



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 28, 2012

A CALL FOR QUALITY: NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS GROUP SAYS MORE FAILING SCHOOLS MUST CLOSE FOR REFORM TO FULLY SUCCEED

CALL COMES AS NACSA LAUNCHES "ONE MILLION LIVES" CAMPAIGN

WASHINGTON, D.C. – While a great many public charter schools are among their states' best performers and are paving the way for educational innovation across the U.S., too many are failing to provide a quality education. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), which represents government and other entities that approve and oversee charter schools, today called on charter authorizers to be more proactive in closing failing schools and opening great ones.

NACSA issued the challenge as its new membership survey shows the closure rate for charters in renewal has doubled from year to year but is still leaving far too many schools among the lowest performers, according to state accountability data. As a result, too many children still do not have access to a quality education.

As part of the challenge, NACSA today launched its "One Million Lives" advocacy campaign, designed to provide better schools to one million children by opening more good charter schools and closing more failing charter schools.

For the first time, NACSA is urging state legislatures to adopt new laws that hold both schools and authorizers accountable for their performance. NACSA is also calling for the establishment of statewide authorizing offices because they are more likely to implement professional practices based on high standards and promote quality growth. These changes will help create more successful new schools, including replications, while facilitating the closure of hundreds of schools that are falling short.

"In some places, accountability unfortunately has been part of the charter model in name only. If charters are going to succeed in helping improve public education, accountability must go from being rhetoric to reality," NACSA President and CEO Greg Richmond.

“Many authorizers are, in fact, getting it right – and those are the ones with the best schools, including many that are educating high numbers of at-risk students. But too many others are making decisions too influenced by politics, faulty analysis, and bad laws,” Richmond said. “Our goal is to help all authorizers raise their games to meet the challenges ahead.”

According to NACSA’s analysis, between 900 and 1300 charter schools across the country are performing in the lowest 15% of schools within their state. While some states may have imperfect measuring sticks, too many schools are not achieving the goals promised in their charters. The bottom line is that the large number of schools in the low rung inhibits the sector’s ability to grow in the right way over the long term so more students and families can benefit from great public schools.

If authorizers are able to close the failing charters in the U.S. and replace them with twice as many excellent ones, more than one million students will have access to a quality public education, Richmond said.

“Charter schools are not the only solution in public education, but we didn’t start the charter school movement in order to create more underperforming schools,” Richmond said.

According to NACSA’s annual survey, which focuses on the nation’s largest authorizers (those who approve and oversee at least five schools), the charter school closure rate in renewal increased from 6.2% in 2010-11 to 12.9% in 2011-12. NACSA focuses on closure rates during renewal because those decisions are most tied to academic performance. Charters that close mid-term generally do so for some emergency reason, such as poor financial management, lack of enrollment, or other non-academic causes.

“While the uptick in these types of closures is a good sign, it’s imperative for all authorizers to increase the rigor of their accountability practices so that all charters are held to the highest standards of excellence,” Richmond said.

The National Alliance of Public Charter Schools has reported a 200,000-student increase in charter school enrollment in 2011-12, bringing total charter school enrollment to more than two million students. Georgia and Washington voters this month approved ballot measures creating new, statewide authorizing bodies. Washington joins 41 other states and the District of Columbia to allow the creation of quality public charter schools.

“This is impressive growth and further proof that parents and policy makers want quality, tuition-free educational choices for children,” Richmond said. “We all have important roles to play – charter authorizers, state education agencies, school operators, reform groups, policymakers, funders and others in the charter sector

and within public education – to make sure these schools are the best possible environments for children to learn and to prepare them for the future.”

By engaging authorizers and a broad coalition to close failing charter schools and open many more good ones, we can get one million more children into 3,000 high-performing schools over the next five years.

NACSA released the new data and issued the challenge at a news conference held at the National Press Club with charter school and education reform leaders from across the country, including New Jersey Education Commissioner Chris Cerf, New Orleans Recovery School District Superintendent Patrick Dobard, and Jed Wallace, President and CEO of the California Charter Schools Association.

NACSA also announced that it has received financial support for its effort from the nation’s leading education reform philanthropies, including the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Robertson Foundation and the Walton Family Foundation.

This is the fourth consecutive year NACSA has compiled the authorizer survey data.

