Chartering

The First Biennial Report of the
Illinois State Charter School Commission

March 2014

Cover: Images of the four schools authorized by Illinois State Charter School Commission.
Top left: Math League competition winners from Horizon Science Academy - Belmont. Top right: Students from Southland College Prep listen to a lecture on a college trip to Notre Dame. Bottom left: Students sell produce they grew themselves at Prairie Crossing Charter School. Bottom right: Students from Horizon Science Academy - McKinley Park prepare their entry for a regional robotics competition.

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Foreword

By Greg Richmond, Chairman, Illinois State Charter School Commission

When the Illinois legislature created the State Charter School Commission in 2011, the legislature charged the Commission with writing a report every two years that describes "best practices in charter school authorizing, including without limitation evaluating applications, oversight of charters, and renewal of charter schools" (105 ILCS 5/27A-7.5i).

In its fledgling years, the Commission has sought to discover and provide examples in Illinois of national best practices in authorizing. As a result, the Commission is grateful that the legislature, in its wisdom, created an opportunity for a compilation of what we have learned thus far: our accountability framework for the evaluation of charter schools at the time of renewal; a model RFP to be used by districts and charter applicants for new proposals; and the processes and evaluation tools used by the Commission in managing charter school appeals.

However, the Commission did not want this book to solely represent our own voice. The title, *Chartering*, is inspired by Chicagoan Studs Terkel's collection of interviews; like his book *Working*, we hope that this compilation represents a diversity of viewpoints and outlooks, not just within the Illinois charter sector, but from authorizers throughout the country.

We have endeavored to create a report that can be read and valued by all stakeholders in our great State: superintendents and school leaders; policy makers and charter applicants; parents and political leaders.

We have deliberately invited organizations and individuals who may not always agree, but who can expertly dissect current ideas, issues and problems, and present innovative solutions and thought-provoking ideas in charter authorizing and charter schools. Some articles feature transformations already underway in Illinois – partnerships between universities and charter schools, new ideas in alternative school authorizing. Other articles point the way forward, suggesting new avenues in policy and school design.

Many articles discuss a fundamental missing link: a lack of data. To improve Illinois schools we first need to know where they stand. Throughout *Chartering*, authors identify crucial gaps in our state knowledge: according to Advance Illinois, kindergarten readiness data would help educators target resources and encourage families to engage sooner with school and early childhood education. The Illinois Facilities Fund argues that we must pinpoint the areas statewide with the greatest need for quality schools.

Regardless of policy differences, we all believe the students of Illinois deserve the best possible education and best possible futures. We hope this book will inspire new debates and new partnerships as we move closer to achieving that reality in the charter authorizing sector and beyond.

In addition to serving as chair of the State Charter School Commission, Greg Richmond is President and CEO of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). He was a founding board member of NACSA, serving as the chair of the board from 2000-2005. In 2005, Greg became NACSA's full-time President.

Commissioners listen to public comments at the September 17 Commission meeting at the James R. Thompson Center.

History of the State Charter School Commission

By Jeanne L. Nowaczewski

The Illinois State Charter School Commission was created as part of the Charter School Quality Act (SB 79) and signed into law by Governor Quinn in July 2011.

The role of the Commission is limited. The Commission does not have authority over charter schools generally in Illinois. Most of Illinois' 100+ charter schools are authorized by, and supervised by, the local school district. This is in keeping with Illinois' policy of local control. The Commission only serves as authorizer to four schools: two in Chicago, one in Richton Park, and one in Grayslake. Nor does the Commission police districts' activities regarding charter schools, such as the RFPs issued by districts or policies used by districts to review proposals. Districts are free to develop their own policies, so long as they accord with the charter schools law.

In 2011, the Illinois legislature explicitly assigned only four discreet roles to the Commission:

1. Resolve all appeals from denials of new charter school applications, charter renewals and revocations by districts
2. Supervise charter schools authorized by ISBE and/or by the Commission on appeal
3. Promulgate best practices in charter school autho-

Jeanne Nowaczewski is the Executive Director of the Illinois State Charter School Commission, a independent commission that resolves appeals from charter school applicants, promulgates best practices in charter school authorizing, and serves as authorizer for four charter schools in Illinois. Ms. Nowaczewski, an attorney and formerly a partner with Schiff Hardin & Waite, also previously served as Director of Charter School Recruitment for the Chicago Public Schools from 2001 - 2008.

rizing, including model RFPs

4. Report every two years on best practices in charter schools authorizing

None of these roles are new. The State Board of Education had always heard appeals, and supervised state authorized charter schools. Now the Commission does this to assist the State Board. In the first two years, the Commission has resolved 38 appeals. Only 2 appeals were granted and 1 was denied. The remaining 35 appeals were withdrawn after working through the Commission process.

The nine Commissioners are not paid—they are unpaid volunteers. They are appointed by the State Board of Education following nomination by the Governor. The Commissioners meet 10 times a year throughout the State of Illinois. The Commission does not receive any general revenue from the legislature. Instead, the Commission is permitted by law to charge an administrative fee to the schools it authorizes, and to receive philanthropic donations. Currently, the Commission assesses a 2.5% fee, although the law allows a 3% fee. The Commission is staffed by two people: a Director and a Deputy, who bring legal and educational expertise to the Commission. More information is available about the Commission at its website: www.isbe.state.il.us/SCSC/

Background of the Illinois Charter Law

In 1996, the Illinois legislature passed the state's first Charter School Law. At the time, the legislators set out the following goals for the legislation: to improve pupil learning, to increase learning opportunities with special emphasis for at-risk pupils, and to provide parents with expanded choices within the public school system (105 ILCS 5/27A-2(b)).

Today, almost two decades later, the task of educating Illinois' children is not yet complete. A 2013 study by the Alliance for Excellent Education (AEE) reports that overall 84% of all Illinois students are graduating from high school, including only 77% of Hispanics and 74% of Black students. AEE ranked Illinois 30th in the nation in 4th grade reading proficiency and 35th in 8th grade reading proficiency.

It was towards this goal of improving student achievement in Illinois that the General Assembly amended the charter law in 2008 and charged the Illinois State Board of Education with convening an Independent Charter School Authorizer Task Force. Legislators believed that charter schools could be an important tool in enhancing the quality of schools and student results in Illinois, but noted that almost all charter schools were concentrated in Chicago. The task force was asked to study the need for an independent charter school authorizer in Illinois.

After working for a year, the task force recommended the creation of "a quasi-independent statewide public charter school commission that would review charter applications in certain scenarios." Based on their report, the Illinois State Charter School Commission was created as part of the Charter School Quality Act (SB 79) and signed into law by Governor Quinn in July 2011. Under the law, the Commission was established as an independent body with "statewide chartering jurisdiction and authority."

The Creation of the Commission

Under the law, the Commission consists of 9 members, voluntary education-oriented appointees from across Illinois, appointed by the State Board from a slate of candidates proposed by the Governor. As noted, these Commissioners are not paid for their service on the Commission, yet devote significant efforts to the work of the Commission. The nine "Founding Commissioners" included:

- The Commission Chairman, Greg Richmond, President & CEO, National Association of Charter School Authorizer, Chicago
- Glen Barton, former Chairman and CEO, Caterpillar Inc., Peoria
- Sean Denney, Illinois Education Association, Springfield
- Jaime Guzman, Senior Director of Outreach, Big Shoulders Fund, Chicago
- Dr. Mike Jacoby, Executive Director, Illinois Association of School Business Officials, DeKalb

The Commission has been working with the Charter Funding Task Force (above) to produce a report to be issued in January 2014.

• Angela Rudolph, President, Think.Plan.Do. Consulting, Chicago
• Dr. Paul Swanstrom, former Superintendent, Joliet Township High School District 204, Crete
• Dr. Rudy Valdez, General Manager – EIS Systems Engineering Lead–Aftermarket,
Hamilton Sundstrand, Rockford

The Commission's staff and Commissioners have worked for the past two years to fulfill the four duties assigned to the Commission by the legislature: resolving appeals, supervising Commission-authorized charter schools, promulgating best practices in authorizing, and reporting on best practices. The Commission's work towards these four goals is discussed below.

Appeals

The right to appeal the denial of charter school proposals is not new. The first charter school law passed in Illinois contained the right to appeal, but directed such appeals to the State Board of Education. The only change that occurred in the 2011 charter law amendments was to direct these appeals to the Commission, as an entity with specific expertise in the area of charter review. The State Board of Education chaired the Task Force that created the Commission and agreed with this rerouting of appeals.

Since the Commission held its first meeting in November 2011, the Commission has resolved 38 appeals. Appeals may be filed from any district in Illinois. Over the past two years, appeals have been generated from the Fox River Valley area, the South Holland community, Rockford, Thornton, Maywood, and Chicago. Overall, 35 appeals have been withdrawn by applicants, 1 appeal has been denied, and two have been granted.

The Commission has developed policies and rules to guide its resolution of appeals. Appeals are a part of Illinois law to allow applicants a "second look," part of the American way of fairness. A comprehensive Commission rubric is used to judge proposals, and independent evaluators are brought in for their expertise to study the appeals. The Commission also interviews the districts, and listens to why the districts decided to deny the appeal. Ultimately, the Commission applies the law of the land to the proposal, and if, and only if, it is meritorious and meets the strictures of the law, does the Commission grant it on appeal.

The denied appeal and the granted appeals both arose out of Chicago, District 299. In November 2012, the Commission received a half-dozen appeals from charter applicants to Chicago Public Schools based on inaction, and then, in December and January, sev-

eral more appeals based on denials. In response, the Commission applied its standard of de novo review and granted the two appeals of the Concept Schools, while also denying another CPS appeal from Pathways. In March 2013, the two Concept schools, Horizon Science Charter Academy-Belmont and Horizon Science Charter Academy-McKinley Park, became the first two schools whose appeals were granted by the Commission.

