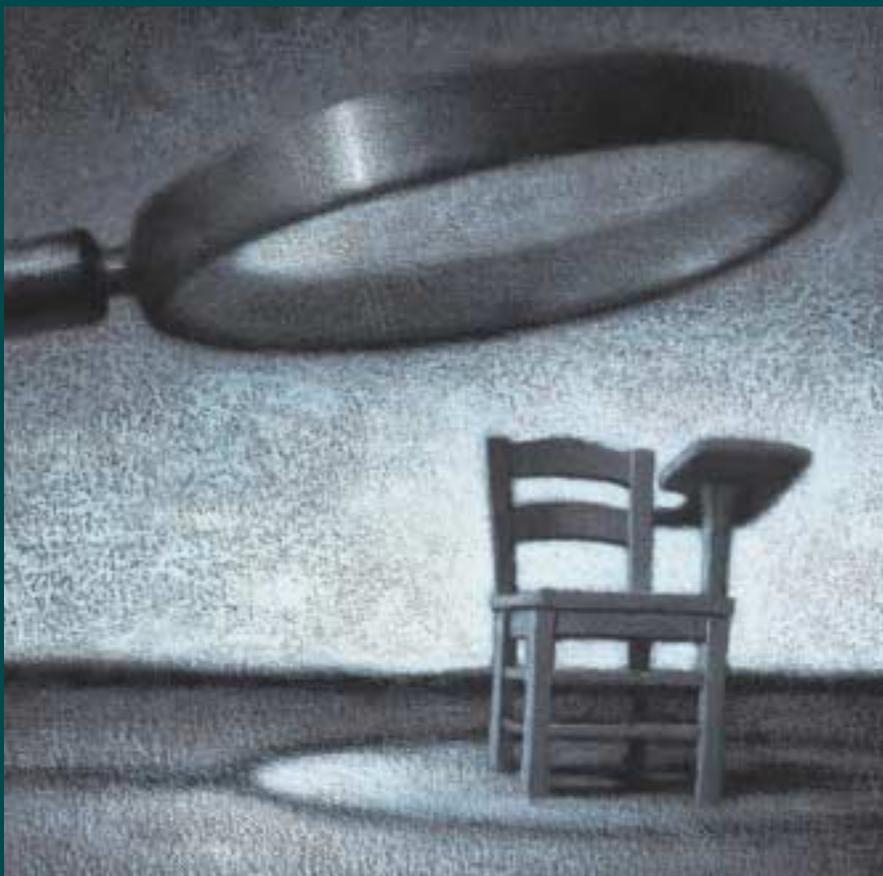


# TRENDS

IN CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING



BY REBECCA GAU

FOREWORD BY MICHAEL J. PETRILLI AND CHESTER E. FINN, JR.

MAY 2006



THOMAS B. FORDHAM  
INSTITUTE

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## ... TABLE OF CONTENTS ...

Executive Summary ..... v

Foreword ..... vii

Introduction ..... 1

### SECTION ONE

Major Findings ..... 10

### SECTION TWO

Local Education Agencies ..... 14

State Education Agencies ..... 17

Higher Education Institutions ..... 20

County/Intermediate Agencies ..... 22

Nonprofit Organizations ..... 24

Independent Chartering Boards ..... 26

Municipal Authorizers ..... 28

Conclusions ..... 30

### APPENDICES

#### **Appendix A:**

Advisory Committee, Focus Group, and Interview Participants ..... 31

#### **Appendix B:**

Comparison of Authorizer Types on Selected Topics,  
including Open Ended Questions ..... 32

#### **Appendix C:**

Survey Items Included in Charter Authorizer Continuum ..... 36

... FIGURES AND CHARTS ...

Table 1: Survey questions and rationale for data-driven decisionmaking . . . . . 2

Table 2: Survey questions and rationale for sound working relations . . . . . 4

Table 3: Survey questions and rationale for skilled personnel . . . . . 5

Table 4: Survey questions and rationale for adequate resources and autonomy . . . 6

Table 5: Survey questions and rationale for parent and community input . . . 6

Table 6: Authorizer types by size category . . . . . 8

Table 7: Survey response rate by authorizer type . . . . . 9

Table 8: Approval rates for charter applications . . . . . 10

Table 9: Charter authorizers and the quality/compliance quadrants . . . . . 10

Table 10: Authorizer types and the quality/compliance quadrants . . . . . 11

Table 11: Authorizer size and the quality/compliance quadrants . . . . . 12

Table 12: Authorizers by size . . . . . 12

Table 13: Approval rates of LEA authorizers . . . . . 15

Table 14: Percentage of LEA funds by type . . . . . 15

Table 15: Are higher ed authorizers responsive to applicants? . . . . . 20

Table 16: Authorizing types and the five elements of effective  
charter authorizing . . . . . 30

Figure 1: Non-renewals are driven by low student achievement . . . . . 10

Figure 2: The quality/compliance quadrants . . . . . 11

Figure 3: Authorizer's first charter by year 13

Figure 4: Most LEAs began chartering in the late 1990s . . . . . 14

Figure 5: LEAs tend to sponsor a few schools each . . . . . 14

Figure 6: SEAs tend to be medium sized or large (n=13) . . . . . 17

Figure 7: Top three ways SEAs would use more staff (n=29) 19 . . . . . 19

## ... EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ...

Belatedly, policymakers and researchers are recognizing that quality charter schools depend on quality charter school authorizing. This report presents findings from a pioneering national examination of the organizations that sponsor, oversee, and hold accountable U.S. charter schools. Its primary aim is to describe and characterize these crucial but little-known organizations: What do they look like? How big are they? How do they go about their work? The result of this inquiry is a new a typology of charter school authorizers that includes, in alphabetical order:

- County/Regional/Intermediate Education Agencies
- Higher Education Institutions
- Independent Chartering Boards
- Local Education Agencies (school districts)
- Municipal Offices
- Nonprofit Organizations
- State Education Agencies

Each of these types is profiled against five elements of successful charter authorizing practice (as determined by an expert advisory group):

1. Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes;
2. Sound working relations between authorizer and school;
3. Skilled personnel;
4. Adequate resources and autonomy; and
5. Parent and community input.

In addition to giving readers a clearer picture of the major categories that U.S. charter-school authorizers fall under, this study also provides fresh insights on matters with policy implications for the charter movement:

## *National Trends*

1. Contrary to earlier reports, authorizers primarily “non-renew” charter school contracts because of poor academic performance.
2. Authorizers have grown choosier over time about approving schools, and not because of state-imposed caps on charter growth.
3. Unfortunately, almost half of all authorizers, particularly the smaller ones, exercise limited oversight of their schools.
4. Four-fifths of authorizers say they would use additional staff to monitor schools’ academics, and two-thirds would like additional technology to monitor accountability.
5. Authorizing is still new and dominated by small-scale, school-district sponsors.

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*Policymakers and researchers  
are recognizing that  
quality charter schools depend on  
quality charter school authorizing.*

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Charter school authorizers are highly varied, as this study shows, and some have both the resources and the will to do it well. Others appear to engage in this activity half-heartedly or reluctantly. Some types seem more able to practice quality authorizing than others—the nonprofit organizations and independent chartering boards included in this survey tend to score well on most counts, as do most of the larger authorizers—but good practices can be found in authorizers of all types and sizes. For all the variability, there are signs of the field’s growing commitment to quality, accountability, and results.

## ... FOREWORD ...

Over the past decade or so, we and others have often claimed that charter schools are the most promising innovations in American education. We were wrong. *Charter school authorizing* and the act of chartering schools are the most promising contemporary educational innovation.

After all, there's little you can find in the nation's charter schools that doesn't also exist somewhere in the vast and varied world of public and private schools. But the process of authorizing new schools—allowing them to open, overseeing their progress, shutting them down if necessary, but not actually running them—is entirely new. Moreover, it introduces the possibility of fostering quality schools via purposeful creation and replication rather than, as is too often the case today, viewing excellent schools as wondrous accidents that nobody really knows how to get more of.

Doing this right is hard. We've learned from Fordham's own experience authorizing schools in Ohio. But doing it right and doing it well are essential if charter schools are to thrive, and for the charter movement to succeed in fulfilling its great promise. We've also learned that it's chartering, more than lessons from charter schools themselves, that is most replicable by the traditional public school system.

Our appreciation for the critical role of charter authorizing dates to 2003 when the Fordham Institute released *Charter School Authorizing: Are States Making the Grade?* As implied by its title, that study examined state policies and practices, and for the most part, the unhappy answer to its core question turned out to be “no” or “not enough.” Few states had yet developed a conducive policy environment or sound infrastructure.

That study taught us to be concerned about authorizer red-tape and “compliance creep,” unsupportive (sometimes dysfunctional) state policy environments, and ill-prepared, even hostile local school board authorizers. Yet, given the state orientation of that study, it was not clear how individual authorizers or types of authorizers behaved in relation to these circumstances, much less which behaviors on the part of authorizers were most directly related to charter school quality.

The field has advanced since 2003. Policymakers and analysts have illuminated the key role that authorizers play, and they've examined authorizer behavior. For example, Bryan Hassel and Meghan Batdorff have studied the decisionmaking processes of a sample of authorizers and determined that they generally make the right calls (such as when to close a school), even if they don't always do so in a coherent way. More recently, Robin Lake of the Center for Reinventing Public Education

broke new ground by envisioning better accountability structures for authorizers themselves.

Still, big holes remain. Ultimately, state policymakers want to know which authorizer types—local school districts, departments of education, universities, etc.—tend to charter high-quality schools. If we knew with certainty, for example, that school districts make lousy authorizers and universities make great ones, we could advise legislators to set policy accordingly. Further, if we could identify concrete authorizer behavior that is related to school quality—such as effective techniques for screening start-up applications from would-be school operators — the field could adopt such “best practices” as its standard operating procedures. When

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*It's chartering, more than lessons from  
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launching the current study, we hoped that we could unlock such lessons and make a direct link between authorizers and their schools' student achievement.

Alas, we quickly learned from the best researchers and savviest methodologists in the country that this linkage is not yet possible. The greatest challenge is the lack of rich, longitudinal, comparable data that would permit this type of analysis. But there were other significant gaps. The field did not even have a solid description of itself: the number of authorizers; how they sort out by type; the range of their variations. Furthermore, there wasn't a well-developed hypothesis of how authorizer behavior would lead to quality charter schools and ultimately to strong student achievement. Disappointed but not despondent, we decided to fill these gaps as best we could. The result is the present study, with many fascinating findings of its own.

To tackle the research, we turned to Rebecca Gau, co-author of the previously mentioned 2003 report, who has researched education topics from teacher shortages to successful schools for Latino students. She holds a master's in Public Policy from Duke University, teaches statistics and research methods for two universities, and currently runs her own research shop — Goal One Research — in Arizona. Rebecca is a tireless analyst, comfortable with large-scale data sets, and relentless about details. We asked the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) to help us identify and survey every charter sponsor in the land. And

we approached Achelis & Bodman Foundations and Walton Family Foundation for financial support; their resources have been indispensable and we thank them sincerely.

### *Research Objectives*

Our primary aims in this report are descriptive: show what charter authorizers look like, how big they are, and where their funding comes from. We also inquired into their values and processes, building a set of questions around five elements of effective authorizing practice. Then we organized the data into a typology of authorizers that should deepen public under-

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*Contrary to commonly held assumptions, the reason most authorizers give for not renewing a school's charter is academic performance.*

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standing of these still shadowy entities and the work they do.

We also tease out lessons for policymakers. If you are a legislator, say, and want your state's charter authorizers to take a more "hands-on" approach to school sponsorship, which organizations (e.g., universities, state departments of education, local school districts, etc.) would you be wise to turn to? Are there benefits of scale? Are there organizations that should not be given the task of authorizing schools, based on the behaviors they exhibit? What types of sponsors appear to do the best job, at least as judged by expert opinion about the essentials of quality authorizing? (In the future, as explained above, we hope this expert opinion can be rigorously tested by looking at the effectiveness of the schools the authorizers sponsor.) And looking at the authorizing field as a whole, are there any important trends worth noting?

Even with these scaled-down goals, the study faced major challenges. We wanted to survey the "universe" of charter authorizers, yet even NACSA did not have a firm grasp of the contours of the field. It did manage to identify approximately 500 authorizers and sought to contact each of them. We later learned that other organizations put the number of total authorizers north of 800. It is unclear why this discrepancy exists. (Timing explains some of it—new authorizers have opened their doors in the year since we launched the survey, and others have gone out of the authorizing business, and were therefore excluded from our study.)