About NACSA: [The National Association of Charter School Authorizers](http://www.qualitycharters.org) (NACSA) is committed to advancing excellence and accountability in the charter school sector and to increasing the number of high-quality charter schools across the nation. To accomplish this mission, NACSA works to improve the policies and practices of authorizers – the organizations designated to approve, monitor, renew, and, if necessary, close charter schools. NACSA provides professional development, practical resources, consulting, and policy guidance to authorizers. It also advocates for laws and policies that raise the bar for excellence among authorizers and the schools they charter. www.qualitycharters.org

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What others are saying about NACSA's One Million Lives campaign

Nina S. Rees, President/CEO, National Alliance of Public Charter Schools

"To truly succeed, the public charter school community has to focus on growth and quality at the same time. The One Million Lives project will create the policies to ensure that every public charter is a high-quality school."

Chris Cerf, Commissioner, New Jersey Department of Education

"If charter schools are one important avenue for creating high-quality public school options for students and families, then we must take the necessary steps to ensure they truly are high-quality options. This means strengthening the process by which schools are granted a charter, holding them accountable for results along the way, and closing schools if they fail to meet the goals of the charter upon which they were founded. This is precisely what the exchange of autonomy for accountability means – the core idea inherent in charter schools. As authorizers we must do our part in only accepting excellence from this sector."

Patrick Dobard, Superintendent, New Orleans Recovery School District

"New Orleans is on the way to closing the achievement gap. In the 2004-05 school year, fewer than 25% of public school students in the city were on grade level. Our commitment to creating a network of independent, autonomous charter schools has been a driving force in narrowing the gap significantly with more than 50% of our students now on grade level. Crucial to our ability to have successful organizations expand and open new charter schools, is an independent third party that reviews charter applications."

Jed Wallace, President/CEO, California Charter Schools Association

"This year as we celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the charter school movement, California charters experienced another spike in momentum with 109 schools opening as parents and communities across the state turn to charter schools in ever-greater numbers.

"However, we cannot truly have the impact charters were intended to have – to reinvent public education – if we do not close those charters that have demonstrated an inability to meet the challenge of excellence and chronically underperform. CCSA applauds NACSA for its One Million Lives campaign and its goals to encourage effective authorizing, to grow the number of high quality charters across the country and to close those charters that are failing. The time to act is now if the charter movement is to continue to rebuild trust in the public education system by providing high quality public school options for all kids."

Janet Mountain, Executive Director, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation

"The Michael & Susan Dell Foundation believes that the process of chartering schools, when done well, has the potential to transform the educational opportunities available to students and families. NACSA's work to improve chartering practices, and specifically to close chronically low performing schools and replace them with high performing options, is to be commended."

Don Shalvey, Deputy Director, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

"To realize a nation where every student graduates from high school 'college ready' requires every school aspire to excellence and a cooperative spirit that shares successes and learns from others. NACSA's focus on excellent chartering processes increases the likelihood that both will happen. 'Bravo' to the NACSA team!"

Phoebe Boyer, Executive Director, Robertson Foundation

“Each year, our public education system is falling short for thousands of children. Charter schools are an important part of the solution, but only when they’re high-quality. We need to continue to open new, great charter schools while strengthening our efforts to close those that persistently fail. Authorizers are critical levers and we are proud to support NACSA’s leadership in the field.”

Ed Kirby, Senior Program Officer, Walton Family Foundation

“As more parents across the country are empowered to make choices about their children’s education, the need for high-quality school options - district, public charter or private - is more important than ever. With this funding, NACSA can continue to raise the bar on public charter school authorizing practices and expand the network of strong authorizers who thoughtfully approve and provide oversight for high-performing schools and close those schools that are not meeting their promise of serving students with a good education.”

Bill Phillips, President, New York Charter Schools Association

“NACSA is right to bring the focus back to kids with its One Million Lives campaign. For whatever reason the fact is that we open and close too few charter schools, even in a successful chartering states like New York. Both failures harm children.”

Jim Griffin, President, Colorado League of Charter Schools

“Taken as a whole these policy recommendations are a loud statement that charter schools, parents, and community leaders across the country should have access to a quality authorizer – rigorous, objective, and professional – with its own clear mandate for performance expectations.”