In addition, also in March 2013, a group filed a virtual school charter proposal in the Fox River Valley with 18 districts, seeking to create a 2,000 student K-12 virtual school in that area of the State. The districts denied the proposal, and Illinois legislators, believing that virtual schools needed more study in Illinois, proposed legislation establishing a short moratorium on new virtual schools in Illinois. The Virtual Learning Solutions appeal was filed with the Commission in early May, and by late May, the moratorium had been established in the law by the Illinois legislature. At its June 2013 meeting, the Commission was prepared to take action as an appointed body, and formally dismiss all 18 appeals based on the moratorium, but the applicant withdrew the day before. The moratorium legislation imposed on the Commission the duty to study virtual schools and promulgate a report by March 1, 2014, described elsewhere in this Report.

Most recently, in October, 2013, the Commission received a set of nine appeals from a charter applicant who had sought to create a single-gender boys middle and high school in the South Holland area. The applicant, however, chose to withdraw the appeals after two days of interviews, and the Commission accepted this withdrawal at its November 19, 2013 meeting.

Authorizing

- **The Commission's Four Schools**

As noted above, the Commission is a small entity, with no power or authority over the 100+ charter schools in Illinois. Those 100+ schools are supervised by their local districts, as a part of Illinois' local control model.

"In the coming year, the Commission plans to expand its role as a resource for districts and applicants alike."

Instead, the Commission currently serves as authorizer to only four schools: Prairie Crossing Charter School, Southland College Prep Charter High School, Horizon Science Academy-Belmont and Horizon Science Academy-McKinley Park. These schools are described below:

Located in Grayslake, Prairie Crossing Charter School has been in operation since 1999 and serves 391 children in grades K – 8 from the Fremont (#79) and Woodland (#50) school districts.

Southland College Prep Charter High School, drawing students from the Richton Park district, has been in operation since 2010 and is serving 500 students in grades 9 – 12, as of September 2013, the school's first year at full capacity.

Horizon Science Academy Charter School-McKinley Park, opened with 432 students in grades K-8 on Pershing Road in Chicago in September 2013.

The second school, Horizon Science Academy Charter School-Belmont, opened with 288 students in grades K-5 on North Avenue. At capacity, the schools will each serve 725 children in grades K-12 drawing students from Chicago, District 299. Both schools aim to provide students with a "STEM college preparatory" education that has a science, technology, engineering, and math focus.

Illinois State Board of Education Chairman Gery Chico meets with students from Horizon Science Academy McKinley Park, a Commission-authorized school on October 31, 2013.

- **The Commission's Accountability Plan**

In the charter sector, an authorizer's job is to closely monitor its charter schools annually, and especially at the 5 year point of charter contract renewal. If charters are poorly working schools, then they can be closed if an authorizer has a solid accountability plan. The essence of the accountability plan is this: if the school meets the high standards it promised upon authorization, it has the autonomy to pursue its academic goals as it sees fit, within the parameters of certain overarching laws; however, if the school does not meet these goals, it must be held accountable, and if necessary, closed by the authorizer. This past year the Commission enacted a formidable Accountability Plan with three domains, Academic, Financial and Organizational, exemplifying national best practices. The Commission is now applying the Accountability Plan for the first time to the Prairie Crossing School, and will decide on whether and under what terms this school will be renewed in spring 2014.

Best Practices

To meet its mandate to model and promulgate best practices, over the past two years, the Commission has worked to establish an administrative framework of policies and practices that exemplify best practices in appeals, decision-making, and authorizing. The Commission has established a legal-opinion style format for its decisions on appeal, amended its administrative rules, revised its non- regulatory guidance, and developed policies regarding such items as: charitable funding, administrative fee structures, policy implementation of school authorizations, and Commissioner term replacement procedures. These decisions, rules, guidance and policies are all available on the Commission's website for public study and as a resource to districts and applicants.

The documents that the Commission has developed, including the Commission's Renewal Framework, annual reports on the performance of Commission

schools, and a model RFP will be published and actively distributed to Illinois districts in 2014.

Staffing, Funding, and Commission Practices

The Commission receives no general revenue funds, and is authorized, instead, by law, to raise funds to support Commission work in two ways: (1) by charging an authorizer fee to the schools it supervises (the Commission charges 2.5%, though 3% is allowed by law), and (2) by seeking charitable contributions (to date, the Commission has received approximately $320,000 in grants). Based on these two methods of funding, the Commission's annual budget during its first two years was less than $500,000 annually, and was used to support an Executive Director (hired in June 2012), a Deputy Director (hired in July 2013), both based in Chicago at the Bilandic Building, and for the administrative and programmatic expenses to support the activities outlined above. The State Board of Education has assisted the Commission since its inception, and, after an amendment to the statute in February 2013, took further steps to administratively support the staff, while protecting the Commission's independent jurisdiction over appeals.

Despite its small staff, the Commission holds ten public monthly meetings a year, as well as a number of public hearings and forums for appeals, rule-making and renewals. The Commission rotates its meetings throughout the State, and has held meetings in Rockford, Peoria, Maywood, Richton Park, Grayslake, and a number of different neighborhoods north, south, and west in the City of Chicago. The Commission also holds open public committee meetings at its offices on a regular basis to work on developing the policies and practices noted above.

The Road Ahead

In the coming year, the Commission plans to continue to try to serve as a resource for districts and applicants alike. The Commission seeks to be responsive to requests for guidance, and to offer model best practice documents and processes regarding proposal review, management of authorizing activities, especially renewal, and other policies and practices.

Already, in the very first month of 2014 the Commission participated in two important legislatively mandated activities in Illinois. First, as mandated by Illinois Public Law 98-0016, the Commission was charged with submitting to the General Assembly "a report on the effect of virtual-schooling, including without limitation the effect on student performance, the costs associated with virtual-schooling, and issues with oversight." On February 24, the Commission issued its report and recommendations regarding virtual schooling. For more information on the Commission's findings see the article concerning these recommendations contained within this report.

In addition, as required by Illinois House Joint Resolution 36, the Commission provided administrative support to the Charter School Funding Task Force in its mission "to compile a comparative analysis of charter school funding practices across the United States; examine the current funding provisions in the Charter Schools Law for the purpose of ensuring funding equity; and review the effects of State-authorized charter schools." A link to the full task force report is available in the additional resources section of this report.

During its first two years, the Commission has worked hard to fulfill its mission of serving as the first and best high-quality state-wide charter authorizer in Illinois. The Commissioners and staff of the Illinois State Charter School Commission recognize the enduring need for high-quality schools in Illinois as set out in the initial Charter School Law: to improve student achievement, to increase opportunities for at-risk children, to provide parents with choices, and to foster experimentation and invention within public schools. During the coming two years, the Commission will continue to work with applicants, districts, schools, and charter operators, to help realize these goals for Illinois students and families.

PART II. FROM THE AUTHORIZERS

In this section, authors discuss topics in authorizing, including school accountability, authorizer fees, and authorizing alternative schools. In addition, the Illinois State Board of Education recounts the history of bringing a charter school to North Chicago and authors from Indiana and New York provide insight into the value of multiple state authorizers.

Defining Accountability for Commission-Authorized Schools

By Jaime Guzman

Public Act 097-0152, the Charter School Quality Law which established the Illinois State Charter School Commission ("the Commission"), required that the authorization of schools previously authorized by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) would ultimately transfer to the Commission. This meant that responsibility for authorization of Prairie Crossing Charter School, authorized by ISBE in 2004, and Southland Charter School, authorized by ISBE in 2009, transferred to the Commission on July 1st 2012. Additionally, oversight of any charter schools authorized by the Commission on appeal would also be the responsibility of the Commission. A key function of any charter school authorizer is to ensure that schools are held to high standards of performance in order to ensure that the public interest and student rights are protected.

In the Fall of 2012, the Commission identified and adopted a time line and workplans for development and adoption of a comprehensive performance framework for any school authorized by the Commission. This would include criteria to measure performance on Academic, Financial and Organizational measures. Developing, adopting and implementing these criteria was essential as decisions to re-authorize the contracts with Prairie Crossing Charter School and Southland Charter School were scheduled to be made in 2014 and 2015 respectively. In June 2013, the Commission adopted the "Accountability System for Schools Authorized by the Charter School Commission" which represent the best thinking from nationwide authorizers and sets a high bar for the quality of charter schools authorized by the Commission.

The Approach

The Commission took a comprehensive approach to developing the accountability system for Commission- authorized schools. This included:

- Accessing resources from the National Association of Charter School Authorizers

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Indicator	Measure	Weight	
1. Student Achievement (Proficiency)	a. Proficiency Statewide Comparison– Reading and Math	20%	10%
	b. Proficiency – Assigned School Composite Comparison– Reading and Math	10%	5%
	c. Proficiency – Similar Schools Comparison– Reading and Math	10%	5%
2. Student Progress Over Time (Growth)	a. Student Growth – Reading and Math	35%	15%
3. Performance of Subgroups	a.1. Subgroup Proficiency – State Comparison– Reading and Math a.2. Subgroup Proficiency – Assigned School Composite Comparison – Reading and Math	10%	5% 5%
	b. Subgroup Growth – Reading and Math	10%	10%
4. State & Federal Accountability	a. AYP	5%	5%
5. Mission-Specific Goals	a. School-Specific Academic Goals	--	--
6. Postsecondary Readiness and Success	a.1. ACT Performance a.2. ACT – Assigned School Composite Comparison	NA	5% 5%
	b.1. High School Graduation – 4- and 5-year rates b.2. Graduation Rate – Assigned School Composite Comparison	NA	10% 10%
	c. College Attendance	NA	10%
	d. Postsecondary Employment	NA	--
	e. College Remediation	NA	--

A part of the Commission's Accountability System, the Academic Performance Framework delineates school performance into indicators and measures and assigns weights to each category, depending on the type of school being evaluated. The full Accountability Plan is comprised of Academic, Financial, and Organizational components which can be found in the appendix to this report.