Getting authorizers to participate in the survey was also a headache. As explained in the body of the report, our response rate for most authorizer types came close to 100 percent, but

for local school districts it hovered around 25 percent. Because districts sponsor the overwhelming majority of charter schools, their low response rate means our survey participants are responsible for about half of the charter schools in the nation.

Still, even with these limitations, this study makes significant contributions. It identifies five elements of effective charter authorizing: data-based decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes; sound working relations between authorizer and school; skilled personnel; adequate resources and autonomy; and parent and community input. It profiles seven types of charter school authorizers: County/Regional/Intermediate Education Agencies; Higher Education Institutions; Independent Chartering Boards; Local Education Agencies (school districts); Municipal Offices; Nonprofit Organizations; and State Education Agencies. Finally, it teases out some policy-relevant trends and tidbits about charter school authorizing, circa 2005.

### *Turning the Corner on Quality?*

One of the study's most surprising findings is that when authorizers don't renew a charter school's contract, it's usually for academic reasons. This flies in the face of conventional wisdom. Charter supporters and opponents alike have expressed disappointment in recent years that authorizers aren't taking stronger action to close academically failing schools. Yet, according to our data, that's exactly what they're doing. And it's a good thing; the charter movement's credibility depends on bad schools being put of business.

It's important to point out the contrast between non-renewal and charter revocation. When it comes to closing schools before their contracts are up, authorizers act not because of low test scores, but because schools are self-destructing financially or organizationally. But this is appropriate. Raising student achievement takes time, and except in unusual circumstances, new schools deserve the three to five years of their contracts to prove their stuff. But if schools are falling apart or children are in harm's way, patience is not in order.

Authorizers are also becoming choosier on the front end, when deciding whether to grant new charters. Over the past two years, they've become significantly more selective, lowering the national approval rate from 70 percent before 2003 to approximately 50 percent today. Contrary to what we expected to find, state-mandated caps on the creation of new schools turn out not to be the main reason for this; authorizers in states with and without caps have reduced their approval rates similarly. This, too, is a positive development. It's hard to run a charter school and, while authorizers need to stay open to untested but promising approaches, they are right to be skepti-

cal about half-baked ideas or wannabe school leaders who lack the educational or business acumen to get the job done. It's important that authorizers feel comfortable saying no.

### *What Happened to “Accountability in Return for Flexibility”?*

This study's other major finding is less surprising. Almost half of all authorizers practice limited oversight of their schools, demonstrating scant concern either for school quality (by rigorously screening applicants, holding schools accountable for student achievement, etc.) or for compliance (by ensuring fiduciary responsibility, enforcing federal laws, etc.). On the other end of the spectrum, 31 percent of authorizers are aggressive about both quality and compliance. Yet only one in ten authorizers seems to practice the “tight-loose” model upon which the original charter concept rests: a strong focus on quality and results coupled with a more laid back approach toward compliance and process.

From our own experience as an authorizer, this makes some sense. We quickly learned that we needed to be just as concerned about the niggling details of finance and regulation as about achievement and accountability. After all, if a school is accused of fiscal malfeasance or procedural missteps, the political reaction can be swift and severe. While the authorizer's role is to help shield schools from these crosswinds, giving them the space to do their critical work, we don't operate outside reality. Thus, authorizers committed to quality education soon learn to be attentive to compliance issues, too, even those that one might rightly say the legislature should have exempted charter schools from. Conversely, authorizers that half-heartedly accept their responsibilities generally do so for both sides of the compliance-achievement equation.

Of course, there is significant variation among authorizer types. For example, one-quarter of higher education institutions engaged in this activity seem to manage the “tight-loose” balance, and another 35 percent are “hands-on” with matters of both quality and compliance. Large authorizers in general also tend to be more engaged. It remains the small authorizers—especially school districts with only one school—that frequently neglect their obligations.

### *Two Types to Track*

One last finding deserves special comment. After reviewing all seven types of authorizers for their fidelity to the five elements of effective charter authorizing, we conclude that nonprofit organizations and Independent Chartering Boards (ICBs) show the greatest promise. Yes, this could represent our own bias—after all, Fordham is one of the handful of nonprofits studied here. And we think highly of our home-town autho-

rizer in Washington, D.C. Still, nonprofits and ICBs have much to offer. They engage in chartering by choice, not coercion, have ample resources (financial and human) to draw from, and can skillfully navigate the treacherous politics of charter authorizing. As more of them jump into the chartering fray (both types are currently growing), it will be interesting to see if they can continue to succeed at scale.

### *Final Thoughts*

The goal of linking authorizer practices to their schools' student achievement results remains worthy, if unmet. We hope that the typology developed here, as well as the identification of hypothesized “best practices” in charter authorizing, will enable researchers to take that next step. In the meantime, we encourage policymakers to exercise common sense. Nothing in this report provides slam-dunk evidence that any of the authorizer types ought to be hauled out of this work. Certainly not in all cases. Even some local school districts take their authorizer responsibilities seriously. Still, with so many authorizers neglecting their fundamental duties, legislators are surely better off giving the job to organizations that want it and show evidence of knowing what it means to do it well. We wouldn't force educators to start a charter school against their will; the same rule should apply to charter authorizers.

Many people had a role in the production of this study. In particular, we would like to thank the members of the project's advisory board (see Appendix A); Onnie Shekerjian, the research associate on the study; Steve Farkas, who consulted on the survey design; and the staff of NACSA for their tireless efforts. At Fordham, our senior writer and editor Martin Davis, Jr. and our new staff assistant Sarah Kim brought the project across the finish line; we appreciate their diligence.

—Michael J. Petrilli and Chester E. Finn, Jr.,  
April 2006

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## ... INTRODUCTION ...

The primary aims of this study are descriptive, i.e., to explain what charter authorizers look like, how they behave, and the kinds of resources they have at their disposal. We were especially interested in the variability within the charter authorizing field: How do the major *types* of authorizers differ from one another? Are there some types that appear to be more effective than others?

To find out, we first identified five elements, or practices, that we believe are hallmarks of effective charter school authorizing. It's important to note that we suspect, but cannot yet prove, these practices lead to charter school quality and ultimately strong student achievement. Next, we then constructed a survey around these elements and attempted to contact every charter authorizer known to us. Using their responses, we analyzed the data and looked for insights into charter authorizing as a whole, as well as lessons about each authorizer type.

### *The Elements of Quality Authorizing*

To identify which practices are central to being an effective authorizer, we conducted interviews and focus groups with authorizers and experts. The four elements discussed below represent their consensus opinion. (Appendix A lists those consulted.)

1. **Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes.** The quality authorizer uses detailed data analysis (i.e., value-added assessments) of student progress to help schools gauge their strengths and weaknesses; the information also informs decisions of renewal, non-renewal, or revocation of charters. Independent audits of school finances and operations also inform key authorizer decisions. Applicant approval and school renewal decisions are based on objective criteria and factual information, not politics. For example, the successful applicant is one that demonstrates an ability to carry out its education plan and to handle all aspects of running a school (legal, business/financial, human resources, and educational). The school deserving of charter renewal is one that demonstrates adherence to its contract, financial and operational success, and sound implementation of its education plan.

2. **Sound working relations between authorizer and school.** The sponsor and the school engage in honest collaboration that balances autonomy with accountability. Together, they create an atmosphere that enables each to communicate with the other about problems before they become crises. And early in their relationship, the authorizer establishes clear expectations for compliance, monitoring, performance, and renewal.
3. **Skilled personnel.** The authorizer's staff has expertise, or access to expertise, in key chartering areas: assessment, data analysis, fiscal, legal, management, and No Child Left Behind. It has knowledge and experience with charter schools (or access to such people). The authorizer employs sufficient knowledgeable staff, consultants, contractors, etc., to carry out its authorizing functions in a timely, thorough, and objective fashion.
4. **Adequate resources and autonomy.** The authorizer has sufficient fiscal and human resources, and adequate political clout, to carry out its functions competently and without fear of being undermined. The authorizer has substantial control of its own budget.

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*This study is most interested in charter authorizing's variability — How do the types of authorizers differ? Are some types more effective than others?*

...

A fifth element—**parent and community input**—was identified after reviewing state laws and other research. This was reinforced by our survey results and open-ended questions, which indicated that parent and community involvement is an important element of an authorizer's approach.

Once we identified these elements, we developed survey questions to capture the extent to which authorizers exhibit them.

Questions that captured *data-driven decisionmaking and*

TABLE 1: Survey questions and rationale for data driven decisionmaking

SQ NUMBER	SURVEY QUESTION	RATIONALE
7	Please rate how important the following sources of input are in your office's ability to determine whether an applicant has the ability to carry out its proposed education plan. c. Score from predetermined scoring rubric d. Examine track record of proposed school leadership e. Check references of school leadership (Scale: Not important/Don't Use; Not too Important; Somewhat Important; Important; Very Important)	Approving charter school applications can be a subjective process that requires the expertise of decisionmakers. However, a pre-established scoring rubric can help to ensure consistency in the quality of approvals. To avoid approvals based simply on "who you know," the track record and references of school leaders should be considered seriously as well.
8	Please rate how important the following sources of input are in your office's ability to determine whether an applicant has the ability to handle non-instructional aspects of running a school. c. Score from predetermined scoring rubric d. Examine track record of proposed school leadership e. Check references of school leadership (Scale: Not important/Don't Use; Not too Important; Somewhat Important; Important; Very Important)	We were interested in any differences in the evaluation of instructional vs. non-instructional aspects of running a school.
12	Please rate the importance to your office of the following elements in deciding whether or not to renew a school's contract. a. Reports from site visits b. A pre-determined scoring rubric on each content area c. Independent (i.e., non-agency) assessments or site visits f. Academic performance / testing data g. Student enrollment / retention / attrition h. Teacher quality / retention / attrition j. School's financial position l. Performance compared to other schools (Scale: Not important/Don't Use; Not too Important; Somewhat Important; Important; Very Important)	Whether or not to renew a school's contract is a major decision. Gathering a range of information is best, from site visit reports and independent assessments to achievement data and financial indicators. A rubric that pulls in all of these elements together is helpful and can ensure an objective analysis of a school's overall health.
20	How many charter contracts has your office: h. Declined to renew primarily due to low student achievement i. Revoked or rescinded prior to the contract renewal period primarily due to low student achievement j. Revoked or rescinded prior to the contract renewal period primarily due to low student achievement since January 2003.	There are several reasons to close a school. But the true test of an authorizer is the willingness to actually do it, especially when a school is not achieving its academic objectives.
22	Does your authorizing office use a longitudinal, "value-added," or fixed / mixed effects model for analyzing school academic-achievement data? Please choose one. (Detailed explanations of each type were given and are available in the full survey document.)	These methods of data analysis differ in sophistication, with longitudinal being the least complicated and a fixed/mixed effects model being the most advanced. The model used by the authorizer is an indicator of its capacity to rigorously and fairly evaluate student achievement results.
23	What types of data does your office collect directly from your charter schools that are broken down to the individual student level? Assessment data; Demographic data; Both assessment and Demographic data; Don't know; None.	In order to use data, one must first have it. The more sophisticated data analysis models require both assessment and demographic data.
24	What types of data does your office have arrangements with the state to receive about your charter schools that are broken down to the individual student level? Assessment data; Demographic data; Both assessment and Demographic data; Don't know; None.	We were interested in learning whether authorizers collect data directly from states.

*rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes* examined the tools, policies, and procedures that authorizers use to keep politics out of decisions, while ensuring high-quality schools, shown in Table 1. The survey asked authorizers to rate the extent to which they used scores from predetermined scoring rubrics and data on the track record and references of proposed school leadership in their selection decisions. For renewal decisions we asked them to rate the importance of scoring rubrics, independent assessments or site visits, testing data, enrollment data, finances, etc. We also looked at the numbers of non-renewals and revocations due to low student achievement as well as what types of data they collect and the sophisticated achievement analysis authorizers do.

Our initial focus groups revealed that *sound working relations* between authorizer and school begin as early as the selection process and was explored through questions regarding the availability of information sessions for applicants, the option of conditional approval, and the use of a planning year before the school opens, among other topics. (See Table 2.) We also asked about the flexibility of charter agreements — could they be changed, and did they ask for more than the local, state, or Federal laws required. We asked about the most common consequences for a failure to remedy problems and several open-ended questions. The first asked for the top three strategies for good relationships. We also learned of the importance of the authorizer/school relationship when we asked for their three greatest challenges and the most common steps they take when a school has problems.