Dr. Howard Fuller, Founder and Director, Institute for the Transformation of Learning, Marquette University

“I applaud NACSA for this effort to expand quality choices for children and families. We know that charters play an important role in providing children from all backgrounds not only the opportunity to choose an education that is right for them, but also an education that will prepare them with the skills they need to succeed. The One Million Lives initiative will not only raise the level of discourse to focus on quality, but can help build the coalition necessary to put excellence into action. Our schools, our students and our nation will be better for it.”

SMARTER GROWTH

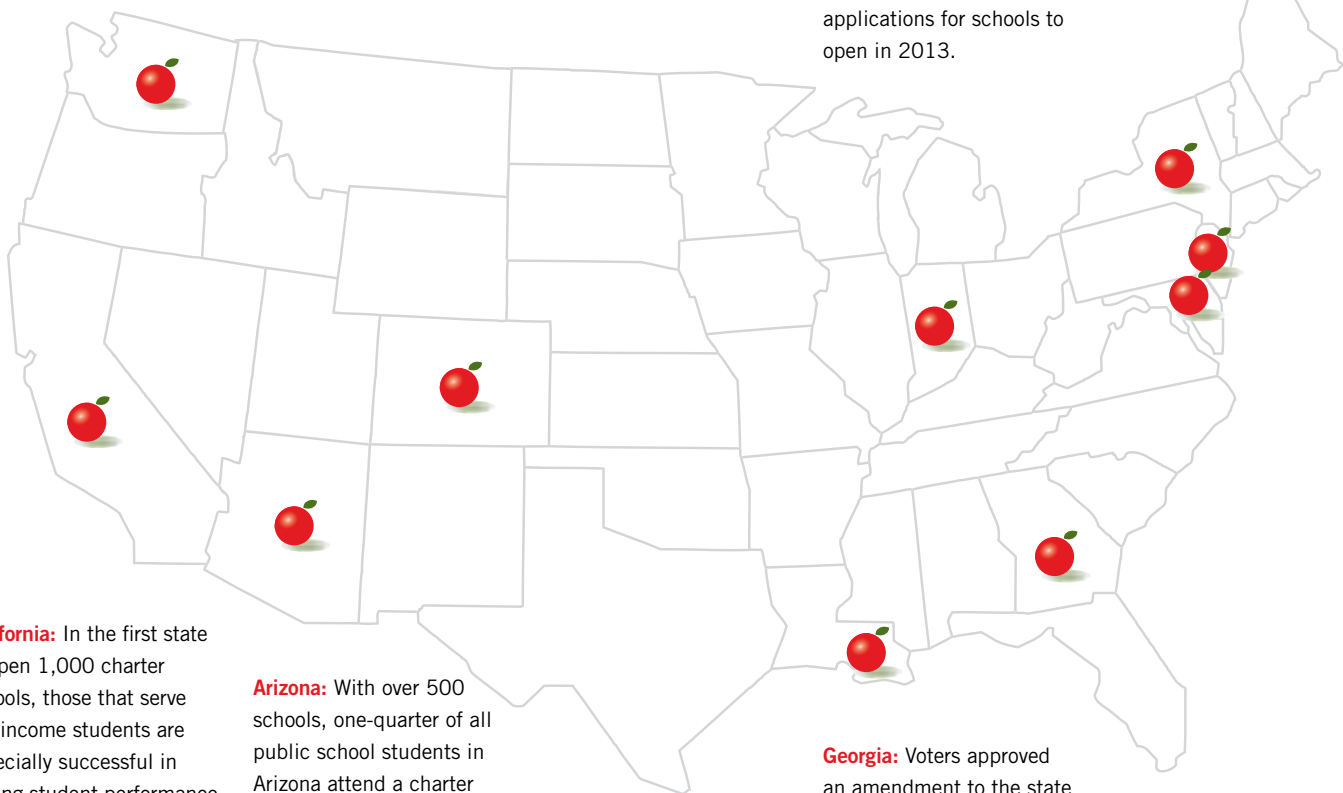
Washington: State voters approved a ballot initiative in 2012, allowing for charter schools and creating a state charter school commission.

Colorado: With both a statewide authorizer and several active district authorizers, Colorado is steadily growing quality charter schools. Charter middle and high schools are exceeding state median growth percentiles in math, reading and writing, while charter elementary schools are lagging.

Indiana: Established in 2011, the Indiana Charter School Board's mission is "to authorize and hold accountable a portfolio of high-performing charter schools." In its first year, the Board focused on quality, not quantity, approving three schools to open in 2012.

