

# Planning & Designing A Comprehensive Approach to Charter School Authorization

**Mark Cannon**

Natl. Assn. of Charter School Authorizers

**Sejal Doshi**

Public Impact

**John Rothwell**

Ohio Charter School Sponsor Institute

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# Authorizer Basics

- Authorizers are entities charged with licensing (i.e., chartering), overseeing, and deciding whether to renew individual charter schools.
- Statutory terms include:
  - authorizer
  - sponsor
  - approver
  - granter

**Authorizers charter schools primarily to provide additional student choice options.**

*Source: Fordham Report, May 2003*

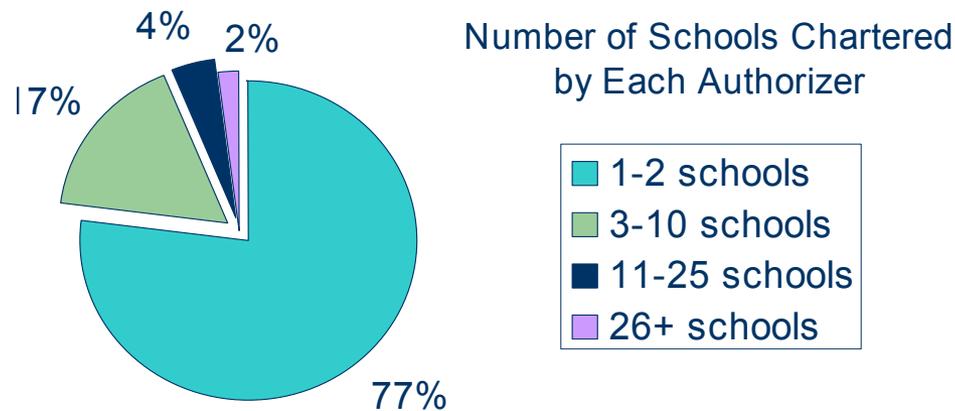
# Authorizer Basics

Entities with chartering authority include:

- School districts (almost everywhere)
- State departments of education (e.g., CT, DE, HI, MA, NC)
- State charter boards (AZ, DC)
- Colleges and universities (IN, MI, MN, MO, NY, OH, WI)
- Non-profit organizations (MN, OH)
- Cities/Mayors (IN, WI)

# Authorizer Data

- More than **600** active authorizers are responsible for overseeing the nation's nearly 2,700 charter schools.
- The vast majority of authorizers charter **1-2 schools**.



Sources: Fordham Report on Charter School Authorizing, May 2003 + Center for Education Reform's 2003 Directory.

