicant capacity, decision alignment

2. Performance Management Systems

- Things like ongoing monitoring, school intervention/revocation, renewal, closure

3. Performance Based Accountability

- Things like performance based expectations and systems specific to educational, financial, and organizational performance

4. Autonomy

- Things like contractual autonomy and autonomy in the educational, financial, operational areas

5. Organizational Capacity

- Things like strategic planning, human capital systems and processes, organizational structure, leadership and decision-making capacity

MIXED METHOD ANALYSIS

- Safal
 - Quantitative Analysis
 - Description of Domains and Sub-domain differences
- NACSA
 - Qualitative Analysis
 - Description of Practice Strengths and Weaknesses

QUANTITATIVE: DATA ARE TYPICALLY NUMBERS

QUALITATIVE: DATA ARE TYPICALLY WORDS

MIXED METHOD: USES BOTH QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DATA

KEEPING IT INTERACTIVE

Of the four primary areas listed below, which do you think authorizers may be (a) doing generally well in, and (b) struggle with?

1. Application Decision-Making

- Things like evaluating educational, organizational, and business/financial plan; applicant capacity, decision alignment

2. Performance Management Systems and Accountability

- Things like ongoing monitoring, school intervention/revocation, renewal, closure, and performance based accountability in educational, financial, and organizational performance

3. Autonomy

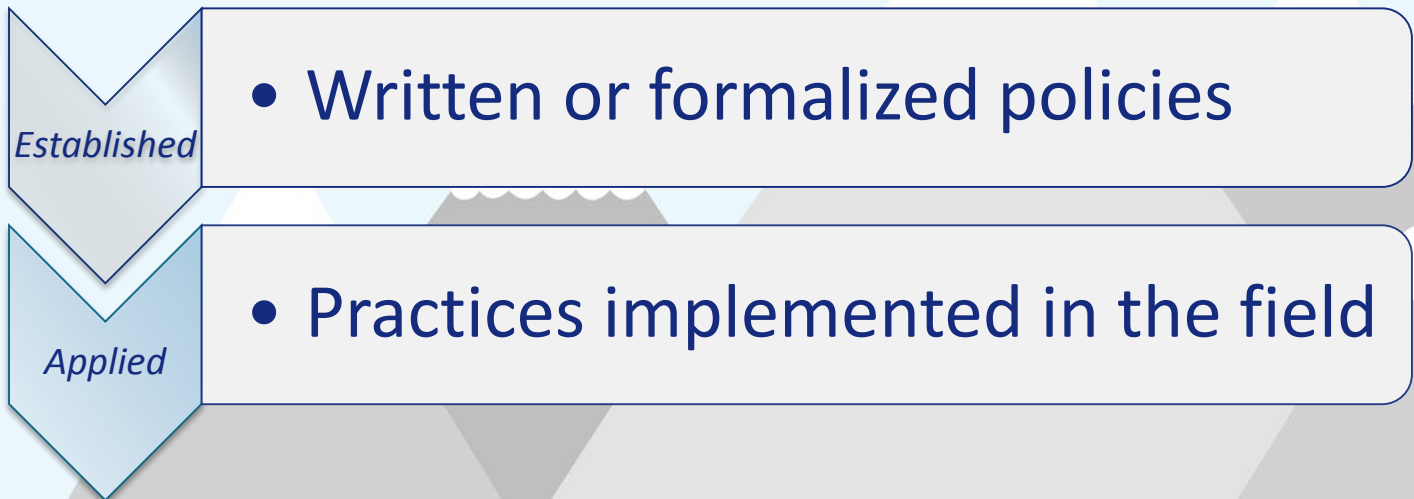
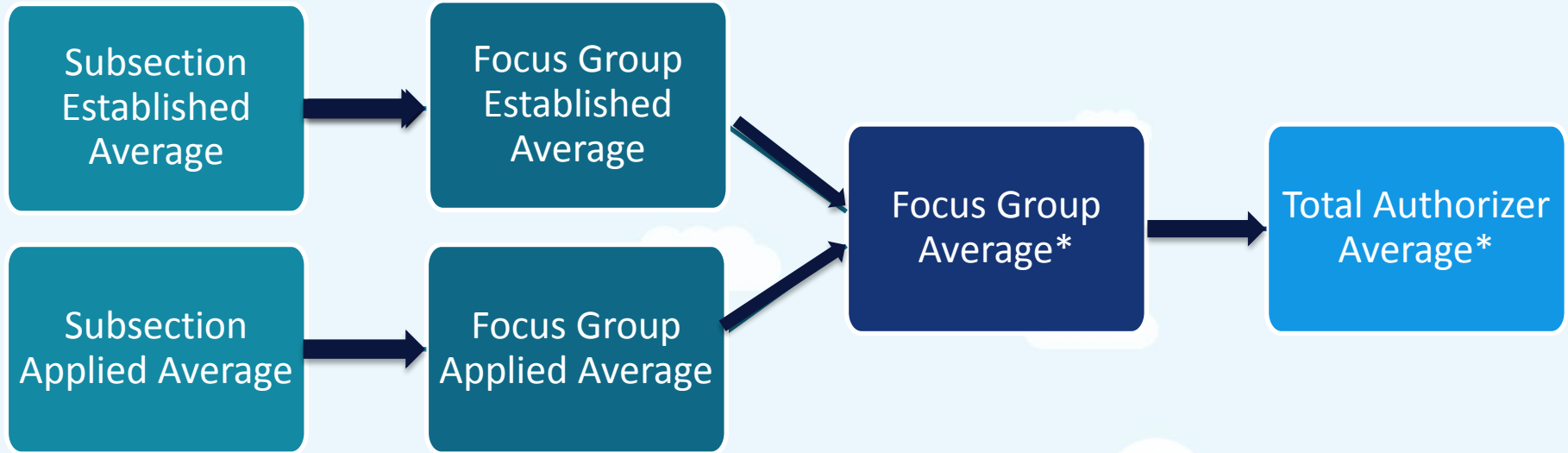
- Things like ensuring autonomy in educational and financial systems, as well as providing differentiated oversight based on performance