- Consulting with nationally recognized experts on charter school academic, financial and organizational domains
- Benchmarking against other statewide and district authorizer performance and accountability frameworks across the country
- Benchmarking with practices of the local authorizing districts

As part of the process, the Commission convened various meetings of the Schools Committee in order to discuss source materials, develop the scope of the accountability system, and identify clear proficiency targets and standards for quality schools. This process involved many hours of discussion, vetting recommendations from staff and other experts, reaching consensus among the committee on a common set of standards and outcome measures, and ultimately developing a final draft to be discussed and vetted by the full commission. The approach was transparent, public, and inclusive while also setting rigorous standards for the performance of Commission-authorized charter schools.

Engaging Stakeholders

In order to ensure that the Commission was fulfilling its responsibility as an authorizer, it was important

to the Commission that the newly developed accountability system apply to the existing Commission schools, despite the fact that the accountability system had not yet been developed when ISBE re-authorized Prairie Crossing Charter School and authorized Southland Charter School, or when the Commission assumed authorization of the schools on July 1, 2012. The Commission set a goal that upon adoption of the accountability system, we would re-negotiate the existing contracts with the schools so that they would be held to that performance standards during their renewal year—2014 for Prairie Crossing and 2015 for Southland Charter School. In order to ensure that schools understood the process:

- The Commission invited schools and their counsel to attend all committee meetings of the Commission's Schools Committee;
- The Commission's staff and the Chair of the Schools Committee held two meetings to review the framework with the schools and their counsel;
- The Commission accepted feedback from the schools and incorporated feedback, as appropriate, into the Accountability System

This approach to engaging Commission-authorized schools in the development of the Accountability System proved fruitful as schools were able to suggest feedback that improved the Accountability System, while also understanding that the goal of the Commission was to set high standards of quality on key Academic, Financial, and Organizational measures.

Because of this deliberate and inclusive process, both existing Commission-authorized schools have agreed to revise their existing contracts with the Commission to be held accountable to the outcome measures in the new Accountability system along with the two new schools authorized by the Commission in 2013. All Commission authorized schools will be held accountable to this common, rigorous set of standards.

In Practice

As of Fall/Winter 2013-2014, the Commission is undergoing the process of evaluating Prairie Crossing Charter School and applying the standards defined by the new Accountability System. The Commission is using best practices around renewal, including compiling renewal findings based on publicly available student achievement and other objective data, asking the school to submit a written application, convening a renewal Comprehensive Evaluation team of external experts to review the application and conduct interviews, and holding site visits, focus groups, and public meetings prior to staff making a recommendation and final consideration by the Commission in 2014. In 2015, the Commission will be undergoing the renewal evaluation of Southland Charter School, which will incorporate the post-secondary outcome measures within the Accountability Plan.

On the Horizon

Looking ahead, there are various questions related to charter school accountability on the horizon that are important to note and that the Commission will continue to monitor: How does the Accountability System hold up as a predictor of quality after its first two applications? How will the Commission incorporate student growth data from sub groups when a model is adopted by ISBE? How do we communicate charter school performance to parents and community members in a clear and comprehensible way? How do we work with districts such as the Chicago Public Schools which has developed its own School Quality Rating Policy (SQRP) for charter schools? The Commission looks forward to tackling these questions, among others, and will update these topics in our next biennial report.

In the Best Interest of Students and the Community

The Story of North Chicago

By Jennifer Saba

Charter schools provide a public school option for families and can raise student achievement, change school culture, increase community engagement, and create a more effective learning environment and education system across a school district. In North Chicago Community Unit District 187, a charter school was pursued as one solution within a menu of options to address the district's considerable academic and financial challenges. As a result, on September 4, 2012, the LEARN 6 Campus opened in North Chicago, serving 250 students in kindergarten through grade two and grades six and seven. At capacity, the school will educate 500 students in kindergarten through the eighth grade. It will take advantage of the increased flexibility afforded to charter schools to improve academic outcomes, such as implementation of an extended 200-day school year, an extended school day, and a low student-to-teacher ratio. The successful implementation of a high-performing charter in North Chicago can be a model for districts throughout Illinois that are considering various options for improving student achievement.

Challenges in District 187

For years, District 187 had been on the decline both academically and financially. It consistently failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and struggled to prepare its students for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. As a result, it was placed on State Academic Watch Status Year 4 during the 2009-10 school year.

In addition to years of failing to make AYP, North Chicago's school district had serious financial troubles. Because Naval Station Great Lakes lies within its district boundaries, North Chicago receives federal Impact Aid. The United States Department of Education distributes Impact Aid based on a number of

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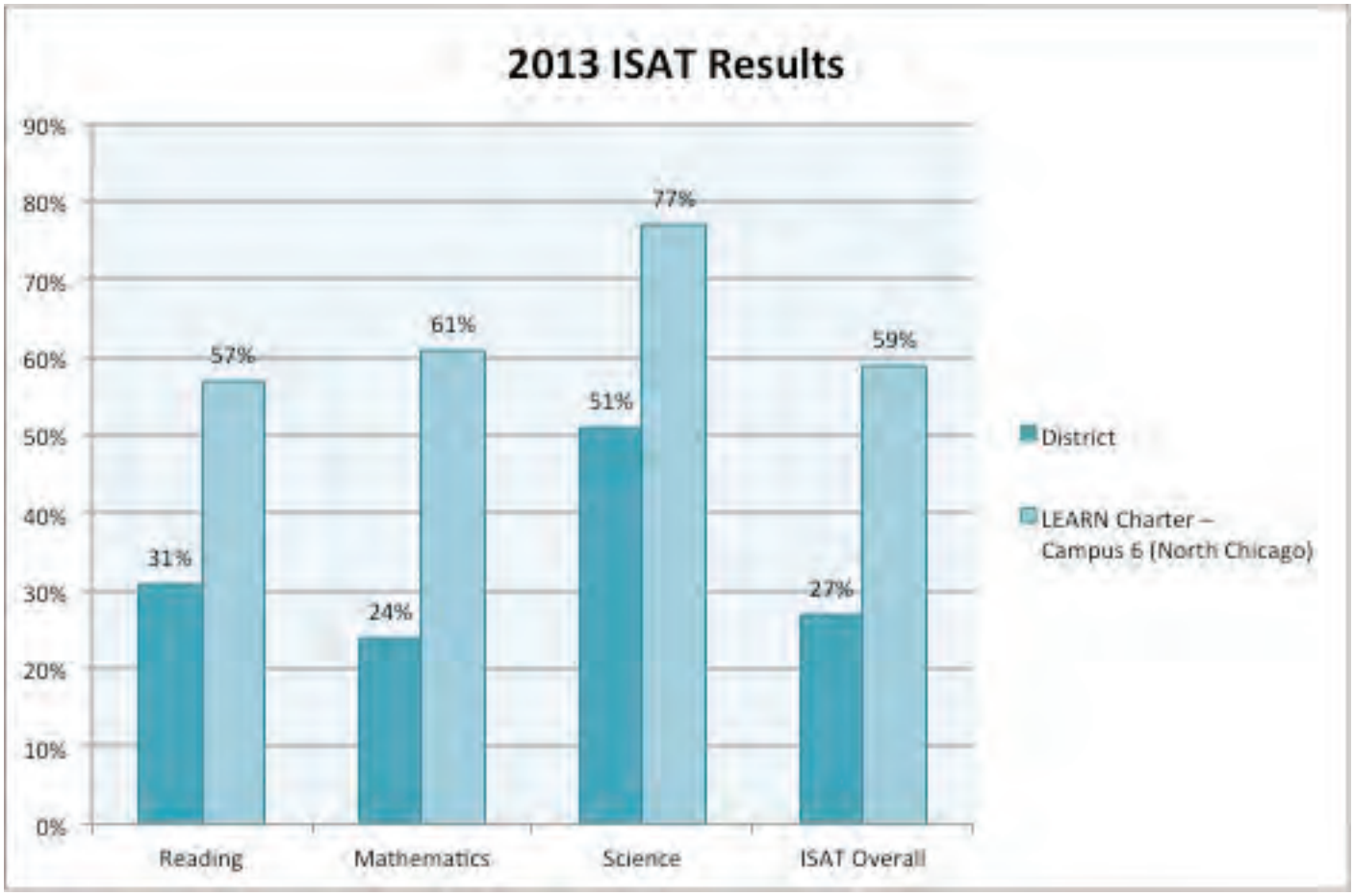


Results from the 2013 Illinois Report Card. Only Reading and Math scores were calculated using the new ISAT cut scores.

factors, including a district's percentage of "federally connected" public education students (in the case of District 187, "federally connected" refers to the percentage of students who are children of armed services personnel working at Naval Station Great Lakes). In 2011, only 22 percent of District 187's students met this criterion, and trends suggested that the numbers would continue to decline. Accordingly, State Board staff forecasted that District 187 would, in the immediate future, lose its "heavily impacted" status and receive only "regular impact" aid, a decrease from $6-7 million per year to $1 million. The tenuousness of the district's financial footing was intensified by the local school board's decision to sell $39.5 million in revenue bonds secured primarily through its Impact Aid revenue.

ISBE Steps In

To help North Chicago address these challenges and meet its educational mission, in November 2010 ISBE entered into an intergovernmental agreement with the district that would allow for greater State oversight of district operations (the "Oversight Agreement"). During this oversight period, ISBE and District 187 worked together to introduce a number of reform initiatives. ISBE guided district management and planning and advised on issues related to instruction, budgeting, and staffing. In 2012 the agency also awarded North Chicago Community High School a competitive federal School Improvement Grant (SIG) worth $6 million over three years. The high school was one of 13 schools across the state to receive this grant. In its application, North Chicago proposed an intervention model known as "transformation" to improve student educational outcomes. The district partnered with the Academy for Urban School Leadership (AUSL), a nonprofit organization that specializes in transforming chronically failing schools, to implement these reforms using the SIG funds.