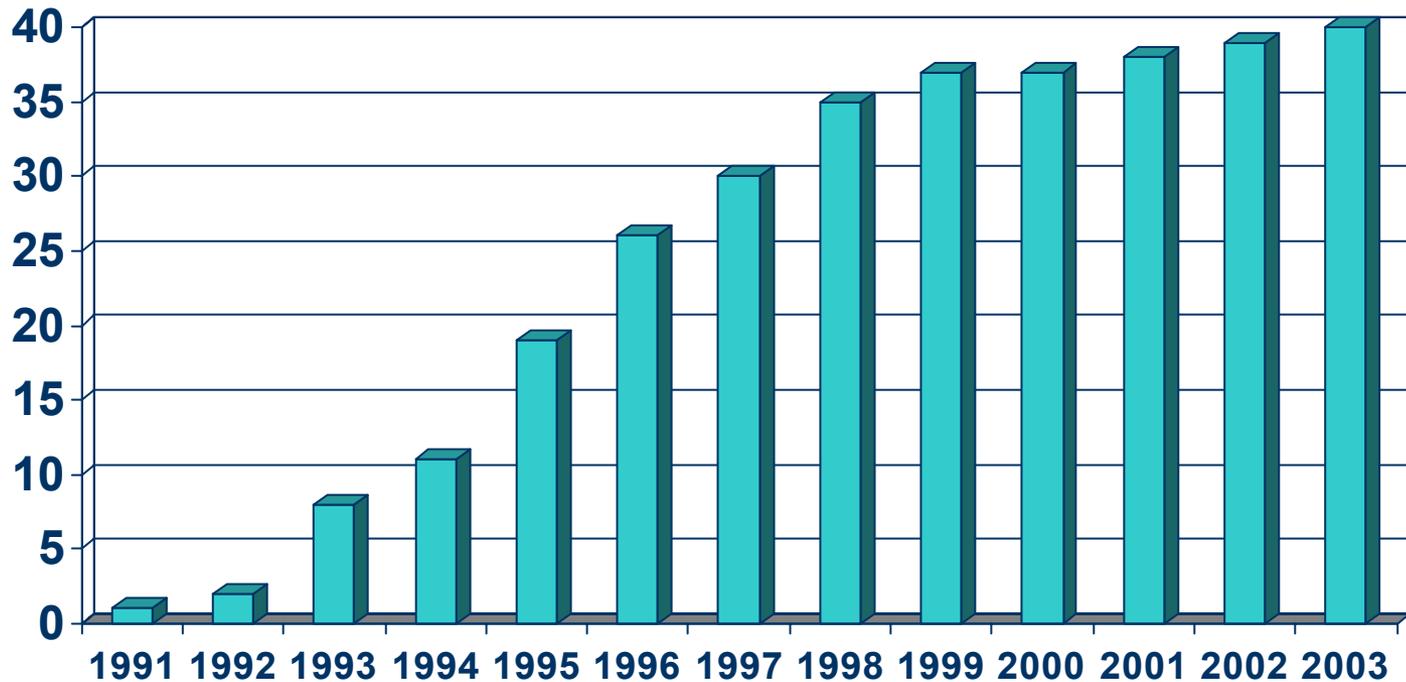
# Authorizer Data

- School districts comprise **89%** of all authorizers.
- State authorizers, on the whole, have **15 times** as much authorizing activity as school districts.
- College and university authorizers have **3 times** as much authorizing activity as school districts.

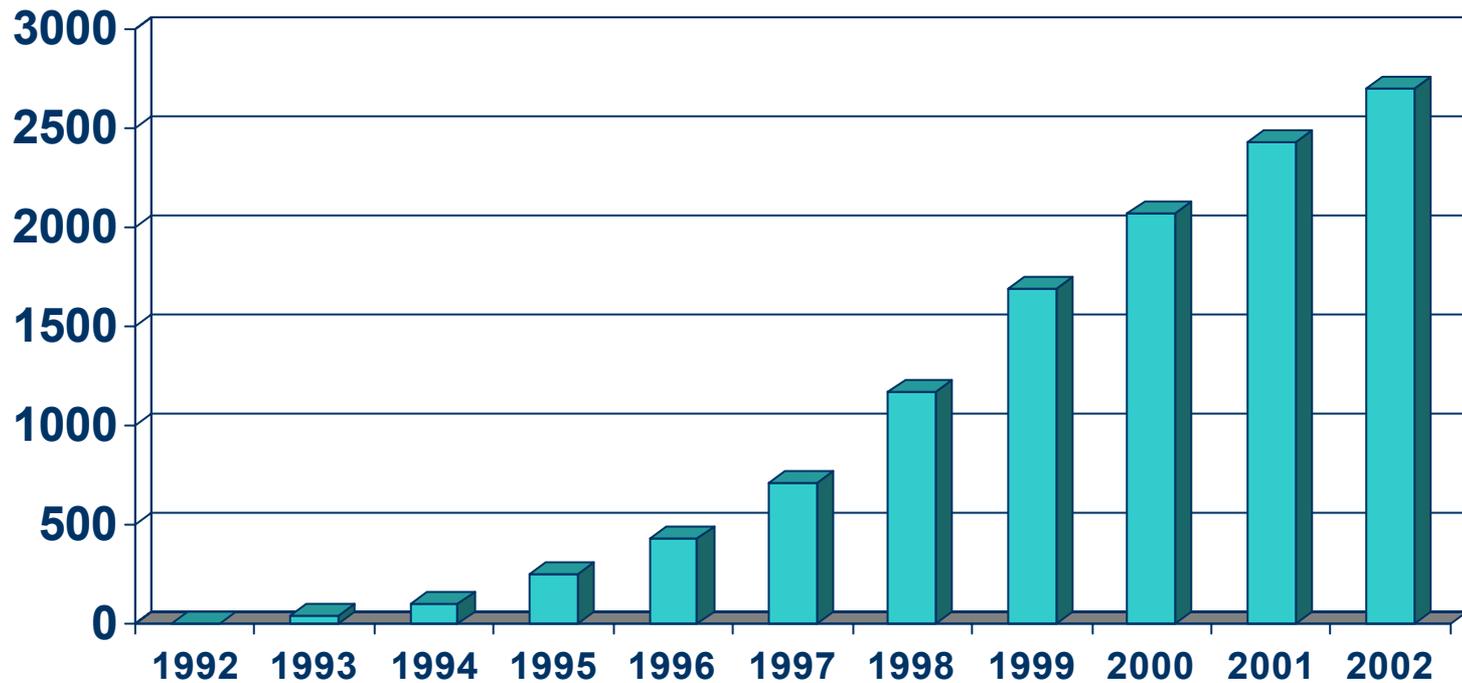
Source: SRI International, "A Decade of Public Charter Schools, 2000-2001 Evaluation Report," November 2002 (Lee Anderson)