Finding *skilled personnel* in a rather new field may not

be easy. It requires the right blend of understanding how education works and support for the charter concept. In addition, many authorizer offices are small and rely on non-traditional staffing, such as contractors or inter-agency help. We wanted to know: Do authorizers appear to have the staff capacity that they need? (See Table 3.)

*Adequate resources and autonomy* means that authorizers are free to make their own decisions, with the infra-

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structure to support them. Some of the open ended responses about challenges or desired changes revealed resource and autonomy constraints, and we also asked about the size of “their budgets, sources of funding, and discretionary funds” (see Table 4).

*Parent and community* input has a larger place in the charter movement than in traditional public schools, since charters are, by design, schools of choice. We wanted to know the extent to which authorizers value input from these key stakeholders. (See Table 5.)

—continued on page 7

TABLE 2: Survey questions and rationale for sound working relations

SQ NUMBER	SURVEY QUESTION	RATIONALE
6	In the charter application and approval process does your charter office: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Offer informal informational meeting(s) with individual applicants? (Scale: Yes, extensively; Yes, minimally; No; Don't Know)</li> <li>Give feedback to rejected applicants? (Scale: Yes, extensively; Yes, minimally; No; Don't know)</li> <li>Allow for conditional approval of charter applications? (Scale: Yes, frequently; Yes, occasionally; No; don't know)</li> <li>Provide application information only if requested? (Scale: Yes; No; Don't know)</li> <li>Have an application scoring rubric or evaluation guide that is available to applicants? (Scale: Yes; No; Don't know)</li> <li>Allow approved applicants to take a planning year before opening a schools? (Scale: Yes; No; Don't know)</li> <li>After approval make a separate decision about a school's readiness to open?</li> </ol>	The series of questions about the application process was to gauge fairness and accessibility. An authorizer that is open to meetings, provides a scoring guide, gives feedback to rejected applicants, and does not wait for requests to promote application information, is one that makes it easier, not harder, for applicants to create a quality proposal. Conditional approval can be a useful tool for applicants that are well on their way towards a quality proposal, while a planning year provides the essential time for great schools to get off the ground. Providing feedback about a school's readiness to open keeps an authorizer engaged in the process, and creates front-end assurances that the school is off to a good start, rather than waiting for problems to appear.
9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Does your office permit schools to refine or amend their accountability commitments or goals for student achievement after opening? (Scale: Yes; No; Don't know)</li> <li>If Yes, for what reasons does your office permit such refinements or amendments? Choose all that apply.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To enable schools to create more realistic expectations based on baseline data of new students</li> <li>To take account of material changes to a school's circumstances (e.g. financial; teacher attrition, etc.)</li> <li>Other, please specify</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	Another indication of an authorizer's fairness is their flexibility. While schools must be held accountable, there are some situations that are simply outside their control. Authorizers should be willing to adapt.
10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do your charter contracts / accountability agreements or Memoranda impose requirements on charter schools in addition to those of existing local, state, or federal law? (Scale: Yes; No)</li> <li>If yes, please specify.</li> </ol>	Some additional requirements might be indication of "red-tape creep," while others might be reasonable and necessary elements of an effective evaluation system. The open-response gave us a chance to tease out the difference.
11	What is the most common consequence your office imposes on schools that consistently fail to remedy problems (financial, academic, administrative) during their charter term? Please choose one. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conditional charter renewal</li> <li>Probationary period prior to charter renewal</li> <li>Refusal to renew charter</li> <li>Revocation of charter prior to end of contract term</li> <li>Withholding funding</li> <li>None</li> <li>Don't know</li> <li>Other</li> </ol>	Some measures are more punitive, and others more collaborative. For example, conditional renewal and probationary periods are more collaborative; non-renewal, revocation, and withholding of funds are more punitive. We asked for the most common, understanding that there are circumstances under which punitive measures might be needed, such as repeated offenses. However, if these punitive measures are the most common, this could indicate a less-collaborative attitude.
13	Please describe the top three strategies your office has found successful in establishing and /or maintaining good relationships with your schools.	This was an open ended question specifically designed to learn what authorizers are doing to foster collaboration.
14	What do you see as your three greatest challenges as an authorizer?	This was an open-ended question designed to learn what concerns authorizers the most.
16	When confronted with a charter school with significant problems, what are the three most common steps your office takes?	Focus groups indicated that authorizers might be struggling with this issue and wanted to learn what their colleagues are doing.

TABLE 3: Survey questions and rationale for skilled personnel

SQ NUMBER	SURVEY QUESTION	RATIONALE
3	How many Full Time Equivalent employees (FTEs) work in your authorizing office? Please add part time staff together and include in the total. This does not include consultants or contractors.	This basic descriptive information is one indicator of the staff capacity of an authorizer. As an authorizer takes on additional schools, it needs additional staff.
4	To what extent does your authorizing office receive assistance from other areas within your parent agency or other public agencies? Note: Do not include any assistance that you receive via outside consultants since that is requested in the next question. Please check one box for each question. (Scale: Not at all; A little; Moderately; Very; Completely) a. Legal b. Fiscal oversight / audit c. Special education d. Site visits e. Bilingual issues f. Insurance / risk management g. No Child Left Behind h. Accountability / testing i. Charter application review j. Renewal / revocation decisions k. Other, please specify	In-house staff aren't the only human resources available to an authorizer. Many authorizers are part of larger education-related institutions with expertise to tap. We wanted to learn, first, if authorizers took advantage of these opportunities and, second, in which areas.
5	a. Does your authorizing office use paid outside consultants or contractors to carry out authorizing functions? (Scale: Yes; No; Don't know) b. If yes, please indicate the functions for which your office uses consultants or contractors and the degree to which it relies on them. Please check one box for each question. (Scale: Not at all; A little; Moderately; Very; Completely) a. Legal b. Fiscal oversight / audit c. Special education d. Site visits e. Bilingual issues f. Insurance / risk management g. No Child Left Behind h. Accountability / testing i. Charter application review j. Renewal / revocation decisions k. Other, please specify	Another way to tap additional capacity and expertise is through the use of consultants. We wanted to learn if authorizers used any of their budgets on "outside" personnel, and for what purposes.
30	Please explain the relevant background of the person who currently oversees the day-to-day operations of your authorizing office. In the space provided please provide one of the following: 1) a brief description of the person's relevant background, 2) a notation that their resume has been emailed, and 3) a link to that information on a website	This question documented the background of key leaders in the authorizer world. Ideally they would have deep experience with charter schools and broader education and administrative issues.

TABLE 4: Survey questions and rationale for adequate resources and autonomy

SQ NUMBER	SURVEY QUESTION	RATIONALE
15	What three things would you change about the current charter landscape / policy environment if you could?	This was an open-ended question. Respondents frequently mentioned challenges around resources.
25	What is the total annual budget that your authorizing office (or “parent” agency) devotes to charter school authorizing functions?	This question was meant to determine whether the authorizer has adequate funding to oversee its schools effectively.
26	Of the total budget for charter authorizing, approximately what percent of your finding do you receive, per year, from: (Answers must add up to 100%) a. Charter school fees paid to your chartering office b. State or congressional appropriations for authorizer functions c. The regular operating budget of the agency to which you belong d. State or federal grants e. Foundation grants f. Other sources	We wanted to see how reliant authorizers are on different sources of funds, and if these sources tend to have strings attached (see next question).
27	What percent of your overall budget is discretionary, that is, your office decides how to spend it?	A key factor in how well an authorizer can do its job is whether its hands are tied by a budget it does not control.
28	If you had more staff for charter authorizing, what would be the top three ways you would use them? Please circle only three. a. Review charter applications more thoroughly b. Conduct more site visits c. Devote more time and effort to monitoring compliance d. Devote more time and effort to monitoring / assisting with school reporting functions e. Devote more time and effort to monitoring schools finances f. Devote more time and effort to monitoring academic performance g. Don’t need more staff h. Don’t know	This question was used to identify the areas where authorizers feel they could use additional staff capacity. This question also teases out authorizers’ priorities — administrative vs. academic.
29	What is the one area in which you could best use improved technology (software, hardware, wireless, etc.)? a. For our own offices’ administrative functions b. To assist with school reporting functions c. To monitor compliance d. To monitor schools’ finances e. To monitor schools’ performance f. Don’t need improved technology g. Don’t know h. Other, please specify	In addition to human resources, technology can play a factor in an authorizer’s effectiveness.

TABLE 5: Survey question and rationale for parent and community input

SQ NUMBER	SURVEY QUESTION	RATIONALE
12	Please rate the importance to your office of the following elements in deciding whether or not to renew a school’s contract. Please check one box for each question. (Scale: Not important / don’t use; Not too important; Somewhat important; Important; Very important) d. Community feedback, such as parent complaints or media scrutiny e. Parent surveys	There will be times when an authorizer has to shut down a school over the protests of the parents and the community. However, input from these key stakeholders should be one of the factors considered in such a decision.

—continued from page 3

## Authorizer Types

The authorizer landscape consists of seven authorizer types:

- **County/Regional/Intermediate Education Agencies.** These agencies typically provide LEAs with special services, like special education assistance. Oftentimes they serve as a link between an SEA and the LEAs. (LEAs that serve an entire county, as is typical in many southern states, are included within the LEA category.)
- **Higher Education Institutions.** In a few states public and/or private colleges or universities may sponsor charter schools.
- **Independent Chartering Boards.** Acting as separate boards for charter schools, these agencies—referred to here as ICBs—have many of the same functions as an LEA or SEA but only have one mission: to sponsor charter schools.
- **Local Education Agencies (school districts).** Often referred to as LEAs, these are traditional school districts—school boards, to be precise—that issue charters to start-up schools or converted public schools. In some LEAs, there is little difference between these schools and their traditional district-operated counterparts, while in other jurisdictions, charter schools have significant freedom and greater accountability.
- **Municipal Offices.** One of the few authorizer types outside the traditional education system, municipal authorizers are part of a city government and sponsor charter schools within their city boundaries.
- **Nonprofit Organizations.** These relative newcomers are exactly as they sound—501[c]3 organizations that are allowed to sponsor schools.
- **State Education Agencies.** Often referred to as SEAs, these are state boards or departments of education — entities that don't traditionally have direct oversight of individual schools, but do know how they work.

Authorizers can also be categorized by size — how many schools they oversee. We found six categories, defined by natural breaks in the data. There were:

TABLE 6: Authorizer types by size category

	NONE	VERY SMALL	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE	JUMBO
County/Regional/Intermediate Education Agency	1	4	6	0	0	0
Independent Chartering Board	1	0	0	0	1	1
Local Education Agency (i.e., local school district or local board of education)	8	43	22	17	11	0
Municipal Office (i.e., mayors office or city council)	0	0	1	1	0	0
Nonprofit Organization (other than higher education institutions)	0	2	0	3	0	0
Private Higher Education Institution	0	3	2	1	0	0
Public Higher Education Institution	0	3	2	5	4	0
State Education Agency (i.e., state department or state board of education)	0	1	1	5	3	3

- **No schools currently** — mostly from newly established authorizers,
- **Very small** — those with only one school,
- **Small** — those with two to four schools
- **Medium** — those with five to eighteen schools
- **Large** — those with nineteen to sixty schools
- **Jumbo** — ninety-nine schools or more

Comparing authorizer types to sizes, we found some interesting patterns — primarily that LEAs tend to be small and SEAs tend to be larger. (See Table 6.)

*The Survey*

After settling on the survey items described above, we designed some questions that collect basic descriptive information about authorizers, such as their longevity, size, and budgets. We now had a full survey instrument which, with tabulations of all responses, is available at [www.edexcellence.net](http://www.edexcellence.net). (Key responses are also provided in Appendix B.)

Next, we contacted all known authorizers (those for which we had viable contact information) via the Internet, mail, and telephone calls between May and September 2005, and asked them to complete our survey. Roughly one-third of those contacted responded.

