

# THE Center for Education Reform

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## AUTHORIZERS MATTER: Ensuring the Creation of High Quality Charters in Georgia

### MODELS FOR CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING

1. Local school board only
2. Local school board and other entities (or Multiple Authorizers)
3. Local school board with binding appeals process to the state board

### WHY MULTIPLE OR INDEPENDENT AUTHORIZERS?

States that have multiple authorizers are not only more likely to foster growth, but quality growth. **Eighty percent of the nation's 4,150 charter schools are in states with multiple authorizers or a strong binding appeals process.** States with multiple authorizers have almost 4 times more charter schools than states requiring only or prior local school board approval.

**There is no practice in which school boards are given first right of refusal before an independent authorizer may review an application.** The reason independent authorizers exist is because local school boards are often unable or unwilling to have fair and impartial processes to vet charter schools, and many that do approve charter schools create friction between schooling entities. Independent authorizers are needed to ensure charter school quality and growth.

The following are just a few examples from four of the 17 states with multiple or independent authorizers:

#### *District of Columbia*

- Seventy-two charter schools operate in DC serving 30 percent of all public school students. DC is ranked an "A" charter law because it allows for an independent authorizer, The DC Public Charter School Board (DCPCSB).
- Recent data shows that eighth graders in charter authorized by the DCPCSB outperformed their conventional public school peers by 27 percentage points in reading. Additional data from the 2007 DC-CAS shows that all charter school students are outpacing their peers in reading by as much as 11 percentage points in grades 3-8.



### **Michigan**

- Michigan is home to 245 charter schools. Its charter school law allows community colleges and public universities to authorize charter schools in addition to local school boards. Applicants may apply directly to the alternate authorizer. Michigan's charter school law is ranked an "A."
- Charter schools in Michigan continue to improve upon their performance each year according to the Michigan Association of Public School Academies (MAPSA). In the most recent MEAP scores, charter schools across the state outperformed their district schools on 23 out of 27 tests. Detroit's charter schools exceeded their conventional school counterparts on 24 of 27 tests.

### **Colorado**

- Colorado has 142 charter schools operating today serving nearly 50,000 students. The state's charter school law created an independent authorizer – the Charter School Institute. Applicants may apply directly to the Institute and do not need local school board approval. The Florida Schools of Excellence Commission was designed after this model, where the independent authorizer can approve schools in districts that have not retained exclusive authority to grant charters; and even then, schools can petition to change from being under school board district to Institute. Colorado's law is ranked an "A."
- Colorado's charter schools beat the statewide average in both math and reading in grades 3-8 on the 2007 Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). On average, 73.3 percent of charter school students in grades 3-8 were at or above proficient in reading, which topped the state average of 67 percent. In math, charters were outperformed the statewide average by 4 percentage points in grades 3-8.

### **New York**

- New York's charter school law allows for the State University of New York (SUNY) to approve and oversee charter schools in addition to local school boards and the state board of education. SUNY charters are among the most accountable in the nation and represent half of the state's operating schools.
- A recent federally-funded study of New York City's charter schools found that charter students in grades 3-8 are making greater gains each year they attend a charter school – approximately 3.5 percentage points per year.

## WHY NOT LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD ONLY OR PRIOR APPROVAL CHARTER AUTHORIZING?

School board-only laws limit the nature and scope of charter schools, and often limit their innovation and funding. School boards have also proven to be lax on accountability. An audit of California's school districts found that they were not properly monitoring both the conventional public schools and charter schools.

The states with the lowest scoring laws, **Rhode Island, Iowa** and **Mississippi**, all require local school boards to approve a charter application prior to the state board giving final approval or denial. States requiring local school board approval of charter schools have an average of only 15 charters per state. According to CER's *Charter Schools Today: Stories of Inspiration, Struggle & Success*, and its survey research over the past 3 years, local school boards are more likely to grant charters when state laws permit multiple authorizers or when there is a strong appeals process.

The few states that require prior approval are Mississippi with only one charter school, Idaho with 30, Iowa with 10 charters and Rhode Island with 11. Both New Jersey and Hawaii only allow one entity to approve charter schools and both states have had their struggles with charter school growth. Twenty-one out of 22 charter school applications were denied in the Garden State this past year. Hawaii finally approved its first charter in the last 5 years bringing its total to 29 charter schools.

## GOVERNORS SUPPORT INDEPENDENT AUTHORIZERS

The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices recognizes that multiple authorizers are a key component of strong charter school legislation. Other Governor's who have supported multiple or independent authorizers are:

- Jeb Bush created the Florida Schools of Excellence Commission in 2006.
- Mark Sanford created the South Carolina Public Charter School in District in 2006.
- George Pataki supported giving the State University of New York the authority to authorize charter schools in 1998.

## WHAT DO GEORGIANS THINK ABOUT INDEPENDENT/MULTIPLE CHARTERING AUTHORITIES?

- 52 percent of people surveyed are not satisfied with Georgia public schools.
- An overwhelming majority – 72 percent – feel other groups beyond local school boards (as current Georgia law dictates) should have authority to approve the creation of charter schools.
- Georgians strongly support tax-dollars following children to charter schools. This means that charter schools are public schools open to all children and do *not* create added financial burden on families.