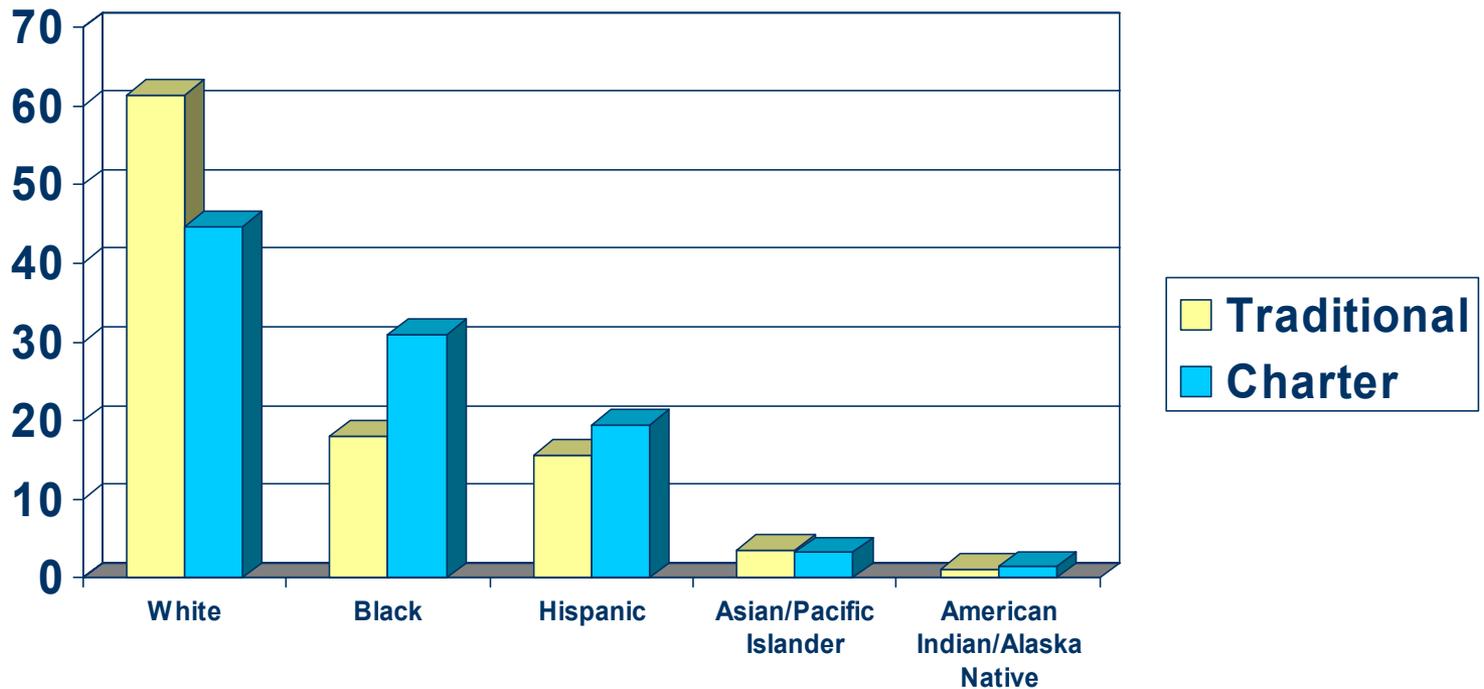
# Spread of Charter School Laws



# Growth of Charter Schools

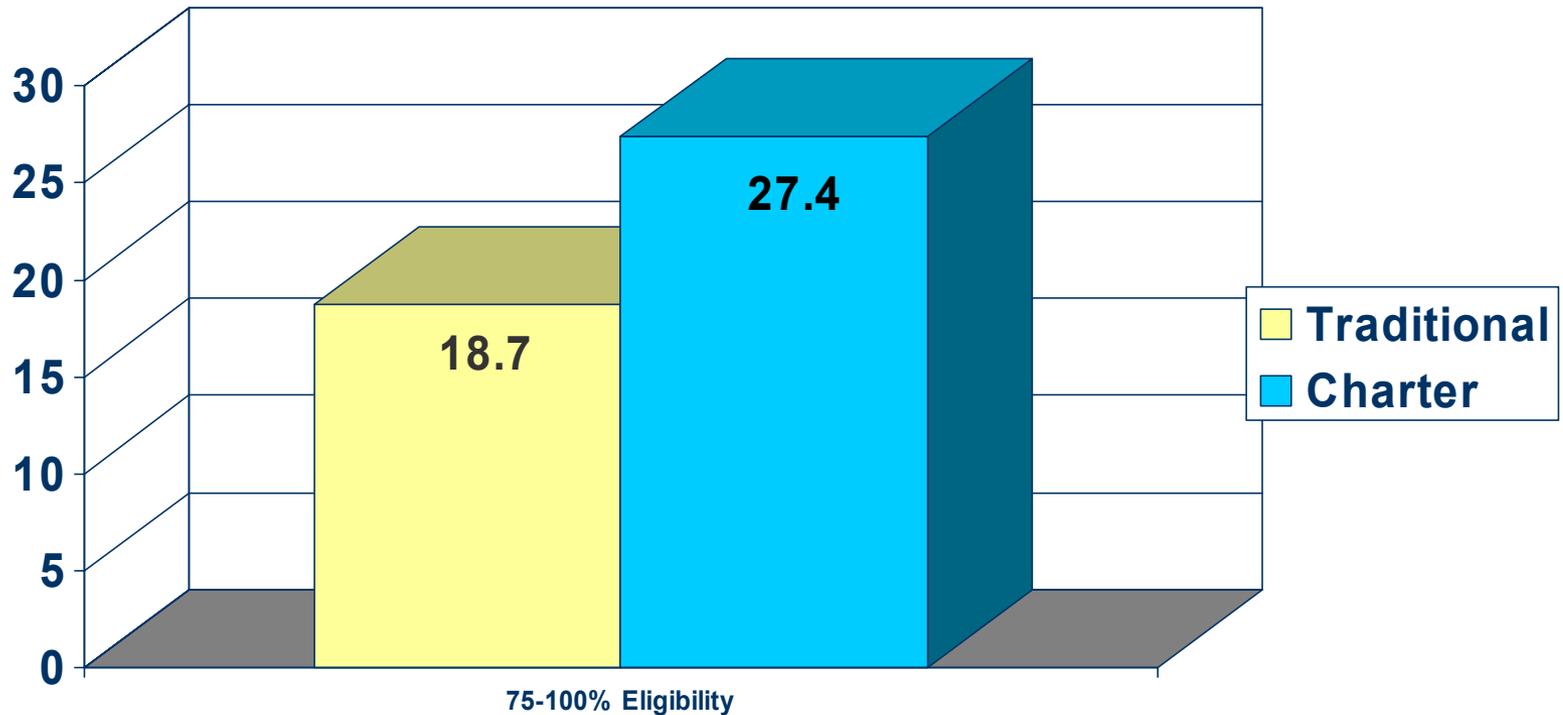


# Percentage of Elementary Students by Race/Ethnicity (1999-2000)



Source: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000.