Table 7 shows the response rates for each type of authorizer. For six of the seven types, all or most of the authorizers responded. Together, these types authorize 69 percent of

the schools represented in the survey. The lowest response rate (24 percent) came from local school districts (or Local Education Agencies — LEAs). This is not surprising, considering that these districts are forced by law to charter schools against their will. However, because districts make up an overwhelming majority of the nation’s authorizers, even with their low response rate they still represent a majority of survey respondents (64 percent). It should be noted that all



*We wanted to know:  
Do authorizers appear  
to have the staff capacity  
that they need?*



data were self-reported and occasionally incomplete. We used what we could, and where obvious errors or omissions occurred, researchers updated the data. (For example, one LEA self-reported as an Independent Chartering Board. We corrected the error.)

The authorizers that responded to our survey sponsor 1,832 schools. That’s approximately half of the 3,600 charter schools currently operating in the U.S.

TABLE 7: Survey response rate by authorizer type

TYPE OF AUTHORIZER	SURVEY RESPONSES	ESTIMATED NUMBER OF AUTHORIZERS IN THE U.S. AT TIME OF SURVEY.*	RESPONSE RATE	NUMBER OF SCHOOLS AUTHORIZED BY EACH TYPE**	PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS AUTHORIZED BY EACH TYPE
County/Regional/Intermediate Education Agency	14	14	100%	19	1%
Higher Education Institution	20	20	100	194	11
Independent Chartering Board	3	4	75	442	24
Local Education Agency	118	492	24	573	31
Municipal Office	2	2	100	14	1
Nonprofit Organization	6	8	75	22	1
State Education Agency	21	21	100	568	31
<b>Total TBFI Survey, 2005</b>	<b>184</b>	<b>561</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>1,832</b>	<b>100</b>

\* Note: The National Association of Charter School Authorizers provided these data. However, Public Impact (PI) has produced a different set of data for the charter authorizer universe, totaling 850 authorizers in all, including significantly more county offices, higher education institutions, local education agencies, and nonprofit organizations. The discrepancy is due in part to timing—many of the nonprofit organizations came onto the authorizing scene in the past year—but also to a different definition of “active” authorizers. Our survey generally excluded organizations that are no longer chartering or overseeing schools.

\*\* Note: These are the number of schools chartered by the authorizers that participated in the survey. These data do not include all charter schools in the nation. We suspect that most of the 1,800 schools not represented in the survey were chartered by local school districts.

### Overview of the Report

The first section of this report examines authorizer trends and other findings relevant to policymakers. The second section provides in-depth profiles of each of the seven main

authorizer types. In addition to basic descriptive data, the profiles examine the extent to which the authorizers in each type practice the five elements of successful authorizer practice. We finish with a few conclusions.

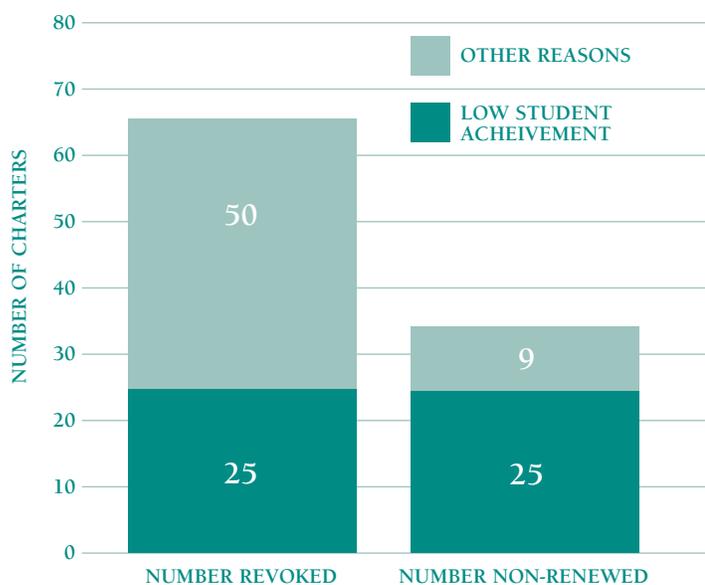
## SECTION ONE — MAJOR FINDINGS

What can we learn from the data gathered by the authorizer survey? Here are the key policy-relevant findings.

**Finding 1: Contrary to earlier reports, authorizers primarily “non-renew” charter school contracts because of poor academic performance.**

Contrary to conventional wisdom and previous research, (such as the Center for Education Reform’s finding that 66 percent of closures are for financial problems or mismanagement) it is student achievement that drives an authorizer to not renew a charter. The authorizers in this survey report not renewing contracts for 34 schools. A total of 2,160 charters have been issued overall, and 14 percent of those have closed due to expiration or voluntary surrender of charter (10 percent), revocation prior to end of charter (3 percent), or a non-renewal decision by an authorizer (1 percent). Most of these decisions

**FIGURE 1: Non-renewals are driven by low student achievement**



(75 percent) were based on low student achievement. This is critical, because the basic charter model of accountability in return for flexibility requires authorizers to shut down schools that are not performing academically. Those surveyed appear to be doing so. The reasons for mid-course revocation, however, were different. Of 67 school charters revoked before the end of the contract renewal period, authorizers were motivated by low student achievement just

33 percent of the time. While we are not certain why these schools were shuttered, we suspect that financial or organizational implosions played key roles. (See Figure 1.)

**Finding 2: Authorizers have grown choosier over time about approving schools—and not because of state-imposed caps on charter growth.**

Authorizers are rejecting charter applications at a higher rate than in the past. Before January 2003, the authorizers approved approximately 68 percent of applications received. Over the past two years (from January 2003 to January 2005) authorizers approved just over half of received applications.

**TABLE 8: Approval rates for charter applications**

THOSE WITH...	BEFORE 2003	JAN '03 - JAN '05	DIFFERENCE
Charter Cap	51%	40%	-11
No Charter Cap	74	58	-16

Is that because many states—such as Michigan, New York, and North Carolina—have caps in place on the number of new schools that can be chartered? Table 8 suggests otherwise. Taken as a group, authorizers operating in states without caps lowered their school approval rate by 16 percentage points, compared within an 11 point decline for authorizers working in states with caps. This suggests that authorizers are getting choosier across the board.

**TABLE 9: Charter authorizers and the quality/compliance quadrants**

QUADRANT	DEFINITION	% OF AUTHORIZERS
“Limited Oversight”	Low focus on both quality and compliance	44%
“Bureaucratic”	Low focus on quality, high focus on compliance	13
“Tight-Loose”	High focus on quality, low focus on compliance	11
“Hands-On”	High focus on both quality and compliance	31

**Finding 3: Unfortunately, almost half of all authorizers, especially the smaller ones, practice limited oversight of their schools.**

Policymakers are naturally concerned about whether authorizers engage in active oversight of their schools. We wanted to know whether certain authorizer types are more likely to do so. Using data from selected survey items (listed in Appendix C), we examined each authorizer’s commitment to overseeing both quality issues (such as analyzing student achievement data) and compliance issues (such as collecting required paperwork and examining the school’s financial position).

Since each authorizer can take a weak or strong approach to compliance issues, and a weak or strong approach to quality, four distinct categories (or quadrants) are possible: (See Table 9 and Figure 2.)

**TABLE 10: Authorizer types and the quality/compliance quadrants**

TYPE OF AUTHORIZER	LIMITED OVERSIGHT	BUREAUCRATIC	TIGHT-LOOSE	HANDS-ON
County/Regional/Intermediate Education Agency	43%	29%	7%	21%
Independent Chartering Board	33	33	0	33
Local Education Agency	42	15	10	32
Municipal Office	50	0	0	50
Nonprofit Organization	50	0	17	33
Higher Education Institution	30	10	25	35
State Education Agency	50	0	10	40

**FIGURE 2: The quality/compliance quadrants**



- **Limited Oversight.** These authorizers are weak on compliance and quality. They are, in essence, neglecting their schools.
- **Bureaucratic.** These authorizers are strong on compliance but weak on quality. They operate much like traditional school systems, with a clear focus on rules and regulations but less attention to results.
- **Tight-Loose.** These authorizers are weak on compliance but strong on quality. They exhibit the classic charter formulation of accountability in return for flexibility.
- **Hands-On.** These authorizers are strong on both compliance and quality issues. They take an active role with their charters.

Many authorizers (44 percent) fall in the “limited oversight” category. They don’t have all of the processes in place to thoroughly track a school’s quality, or to comprehensively monitor safety, legal, and financial issues. The least common authorizers (11 percent) are designated “tight-loose,” even though this is the arrangement envisioned by many of the early supporters of charter schools. Thirty-one percent of authorizers are considered “hands on,” and 13 percent are considered “bureaucratic.”

**TABLE 11: Authorizer size and the quality/compliance quadrants**

TYPE OF AUTHORIZER	LIMITED OVERSIGHT	BUREAUCRATIC	TIGHT LOOSE	HANDS ON
Very Small	47%	16%	0%	30%
Small	32	21	0	41
Medium	28	0	19	47
Large	24	0	35	35
Jumbo	0	25	25	50

As is clear from Table 10, county-level authorizers and LEAs tend to practice limited oversight. Interestingly, State Education Agencies are essentially split between “limited oversight” and “hands-on,” which might be thought of as polar opposites. Independent Chartering Boards are evenly split among “limited oversight,” “bureaucratic,” and “hands-on,” while universities are split among “hands on,” “tight-loose,” and “limited oversight.”

Does authorizer size matter? As Table 11 shows, medium and “jumbo” authorizers tend to be “hands-on,” while very small authorizers engage in limited oversight. It appears

that larger authorizers are more dedicated to quality chartering and have the capacity to do it well. On the other hand, very small authorizers tend to be LEAs, for which chartering is not a primary function—nor a priority.

**Finding 4: Four-fifths of authorizers say they would use additional staff to monitor schools’ academics, and two-thirds would like additional technology to monitor accountability.**

While most authorizers admit to limited oversight of school quality, they appear keen to do more, resources permitting. When asked which areas could use additional staff capacity, these authorities placed monitoring academics ahead of application reviews, site visits, finances, and compliance monitoring. They also reported that they would use more technology resources to monitor accountability rather than compliance, reporting, or administrative functions. Academics and accountability appear to be clear priorities.

**Finding 5: Authorizing is still new and dominated by small-scale school district sponsors.**

It has been over 15 years since the first authorizer in this study opened its doors (1990). Since then, new authorizers have emerged quickly. Figure 3 shows that the late 1990s realized a surge in new authorizers. In fact, 88 percent of the authorizers surveyed have been around for less than 10 years, and half of those (43 percent) have been around for less than five years.

**TABLE 12: Authorizers by size**

SIZE CATEGORY	AUTHORIZERS (%)
No schools currently*	6
Very Small (one school)	36
Small (2 to 4 schools)	22
Medium (5 to 18 schools)	21
Large (19 to 60 schools)	12
[No authorizers with 60-98 schools in sample]	
Jumbo (99 schools and up)	3

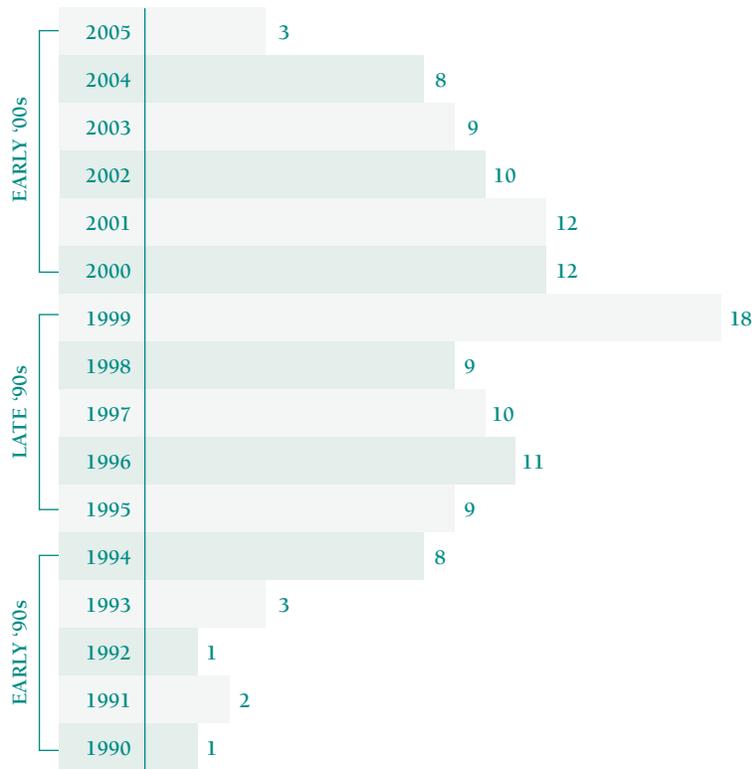
Categories were determined by natural breaks in the data  
 \* Note: These are generally new authorizers which have yet to charter a school.

