

What is Charter School Authorizing?

What do charter school authorizers do?

Charter school authorizers oversee charter schools. Charter schools are public schools that are granted more autonomy than traditional district schools to be innovative in curriculum, operations, and management. In exchange for greater autonomy, charter schools are subject to greater accountability. They must not only meet certain criteria required of all public schools, but must also meet the goals specified within each charter contract.

Charter school authorizers play a critical role in every aspect of the lifecycle of charter schools. Authorizers decide which new school proposals to approve, monitor each school's operations, and decide which schools are meeting the performance standards required to stay open. Authorizers should maintain high standards for schools, uphold school autonomy, and protect student and public interests. For information on authorizing best practices, see NACSA's *Principles & Standards of Quality Charter School Authorizing*, <http://www.qualitycharters.org/principles-standards>, and additional resources available on the NACSA website.

Why is charter school authorizing important?

Charter school authorizing supports and protects charter school autonomy and accountability by ensuring that new charter schools are capable of providing a great education for children; that these schools have a full and fair opportunity to succeed; and that they are promptly closed if they are not living up to their promise.

Effective authorizing is critical to the future of the charter school movement and to the lives of more than two million children who attend charter schools. Quality authorizing leads to quality schools, which can transform public education systems and provide a breadth of new opportunities for students to receive a high-quality education. Weak authorizing ultimately perpetuates a cycle of low-performing public schools.

Who are authorizers?

The types and number of entities entrusted to oversee the nation's charter schools vary according to state law. Currently, 41 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws. These laws provide for a variety of authorizers, including:

- School Districts/Local Education Agencies
- Independent Chartering Boards
- Higher Education Institutions
- Mayor/Municipalities
- Not-For-Profit Organizations
- State Education Agencies

In total, there are 957 authorizers monitoring more than 5,600 schools serving more than two million students. Some authorizers oversee a large number of schools; some oversee only one or two. Too many authorizers in a state can negatively impact the quality of both authorizing and charter schools. See *Multiple Charter Authorizing Options* on NACSA's website, http://www.qualitycharters.org/images/stories/Multiple_Authorizers.pdf, for additional information.

Are authorizers the same as accreditors?

No. Unlike accreditors, authorizers generally do not impose their own specific academic, staffing and financial requirements on charter schools, nor do they certify charter school programs. Rather, authorizers protect the autonomy of the charters they approve by allowing each school to innovate in these areas in accordance with its specific charter—subject of course to any state requirements.

Authorizers also monitor charter schools to ensure that they are accountable for their operation and performance as specified in the charter contract, and that schools are in compliance with all state requirements. Moreover, authorizers can determine whether a school demonstrates the academic, operational and financial capacity necessary for approval to open, and whether the school is living up to its goals or must be closed. By contrast, accreditors do not actually determine the opening or closing of schools, but rather whether a school can and will continue to be accredited.

Where can I find authorizers in my state?

NACSA's website maintains a list of all authorizers by state, including contact information and number of schools in each authorizer's portfolio. See <http://www.qualitycharters.org/overview-interactive-map>

Have a question about authorizing, improving excellence in charter schools, or related topics? Looking for additional resources on charter school authorizing practice and policy? Talk with experts at NACSA by contacting our media relations department at (312) 376-2316 or visit our website at www.qualitycharters.org.