# Percentage of Elementary Schools with 75-100% of Students Eligible for Free or Reduced-priced Lunch



Source: U.S. Department of Education, NCES, Schools and Staffing Survey, 1999-2000.

# **Authorizer Responsibilities Part I**

## **Role, Responsibilities & Capacity**

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# Ultimate Responsibility

- What can we do NOW to set the stage for viable renewal decisions THEN?

# Roles (approaches will vary)

- **Overseer**
  - Ongoing monitoring to deal with issues at an early stage.
- **Evaluator**
  - Ensure that charter schools are accountable for results.
- **Technical Assistant**
  - Offer workshops, encourage mentoring, provide referrals.
- **Advocate**
  - Collaborate with other agencies to reduce school burdens; leverage community support; and seek changes in law.

# Roles

Variation among authorizers depends upon:

- Requirements of state law.
- Level of human and financial resources.
- Perspectives of board and senior staff.
- Political constraints.

**“Where you sit is where you stand.”**

# Roles – A Continuum

1

**Hands-Off**

10

**Hands-On**

# Core Authorizer Responsibilities

Application process

Performance contracting

Ongoing oversight

Renewal decision-making

# Putting it All Together

Performance contracting

Ongoing oversight

Renewal decision-making

Clear expectations for school performance



Evidence about progress toward goals



Decisions based on expectations & evidence

# Putting it All Together

## Application Process

(outreach)  
(criteria)  
(review)  
(decisions)



## Accountability Relationship

(contract)  
(oversight)  
(decision-making)



**High-quality chartered schools**

# Discussion Question

- List three specific situations where you recently found yourself making a conscious decision to inject (hands-on) or not (hands-off) in your work with charter schools.

# **Authorizer Responsibilities Part II**

**Application Process**

**Performance Contracting**

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# Core Authorizer Responsibilities

Application process

Performance contracting

Ongoing oversight

Renewal decision-making

# Application Process

- **Opportunity**
  - for authorizers and school organizers
  - to create excellent schools
  - through a rigorous, high-quality process
- **Process**
  - consider multiple stages
  - as a chance for applicants to improve their plans
  - and for authorizers to charter sound schools
- **Key step**
  - basis of school development and charter agreement

# Core Authorizer Responsibilities

Application Process



- ◆ Outreach
- ◆ Criteria
- ◆ Review
- ◆ Decision

# Application Process → Outreach

What kind(s) of outreach will help the authorizer achieve its strategic goals?  
[continuum of roles and responsibilities]

- Basic outreach
  - clear accessible information about application requirements and process
- Active outreach
  - training for potential applicants
  - individualized guidance on application development
- Targeted outreach
  - Target specific educational programs
  - Target specific sponsors (e.g., community groups)

# Application Process → Criteria

- **Submission requirements**
  - Elements required by state law
  - Also may include: education plan, governance, budget, business plan, performance goals, etc.
- **Guidance**
  - How will the application be evaluated – specify selection criteria
- **Balance**
  - Critical information for decision-making
  - Formulate strong plans
  - Expectations for applicants

# Application Process → Review

- **Multi-step process**

- Letter of intent, prospectus, full application

- **Application review strategies**

- Interviews between applicant and sponsor (staff/board)
- External reviews
- Community input (applications for public review & hearings)
- Other due diligence (e.g., background checks)
- Transparency
- Others?

# Application Process → Decision

Application decision considerations:

- As mandated by state charter law (e.g., application decisions and school requirements)
- As determined by criteria outlined in application (ensure fairness and consistency)
- If denied ... provide feedback; specify conditions for contingent approvals or appeals (if applicable).

# Core Authorizer Responsibilities

Application process

Performance contracting

Ongoing oversight

Renewal decision-making

# Performance Contract

An agreement between authorizer and school that specifies:

- Expectations **school** must meet to secure renewal (or avoid revocation)
  - results
  - compliance
- Expectations **authorizer** must meet
  - autonomy
  - resources
  - [services]

# Performance Contracting

## Why is the charter agreement important?

- Defines legal relationship b/w authorizer & school
- Defines how the authorizer will hold school accountable
- Sets framework for authorizer responsibilities (oversight, decision-making)
- (Ideally) helps school launch with clear mission, purpose & goals

# Performance Contracting

Why is performance contracting challenging?