New Jersey: As a part of its continuing efforts to increase its oversight and accountability for charter schools, over the last two years the NJ Department of Education has opened 18 new schools, closed five schools for poor academic performance or organizational and fiscal issues, and put another 13 schools on probation or corrective action. There are currently 14 approved applications for schools to open in 2013.

New York: Forty-eight thousand students attend 136 charter schools. Attendance rates, elementary reading and math scores, and parent satisfaction are higher than in traditional public schools. In the small number of charter high schools, performance trails district counterparts, but Regents completion rates suggest improved performance ahead.



California: In the first state to open 1,000 charter schools, those that serve low-income students are especially successful in raising student performance. Through their state association, charter schools push for strong performance accountability via their Framework for Improved Academic Accountability and online school report cards.

Arizona: With over 500 schools, one-quarter of all public school students in Arizona attend a charter school. Thirty-seven percent of them are enrolled in schools rated "A" by the state, compared to 25% in traditional public schools. Charters, however, do have a slightly higher percentage of students in D schools (10% vs. 7%). Charter schools are doing particularly well with low-income students in Phoenix, with 66% of their students in A or B schools, compared to 49% in district schools.

New Orleans: In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, 66 of New Orleans' 88 public schools are now charter schools, serving 78% of all students in the city. Dropout rates have decreased by 60%. College readiness has increased from 25% to 37%.

Georgia: Voters approved an amendment to the state constitution in 2012 to create a statewide charter school commission.

Washington, DC: Forty-one percent of all students attend a charter school. 54 of 63 charter schools perform in the top two tiers of the D.C. Public Charter School Board accountability system.



STRONGER ACCOUNTABILITY

FIGURE 1

Number of Charter Schools in Lowest 15% of State Performance

Hundreds of charter schools fall in the lowest 15% of public-school performance in reading and math.

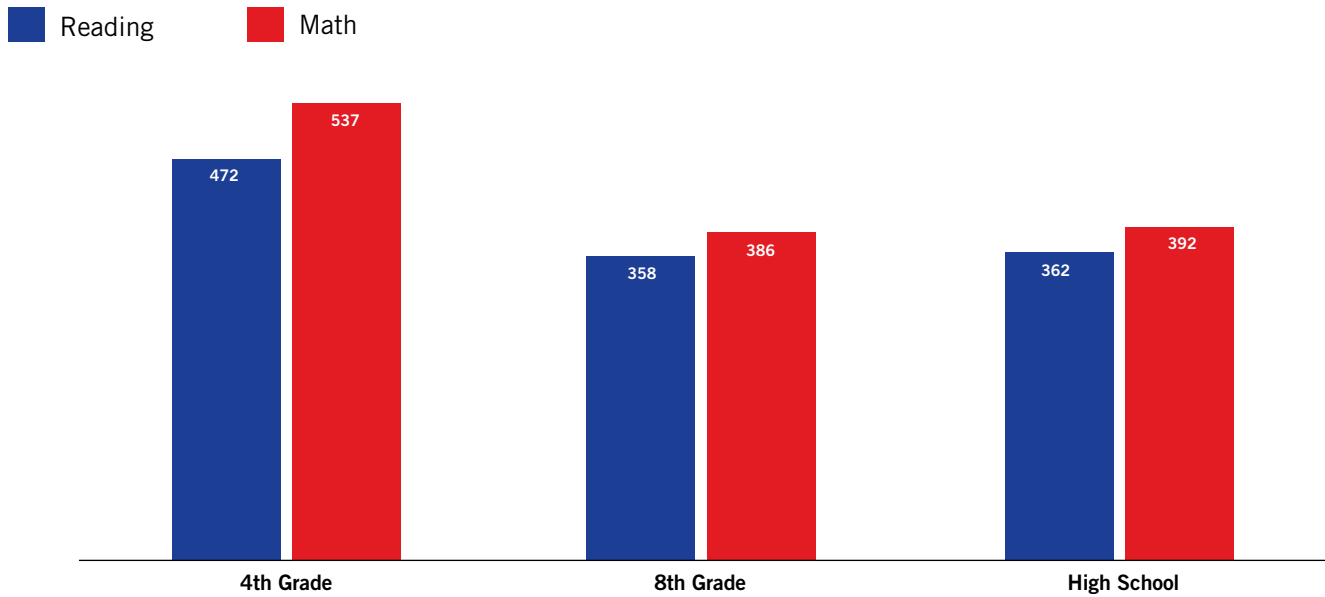


FIGURE 2

Ohio Charter School Closures

Since Ohio's default-closure law took effect, it has shut down nearly as many low-performing charter schools as have authorizers on their own.