To address the threat of losing Impact Aid, ISBE and District 187 also reached out to the Navy to explore specific strategies for bringing military families back into the district. Through roundtable discussions with Navy families, it was determined that a charter school was the strongly preferred school model. In response, ISBE worked with District 187 administrators and representatives from the Navy to develop a request for charter proposals that was released on October 18, 2011. After two months, three charter operators had submitted proposals. ISBE and District 187 convened a charter evaluation review team consisting of ISBE representatives, District 187 administrators, Navy representatives, local community members, and regional and charter educational experts considered all three proposals. On January 17, 2012, the charter evaluation review team selected the proposal of the LEARN Charter School Network, a not-for-profit charter network of college prep elementary schools in Chicago, as the successful candidate. On March 1, 2012, the District 187 school board voted 4-2, with one member abstaining, to deny the charter application. Using the authority granted to him under section six of the Oversight Agreement, State Superintendent of Education Dr. Chris Koch intervened and overturned the local school board's decision on March 15, 2012.

In the Best Interest of Students and the Community

State Superintendent Koch overturned the local school board's rejection of the charter proposal for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the agency believed that the charter would help ameliorate many of the district's academic and financial problems, and thus the local board's decision to deny the proposal was not in the best interests of the students and community. The five LEARN campuses already operating in Chicago had a demonstrated track record of success; for example, on the 2011 Illinois Standard Achievement Test (ISAT), 80.9 percent of LEARN students met or exceeded standards, compared to only 56.4 percent of District 187 students. At the same time, LEARN charter schools served a much higher percentage of low-income students (95.3 percent versus 64.7 percent). LEARN charter schools also had greater attendance rates and lower chronic truancy rates than District 187.

Second, ISBE believed that opening a charter school would encourage military families to live in the district and enroll their children in the public schools. As more children from military families attend North Chicago schools, the district receives more federal Impact Aid and prevents the loss of approximately $6 million in aid per year. Furthermore, ISBE found that the opening of a charter school would not negatively impact the district's budget to the point that it would become financially infeasible.

When the local school board failed to realize the potential gains that a charter school could bring to the district, the state intervened and approved the establishment of a high-performing charter school for North Chicago families. Although only in its second year, the LEARN charter school has already demonstrated progress in improving student outcomes: 59% percent of students at LEARN met or exceeded State standards in math and reading, compared to 27% percent of students across all district elementary schools. In addition to providing new learning opportunities for District 187 students who attend the charter school, ISBE expects that components of LEARN's successful educational program will be shared with and implemented in other North Chicago public schools, where appropriate, to raise levels of achievement across the district. In tandem with other reform initiatives currently underway in the district, the opening of the LEARN charter school represents a viable means of improving student achievement and securing the district's financial future.

Authorizing "Options"

Creating Schools for Out-of-School and Off-Track Students in Chicago Public Schools

By Jennifer Vidis

As the third largest school district in the country, the goal of Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is to provide every student in every neighborhood access to a rigorous, high-quality education that prepares them for success in college, career, and life. To realize that vision, the CPS action plan – The Next Generation: Chicago's Children – includes the specific objective of opening new high-quality schools and programs designed to re-engage and graduate our youth who have dropped out of school or are significantly behind in credits needed for on-time graduation. Historically, CPS has called these "alternative" schools, but we now refer to them as the education "Options" we provide for students in need of a different setting designed to meet their individual needs.

This focus on the growth of Options schools is driven by our data. In a school district with over 400,000 students, there are an estimated 56,000 school-aged youth who are either no longer enrolled in school or still enrolled, but significantly off-track to graduation. Yet, the availability of seats in schools designed to serve these youth has been far below potential demand – hovering, until 2011, under 5,500.

CPS has embarked on a multi-year, comprehensive initiative to strategically grow our Options schools. We are leveraging an array of governance models to provide targeted academic support and interventions to meet the needs of these students. These include district-run schools, contract schools and programs, and charter schools. Chicago is fortunate to have a set of five special multi-site charter schools, provided for under the Illinois Charter Schools law, dedicated exclusively to re-enrolling youth who have dropped out of high school and students who are 15 years and older and at-risk of dropping out. Each of these charters may serve up to 1,875 students across as many as 15 campuses, with a maximum of 165 students per campus. To date, CPS has authorized 2 of these 5 charters.

Jennifer Vidis is the Executive Director of the Office of Education Options, the division of the Chicago Public Schools' Office of Innovation and Incubation responsible for the development and support of a portfolio of high quality education options designed to get youth who have dropped out or are at-risk of dropping out of school back on track and prepared for post-secondary success.

CPS has solicited Options school proposals through three authorization RFP cycles run in years 2011, 2012 and 2013. In each cycle, we have integrated and retained the quality authorization practices for which CPS has received national recognition, while developing increasingly tailored approaches to ensure we are authorizing a portfolio of Options schools that best meet the unique needs of our Options student population. As we continue to develop and refine our approach to authorizing Options schools, we have identified several practices that have served us well.

Segments of the Options population:

Segment	Definition
Young and Far	Ages 14 – 16, Out of School Youth and In-School Over-Aged Under-Credited Youth
Old and Far	17 – 21 year olds, Out of School and In-School Youth with less than 12 credits
Old and Close	17 – 21 year olds, Out of School and In-School Youth with greater than 12 credits

Things That Work for Authorizing Option Schools: 1. Defining the Segments of the Options Population

CPS' authorizing process reflects the fact that schools that succeed in getting students back on track to graduation and prepared for post-secondary life often focus on a specific segment of students. These schools organize their academic programming and student services around key features proven effective in helping the defined set of students achieve academic success.

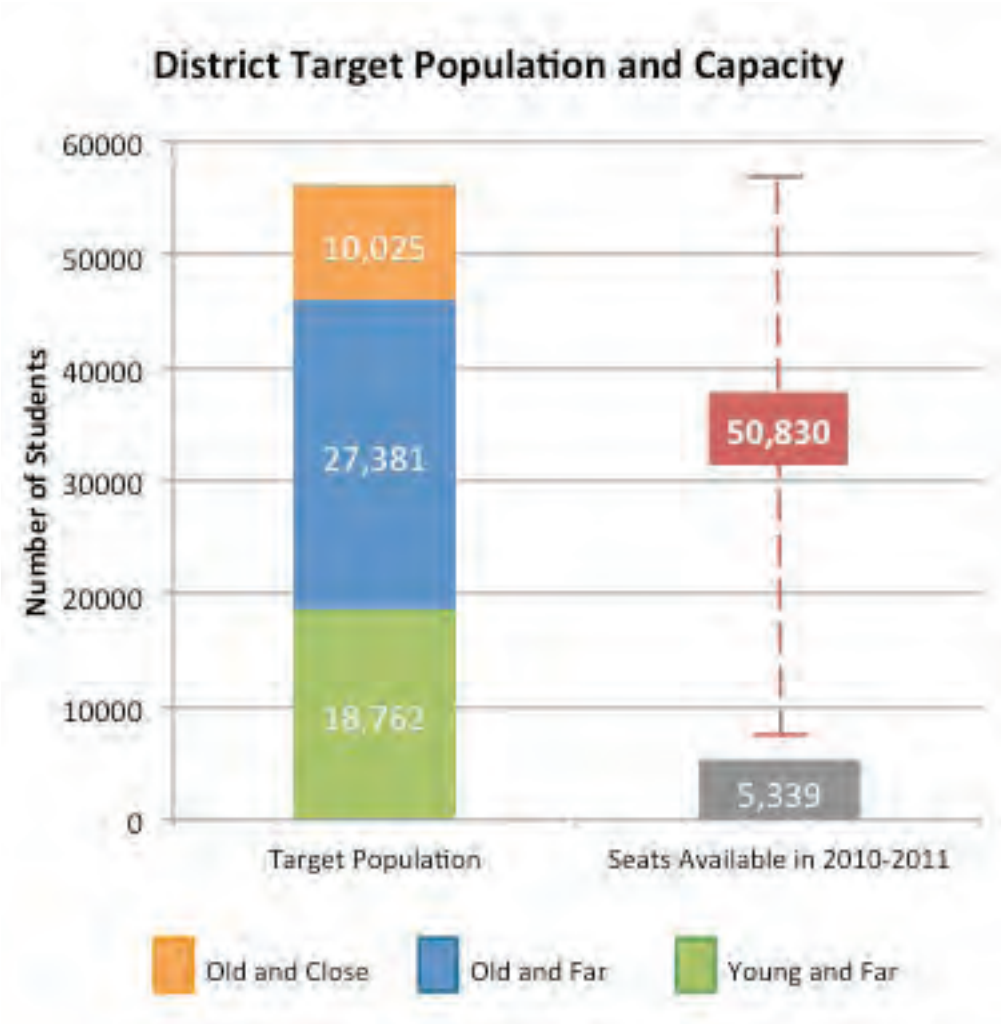
Our RFPs have defined segments of students according to their age and distance from graduation. RFP applicants were asked to identify the segments they would serve and describe how they will tailor their school programs to meet the needs of those student segments.

2. Identifying Features of School Design For Options Populations

Our RFPs have been increasingly explicit about the district's view of the necessary features of a quality Options school. Certainly, there are universal features of good school design that we look for in the authorizing process, such as an academic program aligned to the Common Core State Standards; the use of engaging instructional strategies that emphasize deeper learning; and a post-secondary focus that provides all students with plans and preparation for success in work and education beyond high school. In addition, we seek proposals that address the more specific needs of the Options student population. For example, youth in need of alternative options often seek to enroll at times outside the traditional enrollment periods. RFP applicants are asked to address how the school's instructional program will accommodate the continuous enrollment of students. We also seek to authorize providers with a demonstrated track record of finding and re-engaging out-of-school youth.