- High stakes decision
- How good is good enough?
- How bad is too bad?
- Focusing on *results*
- Meshing with federal & state requirements

# Performance Contracting

Components of a charter agreement may include:

- Common elements
  - Purpose of charter (mission and strategic approach)
  - Charter's term and conditions for renewal
  - Laws & regulations the school must satisfy
  - Resource flow and financial management (including relationships with EMOs/CMOs)
  - Reporting requirements
  - Authorizer options for corrective action, revocation, etc.
- School-specific elements
  - Services agreements
  - Target population and strategies for addressing deficiencies in student learning as well as parent appeal procedures;
  - Performance goals and measurements - accountability planning

# Accountability Planning

- “Accountability Planning”
  - The process
  - by which the authorizer and the school come to agreement
  - about the expectations for which the school will be held accountable

# Accountability Planning

## Three tracks of accountability planning ...

- Externally mandated indicators
  - Federal (e.g., AYP)
  - State (e.g., state assessment system)
  - Charter law (e.g., fiscal compliance)
- Authorizer-initiated indicators
  - E.g., Parent satisfaction measures
- School-initiated indicators
  - Mission-specific goals
    - Application: the starting point
    - Refinement process:
      - Clarify mission & goals
      - Select/develop measures

*Final plan: negotiated with authorizer*

# Expectations: How Definitive?

Straight  
Formula



Pure  
Judgment

WHY?

Clarity is vital  
Need basis for tough calls

WHY?

Performance is complex  
Importance of intangibles

# Discussion Questions

- What do you consider non-negotiables of the charter agreement? List and prioritize.
- What areas would you consider as negotiable? List and prioritize.
- Discuss how your (non-)negotiables affect school autonomy.

# **Authorizer Responsibilities Part III**

**Ongoing Oversight  
Renewal Decision-making**

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# Core Authorizer Responsibilities

Application process

Performance contracting

Ongoing oversight

Renewal decision-making

# Oversight of Charter vs. Non-charter Schools

- The nature, quality and quantity, of oversight expected of charter school authorizers dramatically exceeds that which is provided for district schools, non-public school, or school districts.

# Ongoing Monitoring & Evaluation

- 1) Who does it?
  - 2) How is it done?
  - 3) Why is it done?
- In designing [or re-engineering] a monitoring, oversight and evaluation system, which of these questions is most important?

# Active Participation Moment

- Identify 10 reasons for ongoing monitoring and oversight. [three minutes]
- Prioritize the list [one minute]
- Report

# Why Monitoring and Oversight.

## The reality?

- Authorizers need something to do between the time charters are granted and the renewal decision.
- It's assumed that's what is done when you are in charge.
- Know what's happening in schools to be ready for “gotcha” questions from the press.
- Performance analysis and feedback are foundational leadership roles.
- Be prepared for a valid renewal / non-renewal decision.

# Monitoring

- What gets monitored and how it gets monitored is a function of why you are doing the monitoring.
- Continuous Improvement
- Renewal Decision

# Performance Monitoring

- Academic Performance
- Fiscal Performance
- Organizational Performance
- What is collected, when it is collected, and how it is collected is an essential part of the school's charter / contract.

# Why Compliance Monitoring?

- Renewal Decision?
- It's a leadership thing. Assuring that your subordinates comply with company policies, rules and regulations is a fundamental part of leadership and supervision.
- The leadership challenge is to build a relationship and culture in which compliance is a by-product of school operations and not the focus.

# Continuous Improvement Cycle



# Core Authorizer Responsibilities

Application process

Performance contracting

Ongoing oversight

Renewal decision-making

# Discussion Question

- Is the renewal / non-renewal decision difficult?
- If so why?
- Does it need to be difficult?

# Renewal Decision-making

- **Decision-making Data**
- **Decision-making Criteria**
  - How good is good enough?
  - How bad is too bad?
  - What about the grey area in between?
- **Decision-making Procedure**
- **Alternatives to the Axe**
- **Policies and Procedures for School Closure**