4. Organizational Capacity

- Things like strategic planning, human capital systems and processes, organizational structure, leadership and decision-making capacity



RATING PROCESS



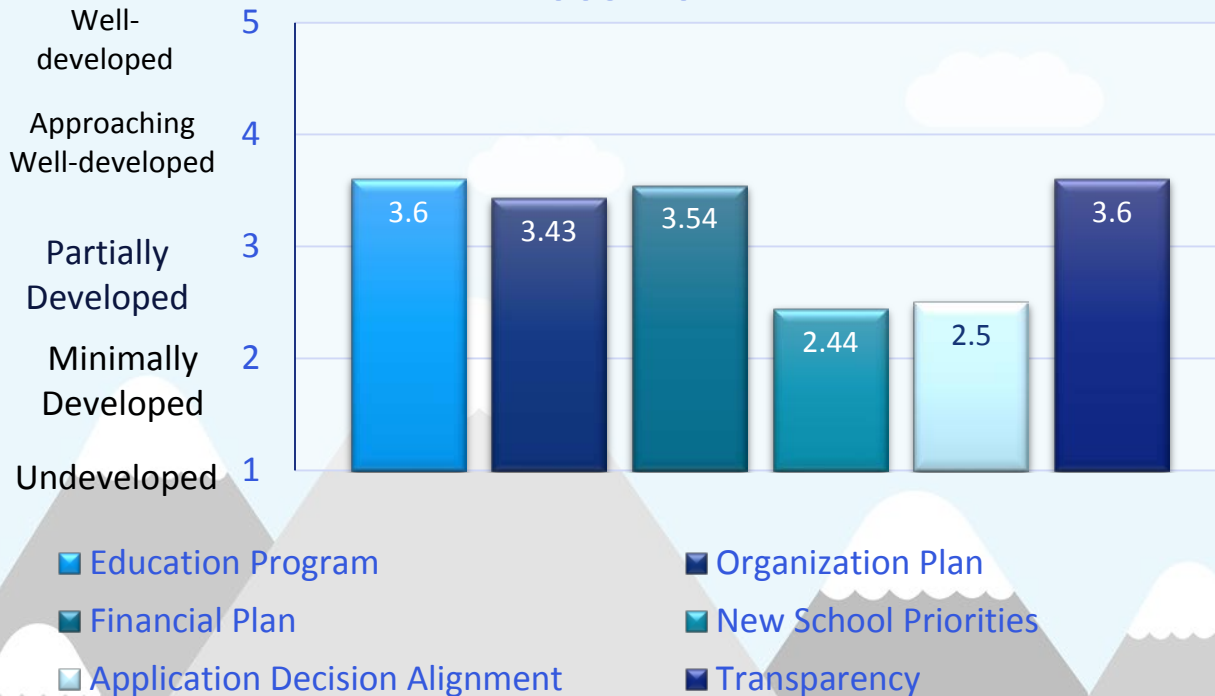
FINDINGS: FOCUS AREAS

Overall and Focus Area Averages



FINDINGS: APPLICATION DECISION-MAKING

Ratings on Common Subsections Between 2009-2014



Key Takeaways

- 37% Authorizers have Approaching or Well-Developed ratings
- Application Decision Alignment & New School Priorities were lowest
- Established & Applied streams were statistically different – 60% correlation