While these features should underpin all Options school designs, the segment of students identified by the applicant has further implications for school design. For example, the best educational option for a 15 year-old student who never completed elementary school will look very different in design from the option for a 19 year-old student just 4 credits away from graduation. The 15 year-old – "young and far" – student will need a program that is up to five years in length, offers the full range of credits and skills and provides extended day opportunities. The "old and far" student may need a one year program that offers a flexible, non-traditional schedule to accommodate work and family obligations and is connected to post-secondary opportunities.

These design implications were called out in the narrative of the RFP, reflected in the proposal questions, and shared with prospective applicants in a bidders information sessions following release of the RFP.



3. Identification of Priority Communities

Consistent with the vision of providing quality options to every student in every neighborhood, we mapped the gap between existing Options seats and potential need by community. This map was shared with applicants who were expected to align their plans for school locations to communities with the greatest need and interest in Options schools.

4. Comprehensive Framework for Evaluation

To improve consistency of RFP evaluation across proposal review teams and to make transparent the district's evaluation criteria, a comprehensive framework for evaluation was developed for the 2013 Options RFP. This framework was aligned to the questions in the RFP and included a detailed rubric with descriptors of performance for each of five ratings levels: strong, approaching, needs improvement, not adequate, and not applicable.

5. Evaluation Teams with Options Schools Expertise

Evaluations teams were organized to include members with the necessary array of subject matter expertise such as curriculum and instruction, accountability, social-emotional support and behavior management, and operations and finance. In addition, team members with experience in alternative school education at the school- and district-level were included on each team.

6. Applying the Right Lens to Accountability

At the time of the last RFP, CPS was well into development of the recently adopted Option Schools Quality Rating Policy. The adoption of this policy recognizes that accountability metrics used for traditional schools yield incomplete or inaccurate results for Options schools. To ensure that the evaluation of Options proposals applied the right lens to performance, the RFP asked proposers to submit 5 year school performance goals using these emerging metrics and cut-points as a guide.

Building these practices into the process for authorizing Options schools has resulted in early success toward our goal of dramatically expanding high-quality educational opportunities for our out-of-school and off-track youth.

Since 2011, CPS has recruited and authorized three providers new to Chicago and approved the expansion of local providers yielding an additional 4,100 seats by school year 2014-15 – nearly doubling our capacity to serve this under-served population of youth. This expansion includes the authorization of two of the district's 5 dropout charters and the opening of Options schools in communities such Englewood and Roseland, providing new possibilities for youth in need of different educational opportunities.

Are Two Authorizers Better Than One?

A New York Perspective

By James Merriman with Michael Regnier

As more charter schools set out to improve student achievement, the work of charter authorizing only becomes more critical. As a long-time authorizer in New York State, and as a charter support provider at the New York City Charter School Center, I have seen up close how much authorizing matters. I also strongly believe that the number of authorizers in a state matters to student outcomes, in ways that aren't obvious at first glance.

An Authorizer's Power

The line from authorizing to student achievement is never direct. An authorizer evaluates proposals for new schools or charter renewals and provides basic regulations to protect students and tax dollars. Yet an authorizer must not act like a school district central office, or it will erode the school-level responsibility that is the heart of the charter school concept. In other words, an authorizer's mission is not to "superintend" the schools to success. Instead, its power to affect student achievement takes three indirect forms.

First and most visibly, the authorizer can close schools that aren't working. A closure is a sign of accountability and a fast way to raise the average charter performance of an authorizer's portfolio, but opening and then closing a low-performing school does not improve public education for children.

Second, the authorizer can set clear standards for renewal and then communicate pointedly and frequently about its expectations. This may prompt a school's board to change its management, to give managers a freer hand, or even to simply work with more urgency. But it will never be enough to fix a broken school. As I used to tell struggling charter schools: if it takes the threat of closing your school for you to have a good school, then I'm likely to end up closing your school.

Third, the authorizer can approve great schools in the first place. This, as they say, is the ball game. Wheth-

James D. Merriman is chief executive officer of the New York City Charter School Center, a support and advocacy organization for a high-quality charter sector in the city. Previously he served for many years as executive director of SUNY-Charter Schools Institute, a state-wide authorizer which answers to the SUNY Board of Trustees. Michael Regnier directs the New York City Charter School Center's policy and research work.

er an authorizer approves a charter school that improves achievement, approves a charter school that does not improve achievement, or fails to approve a charter school that would have improved achievement, its decisions set the course for thousands of children's journeys through public education.

Finding the Right Number

State charter school laws vary widely in the number, and type, of authorizing bodies they allow. Some states, such as New Jersey, set up the state commissioner (or board) of education as the only authorizer of charter schools. Others, such as Ohio, allow dozens of organizations to be authorizers, including non-governmental nonprofit organizations. Still others leave it only to school districts, which more than one commentator has noted is a little like asking Burger King to spawn McDonalds franchises. In my state, New York, there are two statewide authorizers, the Board of Regents (our equivalent of a state education board) and the Trustees of SUNY. (A third major authorizer, the New York City Schools Chancellor, still oversees charter schools but no longer authorizes new ones.)

There is evidence to suggest that having multiple authorizers, as opposed to one, may be correlated with stronger academic results in a state's charter schools. But since there are relatively few states to study, and many possible confounding factors, causal relationships are hard to isolate. I'd like to offer my perspective on why more than one—but not too many—authorizers is the best way to create a high-performing charter school sector.

Race to the Bottom?

A system of many non-district authorizers may seem like a natural extension of the logic of charter schooling itself, with its emphasis on competition and decentralization. In my experience, however, the proliferation of charter school authorizing bodies is not a positive sign for student achievement.

The most common argument against the many-authorizers approach is that it may invite a "race to the bottom." Much like the rightly derided "choose your regulator" system that for a time prevailed on Wall Street, a many-authorizer state could see charter schools rush to the most lax authorizer, spurring other authorizers to "compete" by loosening their own standards for approval, renewal, and oversight. This is not a hypothetical. In fact, given that these many authorizers are almost always supported through per-pupil authorization fees, it is not difficult to notice the perverse incentives for allowing incompetent groups to start charter schools that are never closed down.

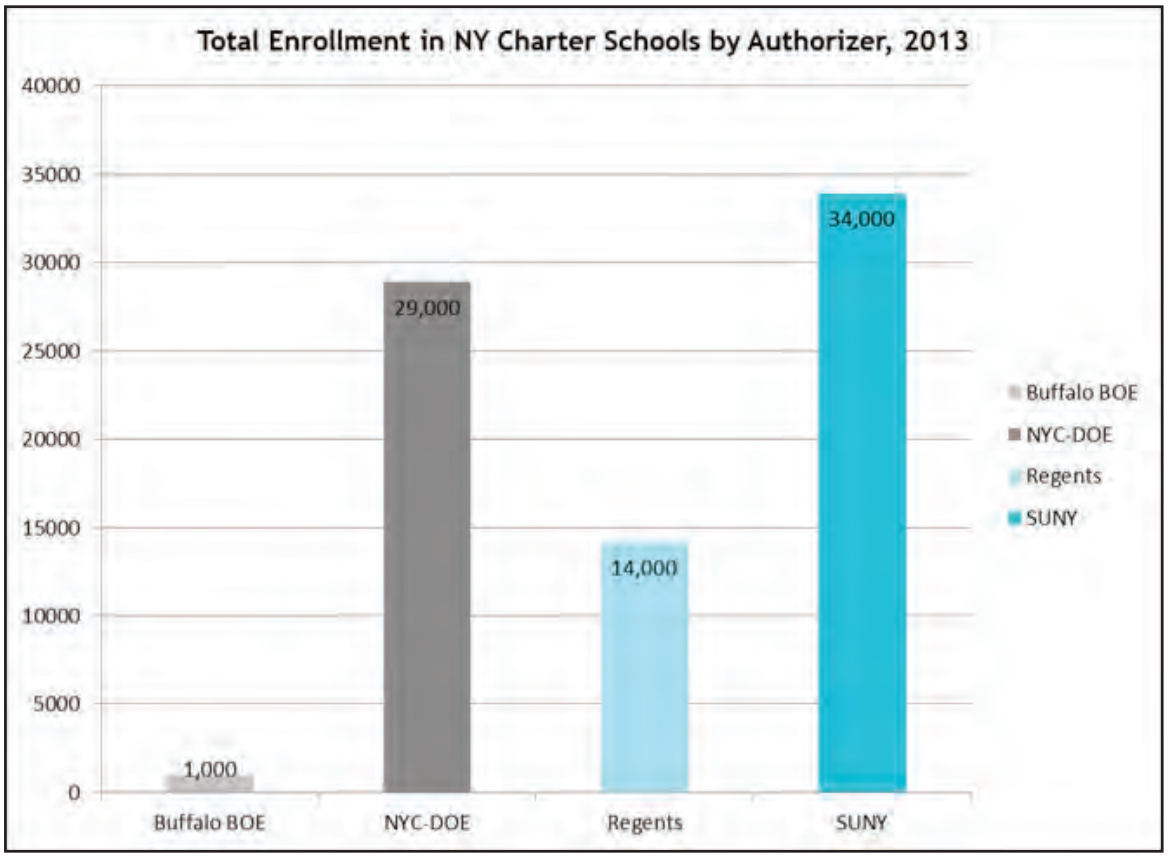
Even without a "race," though, just one enterprising authorizer can gain prominence, and/or fees, by opening the floodgates to questionable schools. In that case, the fact that other authorizers are doing their jobs responsibly will mean very little to the families who are failed—or the charter sector's overall long-term reputation.

One last problem with the many-authorizers model is that it can leave small authorizers ill-equipped. I do not question for a moment that small authorizers can do good work. As charter school law and policy grow more complex, however, and as charter school operators themselves gain in size and sophistication, the bodies that authorize them need enough scale and sophistication to keep up.

Authorizing Alone

While charter school authorizing should not be left to just anyone, it's equally dangerous to leave it to only one agency (and districts). A central authorizer means centralized risk—of mismanagement, of cultural creep toward compliance-oriented thinking, and even of political capture by charter school opponents. Having at least two statewide authorizers, including at least one that is not affiliated with a traditional K-12 education agency, mitigates those risks for the state's charter sector.