As for size, over one-third of authorizers in this survey are responsible for only one school. In fact, almost two-thirds of authorizers in the sample have four or fewer schools. (See Table 12.)

Is this picture changing? Although many authorizers expected to continue sponsoring only one school in the 2005-2006 school year, others planned to grow significantly. Authorizers with only 2-4 schools plan to add, on average, 16 percent more schools (that's fewer than one school each).

Medium sized authorizers reported the most ambitious plans, with an average expected increase of 27 percent, and large authorizers expected an average of 21 percent more schools. Two of the survey's large authorizers planned to add so many schools as to enter "jumbo" status. Still, even with these changes, the authorizer field will continue to be dominated by local school districts that charter just a handful of schools each, at least for the foreseeable future.

FIGURE 3: Authorizer's first charter by year



## SECTION TWO— PROFILES OF AUTHORIZER TYPES

### ... LOCAL ... EDUCATION AGENCIES

**Of all the authorizer types, LEAs are most likely to...**

- Have been authorizing for a while (average age 6.4 years, tied with public higher education)
- Sponsor schools that are unionized (19 percent)
- Have a leader with either charter or educational administration experience (30 percent each)
- Address challenges in a collaborative manner (61 percent.)

**and they are least likely to...**

- Impose extra requirements in their charter agreements (less than half do so).

Often referred to as LEAs, these are traditional school districts—school boards, to be precise—that issue charters to start-up schools or converted public schools. In some LEAs, there is little difference between these schools and their traditional district-operated counterparts, while in other jurisdictions, charter schools have significant freedom and greater accountability.

#### Big numbers

The first LEA authorizer in this study began sponsoring schools in 1990. More came on board each year throughout the 1990s, with new entrants peaking in 1999. The numbers for 2004 show a possible resurgence. (See Figure 4.)

There were 490 LEA authorizers known to us at the time of our survey, accounting for some 88 percent of all authorizers in the nation. Of these, 118, or 24 percent, responded to our survey. Forty-five percent of the LEAs in our sample are from California, Florida, and Wisconsin. Although a large percentage of LEAs (45 percent) are very small (they sponsor only charter one school apiece), LEA authorizers come in all sizes. Figure 5 shows that over 30 percent of LEA authorizers are either medium (5 to 18 schools) or large (19 to 60 schools).

FIGURE 4: Most LEAs began chartering in the late 1990s

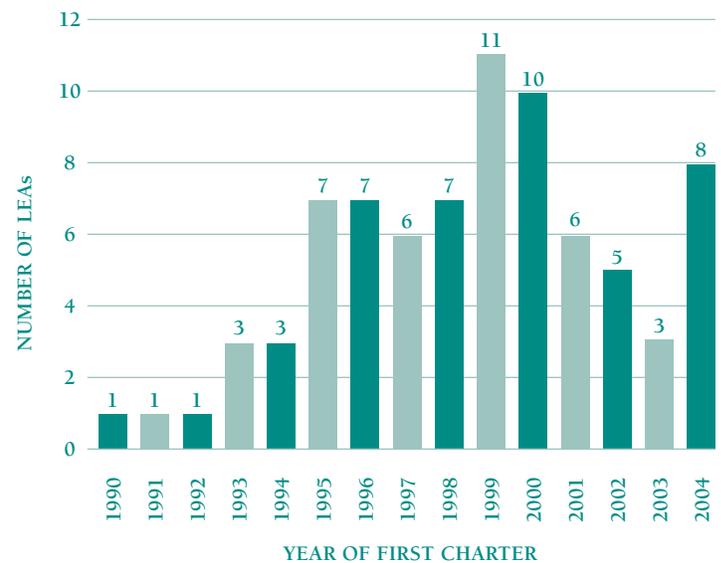
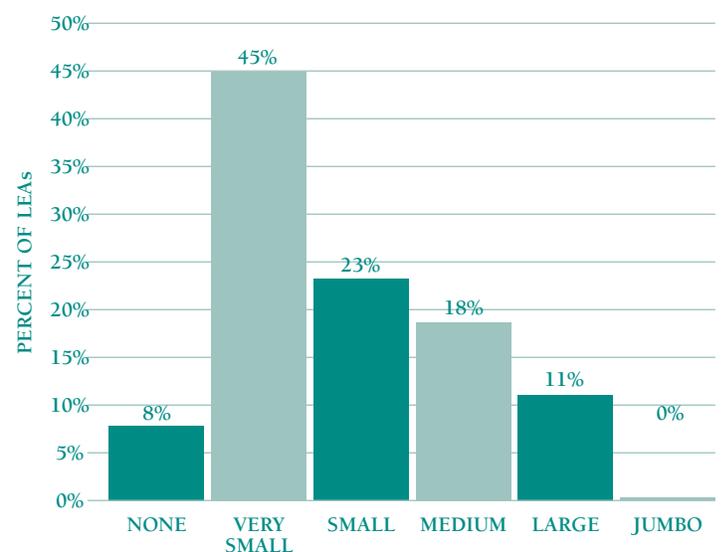


FIGURE 5: LEAs tend to sponsor a few schools each



### Size matters

The number of schools sponsored by an LEA can make a big difference in how it behaves as an authorizer. For example, LEAs issue, on average, one new charter per year, and approve over half of the charter applicants that apply. Like other authorizers, their approval rates have declined recently. Prior to 2003, the rate was 73 percent; since then it has dropped to 66 percent. However, as shown in Table 13, the approval rate of small LEA authorizers declined more

dramatically—from 78 percent to 52 percent. In fact, only the large LEAs increased their approval rate. Perhaps these larger authorizers are more enthusiastic about using chartering to pursue their own reform strategies.

The number of schools an LEA sponsors also has implications for its funding. Large LEA authorizers receive most of their funds (for authorizing expenses) from charter school fees. (See Table 14.) The others cover their chartering expenses, for the most part, with general revenue from the school district budget.

TABLE 13: Approval rates of LEA authorizers

AUTHORIZER SIZE CATEGORY	AVG % APPROVED BEFORE 2003	AVG % APPROVED JAN 2003 – JAN 2005	CHANGE
Very Small	82%	80%	-2
Small	78	52	-26*
Medium	66	60	-6
Large	5	79	+28*
TOTAL	73	66	-7

\* Denotes statistical significance at the .01 level for a comparison of LEA sizes.

TABLE 14: Percentage of LEA funds by type

AUTHORIZER SIZE	CHARTER SCHOOL FEES	GOV'T APPROPRIATIONS	REGULAR OPERATING BUDGET OF AGENCY	GOV'T GRANTS	FOUNDATION GRANTS
VERY SMALL	21%	7%	62%	6%	3%
SMALL	5	0	95	0	0
MEDIUM	9	7	73	12	0
LARGE	57	27	15	1	0

**How well do LEAs practice the five elements of successful authorizing?**

LEAs report trying to develop good relations with their charter schools, even if many got into chartering reluctantly. They also aggressively collect data, but are not very sophisticated in their analysis of it.

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS LEAs DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS LEAs DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	Over 75 percent collect achievement data from both schools and from the state.	<p>Three in ten don't use, or don't know if they use, a data analysis model.</p> <p>One-third use the most basic data analysis model.</p> <p>A predetermined score on a rubric was only rated somewhat important for charter approval decisions.</p> <p>Almost all charter revocations and non-renewals were for non-academic reasons.</p>	LEAs are aware of the value of academic data but are not very sophisticated about using it well.
Sound working relations	<p>Over half allow a planning year for new charter schools.</p> <p>A majority consider teamwork the best strategy for success.</p> <p>Only one in ten uses a punitive measure to fix problems – lower than most authorizers.</p>	<p>Fewer than half give feedback to unsuccessful charter applicants (a lower rate than all other authorizer types).</p> <p>Only one-third are “hands-on,” while two-thirds have “limited oversight” or use a “bureaucratic approach.”</p>	The assumptions that charters are “step-children” to local school districts are in some ways borne out. For example, their application processes are not designed to encourage new charter schools. But once approved, they value collaboration and giving charters room to do their job.
Skilled personnel	<p>They tap resources within the LEA, as the charter offices are “very reliant” on their colleagues in the school district for help with fiscal oversight and special education, and somewhat reliant for everything else.</p> <p>Thirty percent of LEA authorizers have leaders with charter experience (and another 30 percent have leaders with education administration backgrounds). This is a higher percentage than any other authorizer type.</p>	One-quarter would like more staff to monitor academic performance.	The authorizing offices have some charter expertise. They get more in areas where they have less experience.
Adequate resources and autonomy	Two-thirds of the authorizer offices have at least some discretion over their schools’ budgets.	One-quarter are in states with charter caps (less than most authorizers), but these caps have limited some LEAs’ growth potential.	It’s a mixed bag; chartering offices have reasonable control over their budgets but face state caps which constrain their actions.
Parent and community input	<p>A public presentation of the charter application is “important.”</p> <p>During renewal, community feedback is “important.”</p>	During renewal, parent surveys are only “somewhat important.”	They are aware that public perception matters.

## ... STATE ... EDUCATION AGENCIES

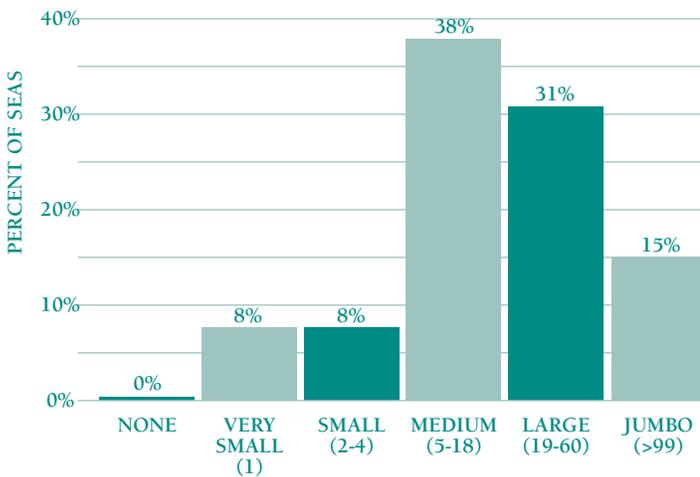
Often referred to as SEAs, these are state boards or departments of education—entities that don’t traditionally have direct oversight of individual schools, but do know how they work.

### Few authorizers, many schools

SEA authorizers first sponsored schools in 1991. The majority came on-line in the late 1990s, while a few more became active in 2003.

At the time of the survey, there were 21 known SEA authorizers in the U.S., contracting with 568 schools. SEAs are 4 percent of all authorizers, but they authorize 31 percent of all charter schools in this sample. Figure 6 shows that most SEA autho-

**FIGURE 6: SEAs tend to be medium sized or large (n=13)**



rizers are medium sized (with 5 to 18 schools) or large (19 to 60 schools). A few SEAs sponsor over a hundred schools.

### Diversity, duality

SEA authorizers tend to fall into one of two groups. Some, 50 percent of SEA respondents, receive all of their authorizer funding from the regular operating budget of the agency, while 33 percent receive all their funding from state or federal grants. SEA authorizers also fall into two groups when asked how they use—or would use—other resources. About half look to parent agencies for assistance with accountability and

testing, while about the other half do so for special education. Twenty-eight percent would like more staff to monitor compliance, while 24 percent want to conduct more site visits.

Thirty-one percent would use improved technology to monitor performance, and 23 percent would use it to assist with reporting functions (such as special education requirements).

How to explain these distributions—larger scores for two categories, with smaller responses for the rest? (See Figure 7.) The most obvious explanation—that SEA authorizers are grouped by the number of schools they authorize—does not pan out. In fact, it’s hard to find any explanation based upon the data. Perhaps what’s key is the larger state policy environment, which is not measured in this study.

#### Of all the authorizer types SEAs are most likely to...

- Receive a charter school application (they’ve received the most in the last two years)\*
- Revoke a charter prior to renewal (at 7% they’ve revoked the most, too)\*
- List their own problems as the greatest challenge (tied with County authorizers).

#### and they are least likely to...

- Approve a charter school application that they receive (approval rate of 50% overall, and 35% in the last two years)\*
- Have discretionary funds (avg. of 19% is the lowest)\*
- Use paid contractors.

