



APPLYING FOR EXCELLENCE

Fostering New High-Quality Charter Schools in California

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is collaborating with leading California charter school authorizers on a fifteen-month project: *Applying for Excellence: Fostering New High-Quality Charter Schools in California*.

The purpose of the *Applying for Excellence* Project is twofold:

- 1) to translate the experience of the most active school district and county authorizers in California into leadership for newer authorizers in the state; and**
- 2) to work with these experienced authorizers to develop practical tools that will make it easier for new authorizers to implement a sound application process and for active authorizers to reflect on and improve their current practices.**

Through *Applying for Excellence*, NACSA will facilitate development of the following practice-oriented tools and resources that California school districts and county offices of education can use to make more effective charter school petition decisions:

- Components of an Effective Application
- Application Packet Self-Evaluation Tool
- Application Implementation Guide
- Intensive Seminars on the Application Process

Project Background. Charter school authorizers are the entities responsible for deciding whether to approve charter petitions and for ensuring public accountability of approved schools through ongoing oversight and evaluation. Authorizers are essential to a strong charter school movement. They provide public accountability, and they ensure that charter schools are doing what they promised to do.

In California, school districts and county offices of education are the primary authorizing entities. These district and county authorizers have chartered more than 400 schools. More students attend charter schools in California than in any other state, and California is poised to surpass Arizona as having the most charter schools in the nation. Nevertheless, some California authorizers have come under fire following several isolated but highly publicized school failures. California has produced hundreds of schools that exemplify what the movement is about – new, high-quality educational opportunities for public school children, but it has also produced some mismanaged schools that, arguably, the authorizer never should have chartered in the first place - and might not have had there been more rigorous, objective application requirements in place.

Project Focus. The petition is the charter school blueprint. A strong petition combined with demonstrated capacity is the best indicator we have of high performance for an operating school. The California Department of Education (CDE) is considering adoption of one application packet for use with petitions to CDE. In addition, a number of county and district

authorizers have developed rigorous application packets and procedures in recent years that also can serve as models for newer authorizers. Through *Applying for Excellence*, NACSA will work with experienced school district and county authorizers to develop resources that encourage fair, consistent, and rigorous application practices.

NACSA's purpose is to foster the leadership of active California authorizers and to help translate their experience into practical charter authorizing resources. **The *Applying for Excellence* resources will help authorizers to assess charter petitions for evidence of demonstrated core competencies and to have reasonable confidence that a school, once chartered, will fulfill the intent of California's charter school law.**

Project Leaders

California Department of Education
 Chula Vista Elementary School District
 El Dorado County Office of Education
 Kern County Office of Education
 Los Angeles County Office of Education
 Los Angeles Unified School District
 Oakland Unified School District
 Riverside County Office of Education
 San Bernadino County Office of Education
 San Diego City Schools
 San Francisco Unified School District
 San Joaquin County Office of Education
 Twin Ridges Elementary School District

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The National Association of Charter School Authorizers is a private non-profit, non-partisan organization whose mission is to promote the establishment and operation of quality charter schools through responsible oversight in the public interest. The *Applying for Excellence* Project is supported through a grant from the Pisces Foundation. For more information, contact Rebecca Drendel (rebeccad@charterauthorizers.org) or William Haft (williamh@charterauthorizers.org).