The largest risk in a sole-authorizer model, however, is something more subtle: stagnation. An authorizer makes difficult judgment calls, and sets up policies and procedures, always within the particular circum-



The 2012 - 2013 distribution of New York City charter schools across authorizers. (Source: New York State Education Department data / New York City Charter School Center analysis)

stances of its state. Without another organization doing the same work, in the same context, the central authorizer never sees that kind of direct challenge to its own judgments and practices. In New York, the two statewide authorizers have adopted different priorities for new school approvals; different performance frameworks for renewal; and even different points of emphasis in oversight. I know firsthand that this diversity of thought challenges both sides to be more deliberate in their decisions, clearer in their positions, and also to "steal" a practice from the other authorizer when it makes sense.

Charter schools got their start partly from the idea that a little diversity, and even a little competition, can be a healthy thing for public schools. The same is true of charter authorizers.

The Authorizing Sweet Spot

For state policy makers considering the question of how many authorizers to create, my advice is to look for the sweet spot. With at least two statewide authorizers, but not many more than that (and allowing the rare district that seriously wants to authorize to keep doing so), a state can avoid the dangers of the multiple-authorizer and the sole-authorizer models.

Authorizers can be sizable and sophisticated, yet still have in-state peers who push their thinking. Schools can have a choice of authorizers to work with, but without the ability to "shop" and the perverse incentives that follow. And the charter sector, as a whole, can be less vulnerable to either a hostile authorizer who slows it down, or a careless authorizer who gives it a bad name.

Other policies can also mitigate the danger of a "race to the bottom" dynamic, and I'll briefly mention a few of them. Schools should not be allowed to change authorizers once they open. Any cap on the number of charters available should include sub-caps by authorizer, so no authorizer thinks in now-or-never terms. Funding for charter school authorizers should not be closely tied to the number of schools they authorize (or at least not completely so), so decisions about is-

suing and renewing school charters can be made on the merits. Such concerns are ameliorated when the authorizer grows to scale and closure of one or a few schools does not represent a significant financial hit to the authorizer's revenues.

Finally, policy makers should think carefully about what type of organization is allowed to authorize. A traditional school district or state education agency can be an effective authorizer, but it should not be the only one. The risk of creeping bureaucratic culture is just too great. At the same time, there must be a sense that the authorizer is ultimately accountable to voters, which is why I advise against letting non-governmental organizations, such as not-for-profits, authorize charter schools. In my view, this important work should permit for political accountability when and where the authorizer is not doing a good job.

Charter schooling is often caricatured as an extremist scheme, but there is a reason it was championed by centrists from Al Shanker to Bill Clinton to Bill Gates. A balance of diversity and scale, competition and regulation, is the key to building a charter school sector that delivers improvements in student achievement. I want to tell everyone, with a New Yorker's characteristic humility, that this balance is one reason our charter sector is on top.

Multiple Charter School Authorizers: The Indiana Context

By Emily Richardson and Kendall Quisenberry

Increasingly, state legislation across the country is diversifying the power to authorize to multiple actors. This article examines the case for multiple authorizers, specifically focusing on the Indiana context. Additionally, this article explains some of the potential pitfalls that may accompany multiple authorizers and examines the legislation that was passed in the 2013 Indiana legislative session to combat these concerns.

Authorizing in Indiana

An authorizer is a body approved by state legislature to approve the establishment of charter schools. Ind. Code 20-24-1-2.5 specifies the following actors may become authorizers: LEAs (called school corporations in Indiana), public universities offering a four year degree, the executive of a consolidated city (the only consolidated city in Indiana is Indianapolis), and a nonprofit college or university offering a four year degree. Legislation passed in 2011 established the Indiana Charter School Board ("ICSB") as an independent state agency.

The Benefits of Multiple Authorizers

Having multiple authorizers in a state establishes oversight and diversity and eliminates the complications of having a single authorizer. First, multiple authorizers provide an outlet for the creation of a professional practice of authorizing. Authorizers can work together to create best practices on common tasks, such as charter renewal decisions and closure. Recently, Indiana has created an Authorizer Alliance to share best practices, as well as to advocate for improvement to its charter school law. Second, having a singular entity authorizing charter schools can bring about undesirable or biased decisions

over time, whereas multiple authorizers create a natural system of checks and balances. Again, we have seen this phenomenon in Indiana.

With the creation of the ICSB, and in turn, the ICSB's creation of an innovative accountability system relying on school and student outputs, other Indiana authorizers also revised their systems of accountability to better reflect quantitative measures. Third, with the existence of multiple authorizers, charter school organizers are able to match their mission, vision, and individual needs with that of the authorizer.

The Drawbacks of Too Many

The checks and balances system is ideal, but as NACSA explains in a 2009 Policy Brief, "[the quality of authorizers is more important than the quantity." Some have argued that Indiana has created too many authorizers, with over 40 nonprofit, private colleges specifically listed in the statute. The accompanying pitfalls to having too many authorizers include the potential proliferation of low quality authorizing as well as creating "extreme variations in standards and practices among authorizers." Indiana legislators, during the 2013 legislative session, recognized these potential problems by requiring each authorizer to provide evidence of its compliance with national best practice in its published annual report.

Despite the legislative attempt to ensure quality, Indiana authorizers do vary in their standards. Because of this variance, there was a concern that low performing schools would seek authorization from an authorizer that was less likely to hold them to a high standard of accountability. This fear was realized in 2013. Ball State University did not renew seven charters for low performing schools; two of these non-renewed schools were then granted a charter by another authorizer. This "authorizer shopping" allowed two historically low-performing charter schools to continue serving students. In order to combat authorizer shopping, the Indiana legislature passed a procedure that an authorizer must follow before it may authorize a school whose charter has either been revoked or non-renewed. In order to authorize such a school, an authorizer must petition the Indiana State Board of Education ("SBOE") for permission, explaining to the SBOE the manner in which the charter school will change its practice to produce better results.

A final issue is that of authorizing capacity. Charter authorizing is an arduous process that, according to NACSA, is more likely to have the staffing and support needed when an authorizer has issued charters to at least five schools. In Indiana, six of the nine authorizers have fewer than five charter schools; indeed, these six only have one or two schools. As a result, whether these authorizers have the time and resources to commit fully to authorizing is a potential question.

Indiana's Future

Despite the challenges, the charter school landscape is rapidly growing and developing in the state of Indiana. Though it is unclear whether the number of charter school authorizers in Indiana is appropriate, it is clear that regardless of the number, the focus on quality authorizing is key.

Emily Richardson is the Interim Executive Director and Director of Legal Affairs and Policy of the Indiana Charter School Board, an independent statewide authorizer. Emily earned her J.D. from Indiana University School of Law and is currently pursuing her PhD in Education Leadership and Policy. Kendall Quisenberry is an intern at the Indiana Charter School Board. She graduated from DePauw University in May of 2013 and began a Fulbright Fellowship teaching in Malaysia in January 2014.

State-Level Charter School Appeals

Due Diligence Practices of the Illinois State Charter School Commission

By Jeanne L. Nowaczewski

Appeals of charter school proposals at the state level are not common in the charter sector because most states have established systems where multiple authorizers are available to any applicant. When there are two authorizers to whom an applicant can apply, it provides an alternative viewpoint that helps to guarantee fairness. In Illinois, charter school applicants can only file one place first to create a charter school: the local district. If the district approves the proposal, the school is authorized by that district. Denials of proposals by the districts are appealable to the State Charter School Commission by law. Thus, the alternative viewpoint or "second look" at the charter proposal comes on appeal.

A short review of how the Illinois State Charter School Commission conducts its due diligence procedures on appeal may be instructive to charter applicants filing proposals at the district level in Illinois, to Illinois districts looking to develop their own charter authorizing practices, to applicants and districts on appeal to the Commission, and to those charter school appellate-review authorizers working in other states and localities.

Background Regarding the State Charter School Commission

The Illinois State Charter School Commission consists of nine members nominated by the Governor and appointed by the State Board of Education. These appointees are all volunteers, who work in other professions, and who agree to serve for the good of the State on the Commission. The Commissioners have set an active schedule, meeting at least 10 times a year to bring their expertise from the fields of public education, urban charter schools, the law, business and civic leadership to bear on the issues before the Commission, including voting on appeals.

Jeanne Nowaczewski is the Executive Director of the Illinois State Charter School Commission, a independent commission that resolves appeals from charter school applicants, promulgates best practices in charter school authorizing, and serves as authorizer for four charter schools in Illinois. Ms. Nowaczewski, an attorney and formerly a partner with Schiff Hardin & Waite, also previously served as Director of Charter School Recruitment for the Chicago Public Schools from 2001 - 2008.

Charter proposals and school districts' decisions regarding charter school proposals are comprehensive documents, covering curriculum, governance, financial, legal, and administrative aspects for the proposed creation and operation of a charter school. When appeals of these proposals are made to the Commission, the law requires that such appeals be considered within a tight 75 day timeframe. Thus, the Commissioners voted that staff should be prompt in accepting appeals that are properly filed, actively and fully investigate such proposals and the districts' reasons for denial, and then bring recommendations related to the appeals to the whole Commission for a public vote within this 75 day window.

This article summarizes the due diligence investigations Commission staff conducts for appeals.

The Commission's Standard of Review on Appeal

The Commission's review of an appeal is conducted under the "de novo" standard. Under this type of review, staff makes a full investigation of each appeal by holding the proposal up to the Illinois charter law, without deference to the decision below, but also taking into account all of the evidence from both the applicant's proposal and the district's response. The Illinois First Circuit Appellate Court in the Richton Park vs. Southland case approved this type of review. If, after this investigation, the proposal is found to meet the law, then the appeal can be granted by vote of the Commission. If the proposal does not comply with the Illinois law, the appeal should be denied. Either side (district or applicant) can challenge a final vote by the Commission by filing a lawsuit in the state courts of Illinois. Additionally, appeals are not required to proceed to a vote; if the applicant prefers to withdraw their appeal, they have the right to do so at any time during the investigation process.