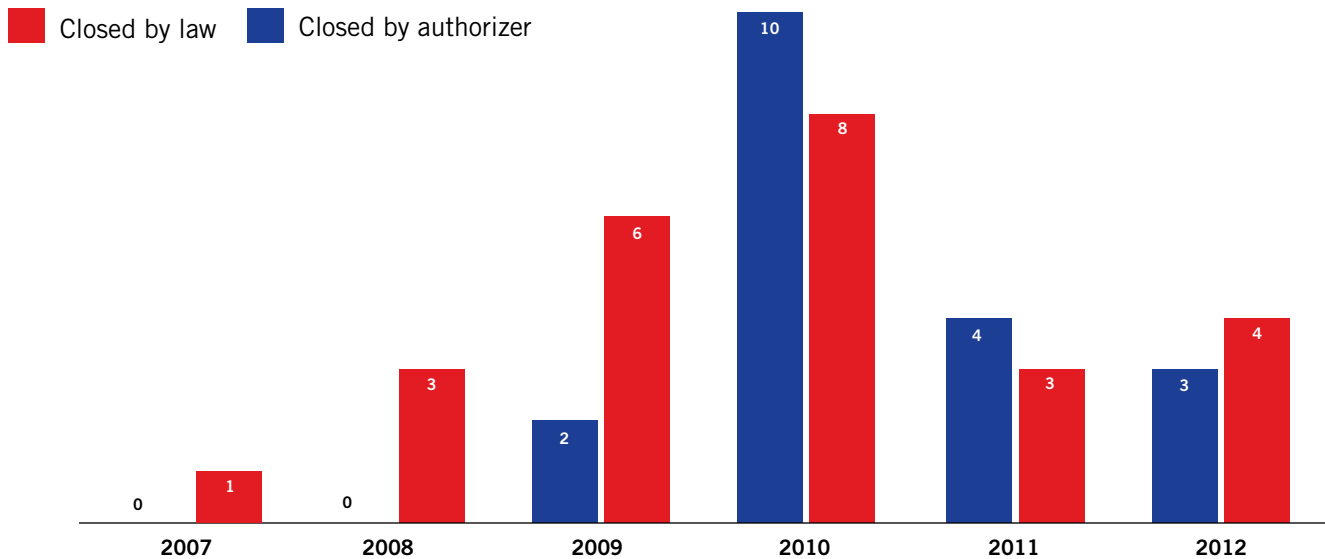


FIGURE 1

NACSA examined state accountability data to determine how many charters fell in the lowest ranges of performance in each chartering state. Because state systems vary so widely in defining “performance bands,” NACSA chose to look at charters with reading and math scores in the bottom 15% of all public schools, according to the most recent data from each state.

This is not a perfect measure. Some states do not separate “alternative” schools from others in their accountability systems, for example—but few such schools are represented in the 4th and 8th grade results reported here. The 15% figure may also include some new schools whose students have entered behind grade level. Even with these cautions, the data presented here show too many charter school students performing at an unacceptably low level of proficiency in these two key subjects.

FIGURE 2

Ohio first passed a default-closure law in 2006,ⁱ providing that low-performing charter schools would be subject to automatic closure after July 1, 2008. The law was strengthened by amendments in 2011. It currently provides that charters can be automatically closed if they are rated “Academic Emergency” for two of the past three years and (for grades 4 through 8) demonstrate less than one year of student achievement growth for two of the past three years. A school’s ratings for its first two years of operation do not count toward the closure rule. Dropout recovery schools and those with a majority of special education students are exempted.ⁱⁱ

Since the effective date of the law (July 1, 2008), it has led to the closure of 19 charter schools—nearly as many as the 21 ordered closed by Ohio authorizers for other reasons in that same period.

ⁱHB 79, as enrolled, Sec. 3314.35. http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/bills.cfm?ID=126_HB_79

ⁱⁱOhio Alliance for Public Charter Schools: 2012 Ohio Charter Law Guidebook, p. 13.

http://www.oapcs.org/files/u115/OAPCS_CLawGB_FINAL.pdf