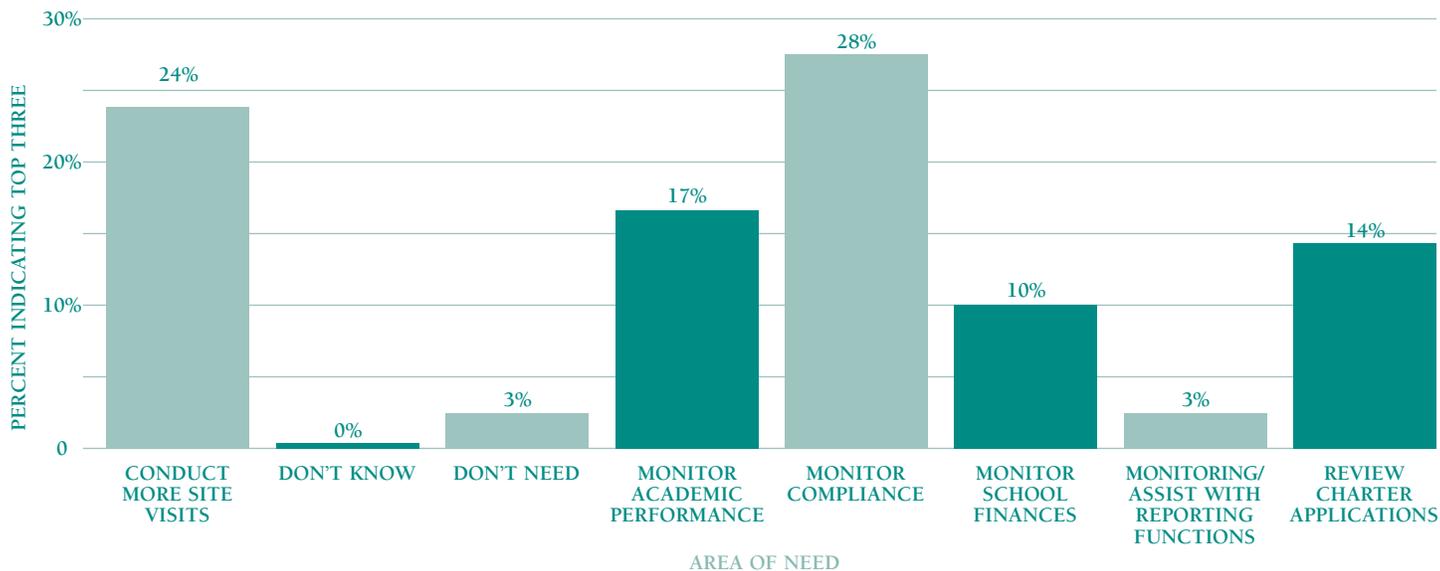
(\* Denotes statistical significance at the .01 level.)

### How well do SEAs practice the five elements of successful authorizing?

Compared to other authorizer types, SEAs are strongest in their focus on and use of data, in both the charter application and renewal processes. Their weakest area is in soliciting parent and community input. This makes sense, since SEAs tend to have stronger capacity around data gathering than most organizations, yet are, by their very nature, cut off from what’s happening “on the ground.”

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS SEAs DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS SEAs DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	<p>They say scoring according to a rubric is “important” during application process.</p> <p>One-third use the most sophisticated model to analyze student achievement data.</p> <p>Schools’ academic performance and financial position are “very important” renewal criteria.</p>	A school’s score on a rubric is only “somewhat important” for renewal decisions.	They use data for both application and renewal processes.
Sound working relations	<p>75 percent offer feedback to rejected applicants.</p> <p>80 percent offer their scoring rubric to applicants ahead of time.</p> <p>30 percent offer conditional approval (This is a much greater percentage than other authorizers show.)</p> <p>90 percent allow a planning year.</p> <p>Teamwork (55 percent) was the most-cited strategy for addressing concerns with schools.</p>	<p>16 percent use punitive measures to remedy problems.</p> <p>They are split between “limited oversight” of their schools and “hands-on” involvement.</p>	They are very fair during the application process, and some engage in strong oversight once a charter is approved.
Skilled personnel	<p>Chartering offices rely heavily on help from their colleagues throughout the SEA.</p> <p>20 percent of authorizing office leaders have charter experience (more than most authorizers).</p>	They could use more staff to monitor compliance (28 percent) and site visits (24 percent).	They have stronger staff capacity than most, but need help getting out “in the field.”
Adequate resources and autonomy		<p>Most chartering offices do not control their budgets.</p> <p>Half are in states that have caps on the number of schools they can authorize.</p> <p>Biggest change requested was more funding (28 percent).</p>	They do not have control over their budgets, and state charter caps limit growth.
Parent and community input	Application presentation at a public hearing is “important.”	<p>Community feedback for renewal is only “somewhat important.”</p> <p>Parent surveys for renewal are “not too important.”</p>	This is not a strong focus.

FIGURE 7: Top three ways SEAs would use more staff (n=29)



## ... HIGHER ... EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

Public and/or private colleges and universities that sponsor schools in five states responded to our survey (Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin).

We knew of 20 higher education authorizers when we undertook this survey, and they all responded to our survey. Fourteen are public universities or community colleges (of which seven are in Michigan) and six are private institutions in Minnesota. Together, they represent less than four percent of authorizers nationwide, but they sponsor 11 percent of the charters in this sample.

The first higher ed authorizers began chartering in 1994 when three institutions took on that responsibility. Since then, one or two have come online each year through 2003. In 1999, five new higher education authorizers began sponsoring schools.

both public and private institutions get a great deal of funding from charter fees and the operating budgets of their parent organizations. The only real difference in funding is state appropriations: public institutions get them, private do not.

Their views about their own challenges follow the same pattern. For example, while most authorizer types are concerned about funding, most higher education authorizers want to improve their infrastructure, such as facilities or human resources processes. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, higher education authorizers utilize punitive measures for addressing problems at schools at a much higher rate than other authorizers.

**TABLE 15: Are higher ed authorizers responsive to applicants?**

	HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORIZERS	OTHER AUTHORIZER TYPES
Give Extensive Feedback to Rejected Applicants	30%	45%
Offer Extensive Individual Informational Meetings	10	36

### Size Does Not Matter

Private institutions have only authorized five or fewer schools each. Public institutions come in all sizes. Despite this, public and private higher education authorizers have mostly similar policies and procedures, some of which are unique to their authorizer type. The differences—around their funding sources and charter school caps—are imposed upon them by law.

All private institutions have complete discretion over their funds (likely because none come from state appropriations) while only half of public institutions do. Chartering offices in

### Of all the authorizer types Higher Education Authorizers are most likely to...

- Get all their funding from state appropriations (one-third of them do—the highest proportion)
- Charge charter school fees (on average about half of their funding comes from charter schools)
- Have been around the longest (average age of public higher education authorizers is 6.4 years, tied with LEAs).

### and they are least likely to...

- Revoke a charter before renewal\* (despite their age, they've only revoked 2, total).

(\* Statistically significant at the .01 level.)

### How well do universities practice the five elements of successful authorizing?

For most of the elements, higher education authorizers exhibit a dual nature. On one hand, they are free from the fiscal constraints that bind other types of authorizers, yet many operate under state caps that restrict their freedom. They have access to data from their schools, but don't appear to use it well. Despite their greatest strength—fiscal autonomy—their chartering offices do not tap into any additional human resource help their universities offer. Despite this, these authorizers would like additional staff. More than other types of authorizers, higher ed is willing to be “hands-on” with their charters.

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	<p>A school's academic performance is “very important” in renewal decisions.</p> <p>A school's financial position is also a very important renewal criterion.</p> <p>Most collect data directly from their schools.</p>	<p>An applicant's score on a rubric is only “somewhat important” for chartering decisions. Rubric scores are similarly downplayed during renewal decisions.</p> <p>They tend to use the least sophisticated model to analyze student achievement data.</p>	They get data directly from schools, but don't use it in a sophisticated way.
Sound working relations	<p>They are the most “hands on” authorizer type, with strong emphasis on quality.</p> <p>Over 80 percent allow a planning year for new schools.</p>	<p>None of these authorizers allows conditional approval.</p> <p>They provide little to no feedback for rejected applicants.</p> <p>27 percent use remedies for struggling schools that are punitive.</p>	They are relatively flexible in their application process, but quite strict once they oversee a school.
Skilled personnel	14 percent of their chartering offices have leaders with charter experience, the third highest of all types.	<p>Their authorizing offices don't tap resources from throughout the university.</p> <p>They would like additional staff for monitoring performance and conducting site visits.</p>	They have some expertise—all of it in-house—but could use more people.
Adequate resources and autonomy	All private institutions have full discretion over their funds and half of publics do.	<p>They view facilities, funding, and human resources issues as challenges.</p> <p>75 percent of public institutions are in states with caps on the number of charter schools or school enrollment.</p>	They have fiscal freedom, but are hindered in other areas.
Parent and community input		<p>They don't tend to invite public application presentations.</p> <p>Community feedback and parent surveys only “somewhat” used.</p>	They don't practice this element.

## ... COUNTY/INTERMEDIATE ... AGENCIES

These agencies typically provide Local Education Agencies (LEAs) with special services, such as special education assistance. Oftentimes they serve as a link between an State Education Agencies (SEAs) and LEAs. (LEAs that serve an entire county, as is typical in many southern states, are included within the LEA category.) Three states (California, Michigan, and Ohio) have these types of authorizers.

### *Few, small, and new*

Fourteen of the 16 county or intermediate authorizers (hereafter “county” authorizers) known to us at the time of the survey responded. (Two of the largest county authorizers in the nation—Lucas County, Ohio and St. Claire, Michigan—did not participate in the survey.) Together, all told, they sponsor 19 schools. The first began chartering in 1994, but most actually began after the turn of the century.

### *Diversity, diversity*

These authorizers appear to have little in common, save for the fact that they oversee just a few schools a piece. Most sponsor only one school, though one county agency authorizes more than ten. Some of these authorizers have slowed their approval rates recently, while others have not. Three of the fourteen

county authorizers have complete discretion over their budgets, while several have no discretion at all. Some rely on charter school fees to fund their authorizing offices, while others tap the operating budgets of their parent agencies. Half use sophisticated data analysis models—a higher rate than other types—but half don’t do data analysis or don’t know if they do.

### **Of all the authorizer types County and Intermediate Authorizers are most likely to...**

- Use a sophisticated data analysis model
- Feel authorizer issues are their greatest challenge (tied with SEAs).

### **and they are least likely to...**

- Issue a charter (fewest issued per authorizer of all types).\*

(\* Statistically significant at the .01 level.)

### How well do county/intermediate agencies practice the five elements of successful authorizing?

As one might expect, county authorizers look like a hybrid of LEAs and SEAs. They have the data capabilities, fiscal freedom, and expertise of an SEA with the rigid application processes, size, and community focus of an LEA.

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS COUNTY AUTHORIZERS DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS COUNTY AUTHORIZERS DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	<p>They rate an applicant's score on an evaluation rubric as "important" for chartering decisions.</p> <p>Financial position rated "very important" for renewal decisions.</p> <p>Academic performance rated "important" for renewal.</p> <p>Half use the most sophisticated data analysis models.</p>	<p>A school's score on an evaluation rubric rated only "somewhat important" for renewal decisions.</p> <p>Half don't use any data analysis model or don't know if they do.</p>	Half of them clearly value data and analyze it in sophisticated ways.
Sound working relations	<p>A majority make separate opening decisions and offer a planning year.</p> <p>Half believe teamwork is the best strategy for success.</p>	<p>Only 30 percent offer informational meetings for prospective applicants and none allow for conditional approval.</p> <p>They are mostly "bureaucratic," with a heavy emphasis on compliance, and some fall under "limited oversight."</p>	On the application side, they are a little rigid, but once schools are approved they are more fair, if bureaucratic.
Skilled personnel	<p>Their chartering offices are very reliant on help from their colleagues for fiscal oversight and special education.</p> <p>23 percent said they didn't need more staff, though another 23 percent said they did, to monitor academic performance.</p>	None report having leaders with charter experience.	What they lack in-house they get through other sources.
Adequate resources and autonomy	<p>Only 21 percent face any sort of caps.</p> <p>Half have total discretion over operating budgets.</p>		They appear to have adequate resources and discretion.
Parent and community input	<p>An application presentation at a public hearing is "important."</p> <p>Community feedback in renewal process is "important."</p>	Parent surveys are only "somewhat important" for renewal decisions.	On the whole, they value parent and community input.