In order to insure that its investigative methods on appeal were sound, the Commission turned to the policies established by National Association of Charter School Authorizers, ("NACSA"), and adopted a series of best practices for charter school authorizing, adapting them as appropriate for state-level charter school appeals. These 12 practices are reviewed here.

"One key ingredient of fairness is keeping all communications open to all parties, and not engaging in "ex parte" or one-sided conversations with either the applicant or the district."

The Charter School Commissions'12 Steps for Due Diligence in Charter Appeals

1. Establish a Regular and Fair Communication System with All Parties

It is important in handling appeals that all parties know that the review will be handled fairly according to a set of routine procedures. One key ingredient of fairness is keeping all communications open to all parties, and not engaging in "ex parte" or one-sided conversations with either the applicant or the district. When it receives an appeal, Commission staff adheres to this rule of fairness and open communications. Staff promptly contacts all parties, sets a schedule for the activities of the appeal which the Commission sends to all parties, and posts this and other information publicly on its website.

2. Schedule Case Management Calls and/or Meetings

During an appeal, Commission staff holds "case management calls" with all parties, usually on a two week

schedule for the duration of the appeal. The Commission staff sets an agenda for these calls, and uses the time to talk with the parties about the procedures of the appeal, the expectations of the Commission and the dates chosen for investigation activities, such as interviews and hearings. Staff uses these calls to answer questions from the parties, and to get their input on dates and locations for interviews and hearings. Minutes for each call are kept and circulated to the parties.

3. Retain Independent Evaluation Teams to Study Proposals and Districts' Responses

Once a schedule for the investigation of an appeal has been set, the Commission staff retains several independent evaluators to investigate the proposal and the district's response. Using independent evaluators helps staff to obtain fair, independent assessments of the proposal and the district's response from outside experts who are familiar with what it takes to make a high quality charter school. Using outside consultants also helps the Commission bring targeted expertise to its decisions; the Commission has retained special experts for alternative schools, single gender schools and multi-district financial proposals when this knowledge is needed to fully investigate a proposed charter school.

4. Use a Rubric to Study Charter Proposals and Districts' Reasons for Denial

Appeals come to the Commission after a charter school applicant has filed a proposal to make a charter school. Sometimes charter school proposals are based on a district's request for proposals, which is usually a set of questions that the district seeks to have answered about the proposed charter school. In other circumstances, the district may not have issued a request for a proposal, so the charter applicant has submitted a proposal answering the questions the applicant thinks are necessary for the proposal to be understood.

In order to fairly review each appeal, the Commission has developed a rubric to review the proposals, and posted the rubric for public study on its website. The rubric is based on Illinois charter law, and also takes into account national best practices for charter school proposals. Thus, the Commission's rubric sets forth the qualities that an excellent charter proposal must possess. Where a district has issued an RFP, the Commission's evaluation team also studies the district's RFP, and any rubric the district may have provided to its applicants.

Additionally, in reviewing the district's denial of the proposal, the Commission also uses a rubric to review the district's conduct and analyses to determine if the district acted within the charter school law.

The use of the same rubric for reviewing all appeals to the Commission allows the Commission staff to fairly assess appeals, and compare them to one another and to standards of high quality.

All independent evaluators are trained in the use of the Commission's rubric, and use it when evaluating the charter school appeals. The completed rubric becomes the basis for the questions that the evaluation team poses to the charter applicant and the district during the appeal interview.

5. Conduct Interviews of Charter Applicants and Districts

The Commission staff considers the in-person interview with the charter school applicant and the district to be a very important due diligence technique. The interview of both the applicant and the district are usually scheduled approximately 30 days after the appeal has been filed, and conducted in or near the district in which the charter application has been filed. While the interviews are not open to the public, all parties can and typically do attend each interview. Interviews last from 1 to 3 hours per party.

The purpose of the Commission's interview of the parties, in the presence of both the parties, is to obtain a better understanding of the charter applicant's proposal for a charter school, the nature of the district's response and the reasons therefore, and to determine if additional documents or other material should be provided to the Commission as it considers

the appeal. Parties are urged to bring persons with knowledge to the interview so that a full discussion may be had. This kind of investigation helps to reveal both strengths and weaknesses in a charter proposal, and many parties on appeal have noted that they learned valuable lessons from the interview phase.

6. Analyze the Academic Record of the Applicants' Other Schools and the District

Some charter school applicants are already operating charter schools in other districts in Illinois or other states. In these cases, the Commission asks the charter applicant for the academic data from their other schools, to determine whether the applicant is capable of providing a high quality learning environment. In addition to the academic date provided by the applicant, the Commission also conducts its own independent analysis of academic data concerning the operator's schools to probe capacity to deliver a school that serves the best interests of the students for whom it is intended. Additionally, the Commission staff and evaluation team also analyze the academic performance of the district whose students the charter school wishes to serve: the analysis investigates whether or to what extent the proposed host district is providing opportunities for successful academic achievement, solid high school graduation and college matriculation rates.

7. Obtain Expert Analysis of Applicants' & District's Financial and Governance Information

The Commission takes special care in analyzing the financial and governance aspects of the charter applicant's proposal. These areas are afforded detailed attention in the Commission's rubric, and the Commission retains evaluators with expertise in these areas in order to insure a deep analysis. Additionally, the Commission also reviews the proposal in terms of the requirements of Illinois charter law, including whether the governance is free of potential conflicts of interest and, in the case of finances, whether the proposed charter school is "economically sound" for both the charter school itself, and the district whose students it seeks to serve.

"Using independent evaluators helps staff to obtain fair, independent assessments of the proposal and the district's response from outside experts who are familiar with what it takes to make a high quality charter school."

8. Conduct Site Visits to Applicants' Other Schools

If the charter applicant is already operating one or more charter schools, the Commission staff recommends conducting at least one site visit to an applicant's existing school, especially if the school is nearby and can be visited with minimal cost. The Commission's site visits are conducted by independent evaluators, who share the rubric that guides the visit with the applicant beforehand. The site visits usually include classroom reviews, interviews with teachers, parents and students, as well as meetings with the Boards of the schools. Site visits are only part of the evidence, of course: schools can have good or bad days, and one site visit does not tell the whole story. Still, when deciding an appeal, all evidence, including the evidence on the ground at a school is important to the Commission having a full picture on appeal.

9. Check Applicants' References with Other Authorizers

When a charter school applicant is already operating charter schools in districts other than the one on appeal, it is helpful to communicate with these authorizers to do a "reference check" of how the charter operator is performing in these jurisdictions. The reference checks are made using a rubric, and typically conducted as telephone interviews of approximately an hour each. The charter applicant is notified that the investigations will be made, and asked to provide contact information for the other authorizers. Like site visits, these reference checks tell only part of the story, but an important one. Reference checks with other authorizers allow the Commission to be informed by the judgment of colleagues in the charter field.

10. Hold Public Hearings to Assess Community Support and Input on Proposals

Illinois charter law requires that the Commission hold a public hearing within 45 days of the appeal being filed. The purpose of the Public Hearing is to listen to any members of the public who wish to present comments to the Commission concerning the matters on appeal, as well as to allow the charter applicant and the districts to make public statements concerning the proposed charter school. Typically, 1 to 3 Commissioners conduct the Public Hearing, assisted by staff, and then the full Commission uses the information collected at the Public Hearing, which is recorded, in making its decisions on appeal. The Public Hearing is usually set at or near the district in which the charter application was filed, and is typically conducted for several hours in the evening for maximum possible attendance by the public.

11. Hold Public Meetings where Commissioners Discuss, Question and then Vote on the Appeals

Near the end of the 75 day investigation period, when Commission staff has concluded its due diligence activities, staff provides the information it has acquired, and the recommendations it has developed, to the Commissioners through briefings and draft analyses. The Commission then proceeds to a public meeting, also within the 75 day window, where the Commission hears presentations both from staff and directly from the applicant and the district. The Commission has a full opportunity at this public meeting to question the parties and to discuss the qualities of the proposed charter school and the district's response. After these presentations and discussions, the Commission takes a roll call vote regarding whether to grant or deny the appeal. In this way, the Commission announces its decision to the public.

12. Issue Written Decisions on Appeal, and Memorialize Proposals for Granted Appeals by Contract

After the public discussion and vote, the Commission memorializes its decisions on appeal in writing. The written decision on appeal is sent to all parties and posted on the Commission's website. To date, the Commission has voted on and decided two appeals: one was granted, for two Concept schools, and one was denied. Both decisions granting and denying these appeals are available on the Commission's website. Written decisions allow future applicants to understand what qualities are necessary for a charter school proposal to succeed on appeal, and what can be the basis for a denial of appeal. These written decisions become a body of precedent that can guide the decisions of the Commission in future appeals.

As noted earlier, the Commission's decisions may be challenged in the state courts of Illinois by either party. To date, no challenges of Commission decisions have occurred.

After a grant of appeal, and the issuance of a decision, the Commission staff then undertakes the task of developing a contract with the Charter School regarding the specific terms under which the school may open and operate for the next five years. Once this contract is developed, it must be certified by the State Board of Education before the school can open its doors.

Conclusion

The Commission believes that applicants and districts have learned about the qualities needed to make a successful charter school proposal and ultimately, a successful charter school, through the Commission's

staff's due diligence process. This is why many applicants to the Commission withdraw their appeals mid-way, because they begin to understand the ways in which their proposals may be improved, and they want to do so, to better serve – ultimately – the students who might attend the schools they envision.