FINDINGS: PERFORMANCE-BASED ACCOUNTABILITY

Focus Group Overall vs. Authorizer Type Overall Ratings

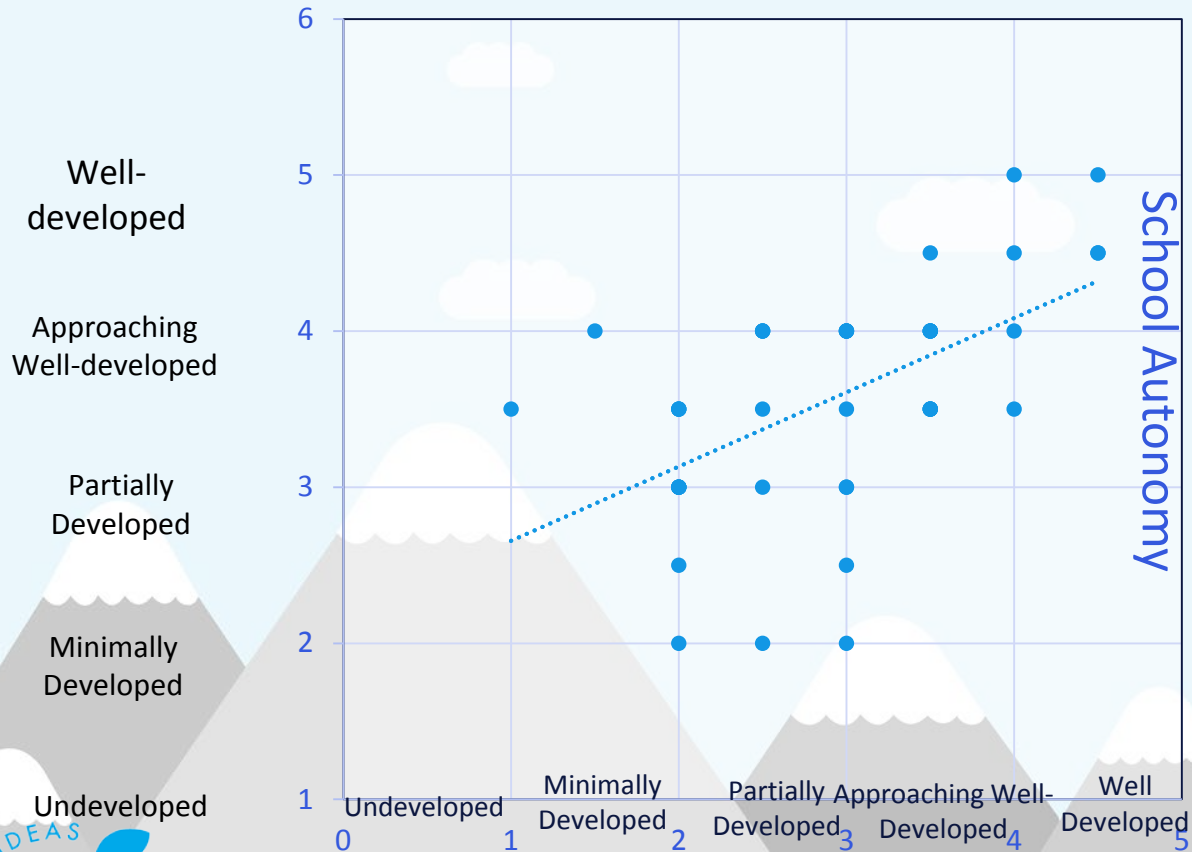


Key Takeaways

- 16% of Authorizers have Approaching or Well-Developed ratings
- 42% of Authorizers have Partially-Developed ratings
- Municipalities' ratings & higher were different than other authorizers

FINDINGS: SCHOOL AUTONOMY

Performance-Based Accountability



Key Takeaways

- Positively Correlated with PBA ratings.
- Age, Size, & Type were not significantly correlated.

FINDINGS: ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

Youngest and oldest authorizers were ranked highest

Overall Authorizer Average: 3.5

Partially Developed

Authorizers which received Approaching Well-Developed were in the top 6 of all authorizers

REFLECTIONS, SURPRISES, & KEY TAKEAWAYS

Further exploration into established and applied application decision alignment.

As school autonomy ratings rose, so did the performance-based accountability ratings.

Transparency in Performance-Based Accountability Operations were lower than Application Decision Making.

Looking at Qualitative Findings: Going Deeper to the Practice Level

METHOD AND PROCESS

- Team of Three Researchers
- Read and coded each evaluation
- Resulted in more than 6,600 excerpts, mapped to twenty nine different codes
- Every excerpt analyzed for thematic strengths and weaknesses
- Findings provide practice-level thematic descriptions

Going Deeper in Performance Management #1: **School Openings**

Assessment Criteria for School Openings

“The authorizer ensures that approved schools are prepared adequately for opening.”