## ... NONPROFIT ... ORGANIZATIONS

These relative newcomers are 501(c)3 organizations that sponsor schools in Minnesota, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.

### *Medium-sized, yet new*

At the time of the survey, there were eight active nonprofit authorizers known to us (including the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in Ohio). Six of them responded to the survey, and together they sponsor 22 schools. Most began authorizing after 2001. They tend to be either medium-sized, with five to 18 schools, or very small with only one school. Many of the schools (60 percent) are located more than 50 miles from their authorizer. While some of these authorizers report to their nonprofit governing board, most report to state education officials.

### *Nonprofit, non-conformist*

There are a few things that set nonprofit organizations apart from other authorizer types. First, they are more likely to use contractors rather than in-house help to handle fiscal oversight and audits. Two-thirds of them say they don't need more staff, while about two-thirds would use improved technology, if they had it, to monitor performance. This is the reverse of what other types of authorizers say. They usually want additional staff, but don't feel they need more technology.

### Of all the authorizer types Nonprofit authorizers are most likely to...

- Have complete control over their budgets\*
- Have schools far away from their offices\*
- Be new to authorizing (average age 2.8 years)
- Impose extra requirements on top of local, state, or federal laws
- Hire a contractor for fiscal oversight and audits.

### and they are least likely to...

- Revoke or rescind a charter (like municipalities, they haven't done it yet)\*
- Get help from parent agency for authorizer functions.

(\* Statistically significant at the .01 level.)

### How well do nonprofit organizations practice the five elements of successful authorizing?

Nonprofit authorizers are strong in three areas: 1) They collect more data than most authorizers and know how to use it; 2) They have adequate and flexible resources; and 3) They value community and parent input.

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	<p>An applicant's track record of school leadership is "very important" in chartering decisions.</p> <p>Financial position and academic performance is "very important" in renewal decisions.</p> <p>Majority use a sophisticated data analysis model.</p> <p>40 percent collect data from schools and 40 percent from the state (more than most authorizers).</p>	<p>An applicant's score on a rubric is only "somewhat important" in application process, "not too important" in the renewal process.</p>	<p>They collect a lot of data from their schools and appear to use it well.</p>
Sound working relations	<p>Two-thirds say teamwork is the best success strategy.</p> <p>Only one lists punitive measures as its primary strategy to remedy problems.</p> <p>Half are classified as either "hands-on" or "tight-loose" authorizers.</p>	<p>Only one-third offer information meetings or give feedback to rejected applicants.</p> <p>Half fall under "limited oversight."</p>	<p>They don't do much to encourage or improve charter applications, but are fair once a school is approved.</p>
Skilled personnel	<p>They are "very reliant" on contractors for fiscal oversight and audits.</p> <p>Two-thirds say they don't need more staff.</p>	<p>Most leaders have educational administration, not charter, backgrounds.</p>	<p>The small ones appear to have the staff capacity they need; the medium ones might need more.</p>
Adequate resources and autonomy	<p>Only one operated under a charter cap (at the time of the survey).</p> <p>All have total control of their budgets.</p>	<p>60 percent would like improved technology to monitor performance.</p>	<p>They do appear to have adequate resources.</p>
Parent and community input	<p>An application presentation at a public hearing is "important."</p> <p>Community feedback is "important" during renewal process.</p>	<p>Parent surveys are only "somewhat important" in renewal process.</p>	<p>Generally they value parent and community input.</p>

## ... INDEPENDENT ... CHARTERING BOARDS

### Of all the authorizer types Independent Chartering Boards are most likely to...

- Have complete budgetary discretion\*
- Issue the most charters per year\*
- Use punitive means to remedy problems.

### and they are least likely to...

- Review/renew a charter (they have long contract periods)\*
- Impose additional requirements on charter schools.

(\* Statistically significant at the .01 level.)

Acting as separate boards for charter schools, these agencies—referred to here as ICBs—have many of the same functions as an LEA or SEA, but unlike them, ICBs have one mission: To sponsor charter schools.

### *Opposites, part one*

There are four known ICBs; the three that participated in this survey sponsor 24 percent (443) of all charter schools represented in this sample. Most of their schools (416) are in Arizona. The first ICB began operations in Arizona in 1994. Washington, D.C., has an ICB that began in the late '90s, and two states—Idaho and Colorado—created their ICBs within the last two years, but they hadn't chartered any schools at the time of the survey.

### *Opposites, part two*

The three ICBs that participated in the survey are very different. One is “jumbo,” one is medium, and one has yet to open a school. One reports to its state legislature and one to a mayor. The newest one reports to a nonprofit governing board. One gets its funding from state appropriations, and one from a mix of grants, fees, and federal appropriations.

They are also split in their opinions and practices, except for application processes and evaluation methods. All three allow for a planning year, give feedback to rejected applicants, offer individual information meetings, and use a scoring rubric. This is somewhat different from other authorizer types. Also, both authorizers that have schools use a longitudinal model to analyze data.

### How well do independent chartering boards practice the five elements of successful authorizing?

As the only authorizer type established solely to sponsor charter schools, we might expect a lot from ICBs. They deliver in key areas such as willingness to use data, fair application processes, and access to expertise. But there is room for improvement across the board.

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS ICBs DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS ICBs DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	Academic performance, teacher quality/retention, and financial position are all rated “very important” in renewal decisions.  Both operating ICBs collect data from schools or the state.	A scoring rubric is only “somewhat important” for application decisions and not too important for renewals.  They use a somewhat sophisticated model for data analysis.	They put a strong emphasis on the importance of data and data collection. They could update their models for data analysis.
Sound working relations	All of them (even the new one) offer information meetings, give feedback to rejected applicants, provide the scoring rubric ahead of time, and allow for a planning year.	Two-thirds of their remedies to problems involve punitive measures.  Two of the three report being more concerned with compliance than quality.	They have very open application processes, but they tend to be more focused on compliance after approval.
Skilled personnel	They are very reliant on paid contractors for charter application review and for legal and NCLB issues.  Only one has a leader with charter experience.	They would use more staff to monitor academic performance and school finances.	They extensively use outside help—which is good if they know about charter issues.
Adequate resources and autonomy	None face charter school caps.  All have total discretion over funds.		Yes.
Parent and community input	A presentation at a public hearing is “important” in application process.	Community feedback and parent surveys only “somewhat important” in renewal process.	They are somewhat concerned with parent and community input.

... MUNICIPAL ...  
AUTHORIZERS

*Because there are only two municipal authorizers, it isn't possible to draw conclusions as to how those authorizers act in general.*

Municipal authorizers are part of a city government and sponsor charter schools within their city boundaries. This sets them apart from other authorizer types, because they come from outside the traditional education system.

*It takes two*

The two active authorizing municipalities sponsor a total of 14 schools. The first began sponsoring schools in 1998 and has four schools. The second, with ten schools, began in 2001.

*A tale of two "munies"*

Though technically cut from the same cloth—local city government—these two authorizers are quite different. One reports to the mayor, the other to the city council. One operates under an enrollment cap, and the other does not. The one with caps has actually issued more charters since its inception, and the one without caps has revoked more.

One authorizer reports having total discretion over its funding, and one has control over about one-third of its budget. One of them believes in teamwork, the other in consistency as a key strategy for good relations with their schools. They both feel challenged by financial issues and NCLB.

### How well do municipalities practice the five elements of successful authorizing?

It is nearly impossible to generalize much about municipal offices, because they operate in very different environments.

ELEMENT OF SUCCESSFUL AUTHORIZING	WAYS MUNICIPALITIES DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	WAYS MUNICIPALITIES DO NOT DEMONSTRATE THIS ELEMENT	VERDICT
Data-driven decisionmaking and rigorous, objective selection and renewal processes	<p>A score on a rubric is “very important” in the application and renewal process.</p> <p>References and track records of leadership are also very important in the application process.</p> <p>Academic performance and financial position are very important in the renewal process.</p> <p>Both use value added models for data analysis.</p>		They both put a strong emphasis on data for decisionmaking.
Sound working relations	<p>Both offer information meetings for prospective applicants.</p> <p>One fits into the “hands-on” quadrant.</p>	One is considered a “limited oversight” authorizer.	One is more focused on sound working relations than the other.
Skilled personnel	<p>They are very reliant on help from other city agencies for legal issues.</p> <p>They tap contractors for site visits, and for fiscal and accountability issues.</p>	Background of one of its leaders is education administration; the other is unknown.	They both appear to have the capacity they need, but mostly through contractors.
Adequate resources and autonomy	<p>One does not face charter school caps.</p> <p>One has full discretion over its budget.</p>	<p>One has caps.</p> <p>One does not have discretion over its budget.</p> <p>They both want to change funding structure and politics/laws.</p>	One has more flexibility with its resources than the other.
Parent and community input		<p>A public hearing during the application process and parent surveys for renewal are only “somewhat important.”</p> <p>Community feedback for renewal is not too important.</p>	They both do not appear to focus on community or parent input, which is surprising given they are run by local elected entities.

... CONCLUSIONS ...

While there is considerable variability among the authorizer types, they also generally exhibit some strengths and weaknesses. Here’s how they stack up against each other.

Nonprofit authorizers and Independent Chartering Boards receive the most “strong” ratings. They collect data, have fiscal independence, and face limited restrictions. ICBs have greater expertise, and nonprofits accept more community input. Of course, these organizations account for only a handful of active authorizers, so these attributes might disappear if they grow larger and when many more are developed.

All authorizer types have room for improvement. LEAs chartering just one school need to pay more attention to it. SEAs need greater resources and to be more responsive to community input. Colleges, universities, and municipalities have resources, but also could benefit from listening to community and parent feedback and making better use of the data they collect.

For all their differences, authorizers are similar in many ways: They favor teamwork over paperwork and bureaucracy; they understand that data and academic accountability are the crux of the charter contract; and they attempt, with limited resources, to find the right balance.

We conclude that most authorizers at least know what they should be doing. A few of them are actually doing it; these authorizers have the resources and infrastructure to collect data to monitor schools’ performance and to hold them to account for the results. Perhaps that’s reason to be hopeful. But for the charter school movement to survive and excel, it needs all charter authorizers to make the jump from knowing what to do, to doing it.

TABLE 16: Authorizing types and the five elements of effective charter authorizing

AUTHORIZER TYPE	DATA DRIVEN DECISION MAKING	SOUND WORKING RELATIONS	SKILLED PERSONNEL	ADEQUATE RESOURCES AND AUTONOMY	COMMUNITY AND PARENT INPUT	OVERALL; STRONG/MODERATE/WEAK
LEAs	Moderate	Moderate	<b>Strong</b>	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
SEAs	<b>Strong</b>	Moderate	<b>Strong</b>	Weak	Weak	Moderate
Higher Education	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak	Moderate
County/Intermediate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>	Moderate
Nonprofits	<b>Strong</b>	Moderate	Moderate	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>
ICBs	<b>Strong</b>	Moderate	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Strong</b>	Moderate	<b>Strong</b>
Municipalities	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate	Weak	Moderate

## APPENDICES

## ... APPENDIX A ...

*Advisory Committee, Focus Group, and Interview Participants*

The project advisory committee assisted in the research design, survey construction, and review of the results.

- Justin Torres, *Thomas B. Fordham Institute (formerly)*
- Macke Raymond, *Stanford University*
- Patsy O'Neil, *Texas Charter Schools Association*
- Bryan Hassel, *Public Impact*
- Jim Goenner, *Central Michigan University*
- Mark Cannon, *National Association for Charter School Authorizers (formerly)*
- Margaret Lin, *National Association for Charter School Authorizers*
- Louann Bierlein Palmer, *Western Michigan University*
- Onnie Shekerjian, *Arizona State Board for Charter Schools (formerly)*

Following the teleconference additional authorizers and experts vetted a revised survey through interviews and “field tests.”

- Kristen Jordison, *Arizona State Board for Charter Schools*
- Larry Gabbert, *Delaware Department of Education*
- David Harris, *Indianapolis Mayors Office*
- Brian Bennett, *San Diego City Unified School District*
- James Merriman, *State University of New York*
- Steve Barker, *State University of New York*
- Rosylin Bessard, *Fresno Unified School District*

In December of 2004 we convened two focus groups via teleconference to learn what key issues authorizers thought needed to be explored in a survey and to get feedback on an early draft of the survey.