SCHOOL OPENING STRENGTHS

- Pre-opening handbooks or checklists
 - Includes required tasks and target dates
 - Individuals responsible for requirements are identified
 - Resources for schools
- Specific Requirements
 - Enrollment
 - Facilities
- Systems for assessing progress on pre-opening requirements
- Consequences for not meeting target dates
 - Increased monitoring
 - Drop-dead dates
 - Delay/revocation

SCHOOL OPENING WEAKNESSES

- Complete absence of pre-opening processes
 - No timelines/deadlines
 - Not enough time (and in some cases too much time) between approval and school opening
- Key requirements not established or are insufficient
 - Not fully described
 - Enrollment targets not high enough
- No system for assessing progress on pre-opening requirements
- Requirements not enforced
 - Not held to target deadlines
 - Allowed to open without completing requirements
 - Not linked to contracts

REFLECTIONS, SURPRISES, AND TAKE-AWAYS

- Authorizer support of schools during pre-opening phase
- Wide variation in practice
- Opening delays / Revocation

Going Deeper in Performance Management #2: **Ongoing Monitoring**

Assessment Criteria for Ongoing Monitoring

“The authorizer has an effective process for monitoring education, financial, and organizational performance of the schools it authorizes.”

ONGOING MONITORING: KEY FINDINGS

Key Strengths

Alignment between monitoring systems/areas, and expectations as articulated in charter, performance framework etc.

- Schools know what authorizer is looking for – and importantly what they are not looking for
- “No surprises”: Clarity on what is being monitored, how, and what consequences/commendations may include

Wide variety in monitoring methods (typically used strategically)

- Electronic software (to reduce in-person burden), annual reports, attending governing board meetings, annual calendar/schedule of reporting/monitoring

Dedicated staff responsible for doing and/or overseeing monitoring functions

- Typically staff that does both monitoring and intervention
- Sometimes staff oversee outsourced functions



ONGOING MONITORING: KEY FINDINGS

Key Weaknesses

No monitoring policy or clearly specified expectations

- No framework, protocols, or other guiding criteria for interventions
- Reactionary to any “problem” that may come up
- Schools have no idea how they are doing and/or what they may be held accountable for, especially when the authorizer has a “finding”

Misalignment between monitoring systems/areas, and expectations as articulated in charter, performance framework etc.

- Schools dinged for things they didn’t even know they could be dinged for

Limited staff capacity (and training) for executing monitoring system

- “Triage Mode”
- High turnover (schools don’t know who to submit information to)
- System is idiosyncratic to staff member executing it; limited implementation consistency

No actions/consequences when problems arise



SITE VISITS: STRENGTHS & WEAKNESSES

Key Strengths	Key Weaknesses
Interviews with many stakeholders (parents, board members, staff, parents, students)	Examining inputs (e.g. teacher questioning techniques, classroom management, lesson materials)
Observations of board meetings, classrooms (for consistency with charter agreement), facility areas (especially cafeteria, restrooms)	Number and structure not sustainable (inadequate staff capacity; not sustainable as portfolio grows b/c labor intensive)
Post-visit information sharing from protocol aligned to expectations	Authorizing staff without expertise or training in site visits; also noted that these folks were also evaluating inputs
Detailed report – including summary assessment – back to school in a timely manner	Informal feedback; no clear picture for the school (or authorizer) on how a school is doing

Going Deeper in Performance Management #3:

School Intervention/Revocation

Assessment Criteria for School Intervention/ Revocation

“The authorizer has effective policies and practices for school intervention and revocation and conducts merit-based interventions, including revocation where appropriate, in response to clearly identified deficiencies in the school’s record of educational, organizational and/or financial performance.”

STRENGTHS

- Common Ranking System Used
 - Three Tiers most common
- Customization of interventions
 - Extends to when problems arise outside/inside tiered system
 - Authorizers are smart in how they are doing this
- Clear method of escalation if problems not resolved
- Immediate revocation for certain triggers
- Criteria specified for several areas

WEAKNESSES

- Lack of an intervention and/or revocation policy
- Among those with policy:
 - Implementation issues
 - No guidance
 - Criteria are not on contract language, law, or policy
 - Intervention criteria unclear or too broad
 - Practice very informal and reactive
- No intervention process for academics
- Weak monitoring and oversight

REFLECTIONS, SURPRISES, AND TAKE-AWAYS

- Underlying issues:
 - Poor or non-existing guiding policies
 - Staff capacity
 - Philosophical differences
- Customized intervention strategies

Let's Talk

- What surprised you?
- What resonated?
- What do you disagree with?