- Larry Gabbert, *Delaware Department of Education*
- Jimmie Rodgers, *Ferris State University*
- Myra Booker, *Los Angeles Unified School District*
- Ailina Rias, *Miami-Dade County Public Schools*
- Joseph Feldman, *New York City Department of Education*
- Josephine Baker, *D.C. Public Charter School Board*
- Buck Hilliard, *Georgia Department of Education*
- Jennifer Rippner, *Georgia Department of Education*
- Beverly Schrenger, *Georgia Department of Education*
- Kate Bowers, *Pittsburgh Public Schools*
- Brian Bennett, *San Diego City Unified School District*
- Mick Founts, *San Joaquin County Office of Education*
- Veronica Geyer, *New Jersey Department of Education*

## ... APPENDIX B ...

*Comparison of Authorizer Types on Selected Topics, Including Open Ended Questions***Average Rating for Amount of Help Received from Public Agencies**

AREA	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Accountability/Testing	2.3	3.0	1.0	2.5	4.0	3.6	3.0
Bilingual Issues	1.5	3.5	1	1	2.9	2.8	3.2
Charter Application Review	3	3.3	1	2.7	3.3	3.3	3.4
Fiscal Oversight/Audit	2.9	3	1.5	2.8	3.7	3.7	4.1
Insurance/Risk Management	2.5	2.7	1.5	2.8	2.9	3.1	3.3
Legal	3.1	4	4	2.3	3.8	3.3	3.3
No Child Left Behind	2.2	3.7	1	2.3	3.8	3.4	3.3
Renewal/Revocation Decisions	3.3	3.6	4.2	2.7	3.4	3.3	0.0
Site Visits	2.5	1.7	1	1.3	2.9	2.8	3.2
Special Education	1.7	3	1.5	1.3	4	3.6	4

NOT AT ALL 1  
 A LITTLE 2  
 MODERATELY 3  
 VERY 4  
 COMPLETELY 5

**Average Rating for Use of Consultants or Contractors**

AREA	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Accountability/Testing	2.3	2	4.5	1.8	1.4	1.6	1.7
Bilingual Issues	1.1	2	1.5	2.3	1.2	1.3	1
Charter Application Review	1.5	4	1.5	2.3	2.1	2	2.3
Fiscal Oversight/Audit	2.8	2.3	4.5	3.5	1.3	2.1	1.3
Insurance/Risk Management	1.3	2	2.5	2	1.5	2.1	1.3
Legal	3.3	1	2.5	2.8	1.5	3.1	3.3
No Child Left Behind	1.3	2	2	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.5
Renewal/Revocation Decisions	1.8	1	3.5	2.3	1.8	1.9	2
Site Visits	2.5	2.5	4.5	2.5	1.8	1.6	1
Special Education	1.7	2.5	2	2.3	1.2	1.6	1

**Percent of Authorizers Choosing Top Three Uses of More Staff:**

AREA	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Conduct More Site Visits	23%	0%	0%	6%	24%	18%	14%
Don't Know	2	0	33	3	0	4	0
Don't Need	6	0	0	66	3	11	23
Monitor Academic Performance	28	43	0	11	17	24	23
Monitor Compliance	9	0	33	6	28	16	9
Monitor School Finances	11	29	0	9	10	10	18
Monitoring/Assist with Reporting Functions*	15	0	33	0	3	9	5
Review Charter Applications	6	0	0	0	14	8	9

### Percent of Authorizers Choosing Top Use of More Technology

AREA	PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION	PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Assist with Reporting Functions	45%	0%	0%	0%	0%	23%	18%	22%
Authorizer							11	
Administrative				100				
Functions	9	0	0		0	15	11	11
Monitor Compliance	0	0	0	5	20	8	10	22
Monitor Finances	0	20	0	0	0	8	1	0
Monitor Performance	36	20	25	15	60	31	24	22
Don't Need	9	60	25	5	20	15	25	22
Don't Know	0	0	25	0	0	8	10	0

### Average Rating for Sources of Input on Applicant Education Plans

SOURCE OF INPUT	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Applicant interview	3.9	3.3	4.5	4.7	3.9	3.9	3.7
General quality of written app	4.5	4.3	4.5	4.5	4.9	4.4	4.5
Public application presentation	2.4	3.7	3	3.7	3.7	3.1	3.7
References of Leadership	4.2	4.3	4.3	3.7	2.7	4	3.8
Score from rubric	2.9	3.3	5	2.7	4.2	3.9	3.6
Track record of Leadership	4.2	4	4.5	4.3	3.4	3.7	3.7

NOT IMPORTANT/DON'T USE	1
NOT TOO IMPORTANT	2
SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT	3
IMPORTANT	4
VERY IMPORTANT	5

### Average Rating for Sources of Input on Non-Instructional Aspects of Running a School

SOURCE OF INPUT	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Applicant interview	4	3.5	4.5	4.8	3.9	3.9	3.8
General quality of written application	4.3	4	3.5	4.5	4.7	4.3	4.4
Public application presentation	2.6	3.8	3	1.5	3	3.1	3.6
References of Leadership	4.2	4	4.5	3.8	2.8	4	3.6
Score from rubric	2.9	3.8	3.5	3.2	4.2	4	3.6
Track record of Leadership	4.3	4.3	4.5	4.8	3.6	3.6	3.6

### Average Rating for Sources of Input for Renewal Decisions

SOURCE OF INPUT	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Academic performance/testing data	5	5	5	4.6	4.8	4	4.4
Community/parent feedback	3.1	3.5	2	4	2.8	2.6	3.5
Complete required filings	3.9	4	4	4.2	3.9	2.6	4.5
Financial position	4.6	5	5	4.6	4.6	3.7	4.6
Independent assessments	3.3	3.5	5	2.4	2.6	3.3	2.5
Parent surveys	3.4	3.5	3	3.2	2.3	4.5	3.1
Performance compared to other schools	3.1	3.2	1	3	3.6	4.2	3.2
Pre-determined scoring rubric	2.9	3	5	2	2.6	4.1	3.3
Reports from site visits	4.5	4	5	4.6	4	4.1	4.2
School Leadership	4.3	4.5	4	4.4	4.3	4.5	4.2
Student enrollment/retention/attrition	4.2	4.5	4	4.4	4	4	4.1
Teacher quality/retention/attrition	4.2	4.5	4	3.8	3.8	3.8	3.6

### Authorizers Use These Strategies to Maintain Good Relationships

TYPE OF STRATEGY	PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION	PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Money	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%
Oversight Activities	15	39	17	17	20	16	19	21
Paperwork	7	11	17	17	0	2	5	4
Teamwork	32	33	50	40	67	55	55	50
Technical Assistance	20	0	17	17	0	24	9	8
Upfront Agreement	12	0	0	0	13	2	7	17

### Authorizers' Use of Data Models

MODEL	PUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION	PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Fixed/Mixed Effects	21%	0%	33%	0%	20%	36%	22%	30%
Value Added	29	17	0	0	40	14	13	20
Longitudinal	29	67	67	100	0	29	34	0
None	0	17	0	0	20	0	9	30
Don't know	21	0	0	0	20	21	22	20

### Authorizers' Most Commonly Cited Challenges...

CHALLENGE	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBS	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAS	LEAS	COUNTY
Authorizer Issues	31%	29%	25%	23%	62%	23%	32%
Both Authorizer and School Issues	9	0	0	20	7	8	9
Charter School Issues	33	14	0	27	29	55	9
Money Issues	9	14	25	0	12	11	9
Philosophical Issues	0	14	0	0	5	9	0
State Policy Issues	10	29	50	20	12	9	23

### Most Commonly Employed Consequence

CONSEQUENCE	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Conditional Renewal	25%	0%	0%	0%	21%	13%	9%
Depends on Problem	0	0	0	0	11	2	0
Don't Know	0	25	33	33	11	16	0
Hasn't Happened	15	0	0	0	16	7	27
Increased Oversight	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Meet with School	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
None	5	0	0	0	0	11	0
Non-Renewal	35	0	0	33	11	11	27
Other	0	0	0	0	0	3	0
Probation Prior to Renewal	20	25	33	17	21	10	0
Revoke Prior to Renewal	0	0	0	0	11	13	36
Send a letter	0	0	0	17	0	2	0
Technical Assistance	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Withhold Funding	0	50	33	0	0	8	0

### Top Three Things Authorizers Most Want to Change

POLICY CHANGE	HIGHER EDUCATION	ICBs	MUNICIPALITIES	NONPROFITS	SEAs	LEAs	COUNTY
Broaden Scope	0%	17%	0%	0%	14%	6%	0%
Communication	0	17	0	23	11	12	17
Compliance/Accountability	0	0	0	7	6	12	28
Infrastructure Improvement	0	0	0	23	17	12	0
Money Issues	33	17	0	23	28	10	17
Politics and Laws	66	33	100	23	3	28	17
Tighten Scope	0	0	0	0	0	9	5

... APPENDIX C ...  
*Survey Items Included in  
 Charter Authorizer Continuum*

*Questions used to determine points for  
 “Quality Focus” (One point each):*

- 6: **In the charter application and approval process does your charter office. (One point for each of these.)**
- b. Advertise (web, print, etc) and/or attend conferences, local meetings, etc. to actively solicit applications?
  - c. Offer informal informational meeting(s) with individual applicants?
  - g. Give feedback to rejected applicants?
  - h. Allow approved applicants to take a planning year before opening a school?
  - i. After approval, make a separate decision about a school’s readiness to open?
- 7: **Please rate how important the following sources of input are in your offices’ ability to determine whether an applicant has the ability to carry out its proposed education plan. (One point for each of these.)**
- a. Applicant interview
  - d. Examine the track record of proposed school leadership
  - e. Check references of school leadership
  - f. Application presentation at public hearing
11. **What is the most common consequence your office imposes on schools that consistently fail to remedy problems (financial, academic, administrative, or other) during their charter term? (One point for any of these.)**
- a. Withholding funding
  - b. Probationary period prior to charter renewal
  - c. Conditional charter renewal
  - d. Refusal to renew charter
  - e. Revocation of charter prior to end of contract term
12. **Please rate the importance to your office of the following elements in deciding whether or not to renew a school’s contract. (One point for every “very important.”)**
- a. Reports from site visits
  - b. A pre-determined scoring rubric on each contract area
  - c. Independent (i.e, non-agency) assessments or site visits

- d. Community feedback such as parent complaints or media scrutiny
- e. Parent surveys
- f. Academic performance/testing data
- g. Student enrollment/retention/attrition
- h. Teacher quality/retention/attrition
- i. Strength and stability of school governing board/leadership
- l. Performance compared to other schools

20. **How many charter contracts has your office? (One point per school as a percent of total renewal/revocations per each of these):**

- h. Declined to renew primarily due to low student achievement? \_\_\_\_\_
- m. Revoked or rescinded prior to the contract renewal period primarily due to low student achievement since January 2003? \_\_\_\_\_

22. **Does your authorizing office use a longitudinal, “value-added,” or fixed effects model for analyzing school academic-achievement data? (One point for any of these.)**

- a. Longitudinal
- b. Value Added
- c. Fixed or Mixed Effects

23. **What types of data does your office collect directly from your charter schools that are broken down to the individual student level?**

- a. Assessment data
- b. Assessment and demographic data

24. **What types of data does your office have arrangements with the state to receive about your charter schools that are broken down to the individual student level?**

- a. Assessment data
- b. Assessment and demographic data

*Questions used to determine points for “Compliance Focus” (One point each):*

- 8: **Please rate how important the following sources of input are in your offices’ ability to determine whether an applicant has the ability to carry out its proposed education plan. (One point for each of these.)**
- a. Applicant interview
  - d. Examine the track record of proposed school leadership

- e. Check references of school leadership
- f. Application presentation at public hearing

11. What is the most common consequence your office imposes on schools that consistently fail to remedy problems (financial, academic, administrative, or other) during their charter term? (One point for any of these.)

- a. Withholding funding
- b. Probationary period prior to charter renewal
- c. Conditional charter renewal
- d. Refusal to renew charter
- e. Revocation of charter prior to end of contract term

12. Please rate the importance to your office of the following elements in deciding whether or not to renew a school's contract. (One point for every "very important.")

- j. School's financial position
- k. Successful completion of required administrative filings

20. How many charter contracts has your office? (One point per school for each of these EXCEPT for schools closed primarily for academic reasons.)

- d. Revoked or rescinded prior to the contract renewal period? \_\_\_\_\_
- g. Declined to renew? \_\_\_\_\_