In closing, perhaps the greatest lesson is how important it is for authorizers to be thoughtful and thorough. On the one hand, there is an urgent need throughout Illinois for families and students to be able to access to high-quality schools of choice. Illinois' academic achievement and graduation rates still need improvement. Over 40,000 students and families have opted to attend charter schools in Illinois so far because they value these options. And there are charter school providers of merit and good will who want to serve this population. In the meantime, traditional school districts are also trying diligently with limited resources to do well by their students and families, and do not always have the time or expertise to engage fully in charter proposal review.

Thus, in this urgent mix of needs and opportunities, the state-level charter authorizer on appeal plays an important role in giving an "arms' length" objective "second look" to charter proposals. The appeal authorizer, in this case, the Commission, must assure a fair, open and transparent process, be rigorous at every juncture, and communicate continuously to the parties and public. When done well, the due diligence conducted during a charter school appeal can afford respect to districts' concerns, guidance to applicants, and -- in the case of granted appeals -- high quality charter schools for Illinois families.

A National Perspective on Charter Authorizer Administrative Fees

By Therese Edmiston

Illinois law authorizes the Illinois State Charter School Commission to charge a charter school it authorizes an administrative fee not to exceed 3 percent of the revenue provided to the school. During its first two years, the Commission has engaged in an ongoing conversation about the correct fee level and in 2013 amended the Commission's fee to 2.5 percent. As part of this discussion, it has been instructive to consider how other charter authorizers handle administrative fees.

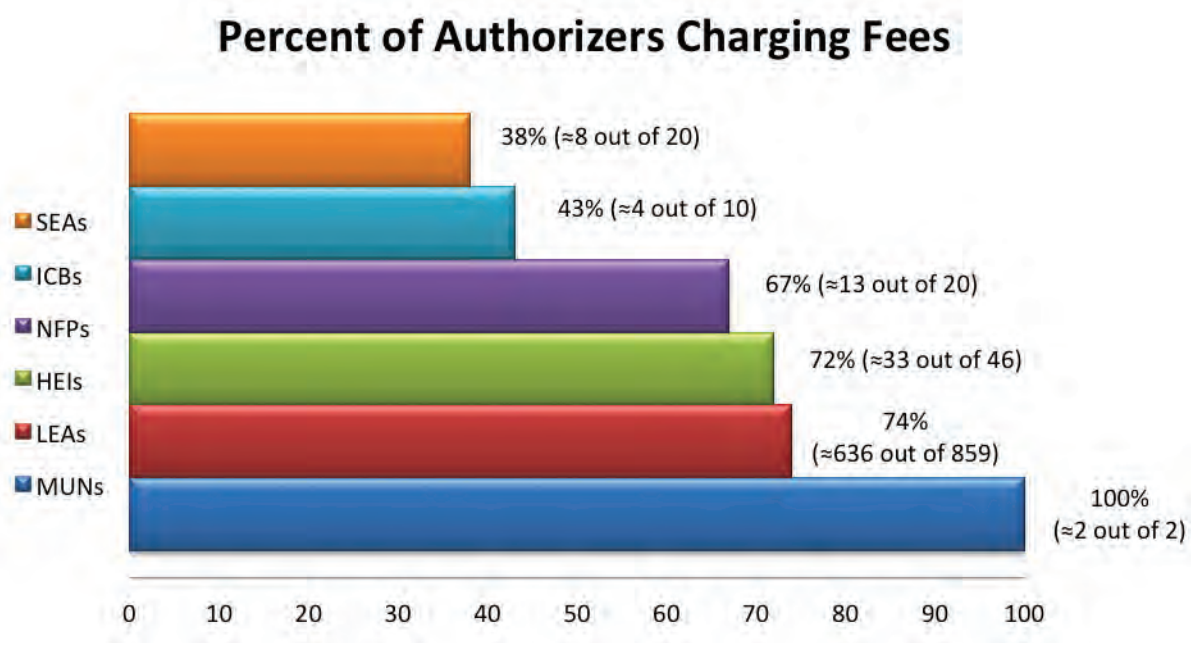
The Big Picture: Various Types of Charter Authorizers Nationwide

Forty one states and the District of Columbia allow one or more of the following entities to authorize charter schools: School districts or local education agencies (LEAs); state education agencies (SEAs); independent chartering boards (ICBs) authorized by the state to grant or oversee charters; higher education institutions (HEIs); non-for-profit organizations (NFPs); and mayors and municipalities (MUNs). Nationally, there are 957 charter authorizers, categorized into 859 LEAs, 20 SEAs, 10 ICBs, 46 HEIs, 20 NFPs, and 2 MUNs. The Illinois State Charter School Commission is an ICB. Illinois was one of four states (along with Nevada, Indiana, and Maine) to add an ICB charter authorizer during 2011-2012.

A small minority of states do not allow charter authorizers to collect fees. For example, New York law states that authorizers cannot charge fees for reviewing charter applications or for school oversight.

However, most states do permit charter authorizers to collect administrative fees from sponsored schools. A total of 69% of authorizers nationwide deduct from their charter schools' per pupil funding as an administrative fee. This includes 67% of large authorizers (those sponsoring 10 or more schools) and 70% of small authorizers (those sponsoring fewer than 10 schools). It includes 74% of school district authorizers (or LEAs) and 62% of non-district authorizers (all non-LEAs). Finally, it includes 38% of SEAs, 43% of ICBs, 72% of HEIs, 67% of NFPs, and 100% of MUNs.

Therese Edmiston is a lawyer at the Legal Assistance Foundation representing students in special education matters and was an intern with the Illinois State Charter School Commission. Previously, she served as a Student Attorney at the University of Texas Children's Rights Clinic and as a law clerk at the Texas Association of School Boards.



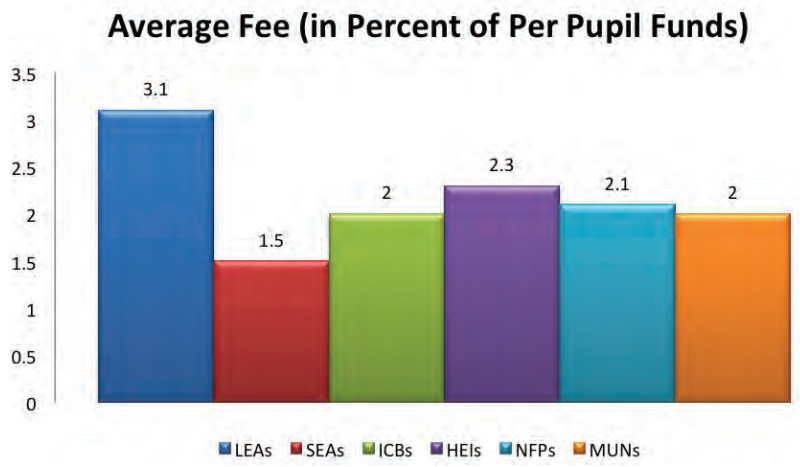
Many authorizers charge fees to fund high quality services, including deciding which schools should open (whether on initial application or on appeal), monitoring and supporting schools' progress, and closing schools that fail to serve students adequately. Though exact duties vary by type of authorizer, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) recommends certain "essential authorizer practices" that are necessary to do the job well: publishing criteria for charter application evaluation, publishing application time lines and materials, interviewing charter applicants, reviewing charter applications, examining and auditing charter schools, and establishing renewal and revocation criteria.

The percentage of per pupil funding retained by the charter school authorizer to provide these services varies by state and by authorizer type. NACSA reports that from state to state, fees range from 0.1 percent to 5 percent of per pupil funds. The national average is a 2.6 percent fee. Large authorizers average 2.4 percent with a median of 2.3 percent. District authorizers average a 3.1 percent fee, and non-district authorizers average a 2.1 percent fee. Specifically, for non-district authorizers, SEAs average 1.5 percent, ICBs average 2.0 percent, HEIs average 2.3 percent, NFPs average 2.1 percent, and MUNs average 2.0 percent. The Illinois State Charter School Commission's current 2.5 percent fee is higher than the average for other ICBs (2.0 percent), but it compares favorably to the average for LEAs (3.1 percent) and the national average for all types of authorizers (2.6 percent).

Focused Snapshots: ICB Charter Authorizers in Other States

A closer inspection of the ICBs similar to the Illinois State Charter School Commission in Nevada, Indiana, and Maine reveals that the ICBs are generally permitted by law to collect between 2 and 3 percent, and in practice generally collect between 1.5 and 3 percent. In Nevada, for example, the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority operates as an ICB which can authorize charters both on initial application and on appeal. Nevada state law permits the sponsor of a charter school to charge an administrative fee not to exceed 2 percent of the total state money apportioned to the charter school that year. Currently, the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority retains 1.5 percent of the state money apportioned to its charter schools. Because the Authority has a portfolio of about fifteen charter schools, the 1.5 percent fee yields revenue equaling about one million dollars. This is the Authority's sole source of revenue and supports all of the Authority's activity.

Indiana law permits a state educational institution or charter school board to collect an administrative fee of not more than 3 percent of the total tuition support the charter school receives. In 2011 Indiana created the Indiana Charter School Board, a first-time



authorizer and an ICB, which charges a 2 percent fee. The Executive Director has created a long-range planning budget showing that the fee can be reduced to 1.5 percent in five years if student enrollment continues to increase. The Board has no source of state funding other than the administrative fees. In contrast, another long-time charter authorizer in Indiana, Ball State University, charges the full 3 percent fee.

Maine's charter school law became effective in September 2011, and the Maine Charter School Commission was formed in January 2012. The Commission, a first-time authorizer and an ICB, recently began reviewing applications but has not yet authorized any charters. Maine law permits charter school authorizers to charge an administrative fee of up to 3 percent of annual per pupil allocations. The Maine Charter School Commission has asked for the full 3 percent from any public charter school it authorizes. The funds collected via the administrative fees comprise most of the Commission's total revenue.

Of course, ICBs are not the only charter authorizers permitted to collect administrative fees. Other types of charter authorizers often require fees equal to or higher than Illinois' 3 percent. Washington, D.C. is an outlier that allows authorizers to charge only 0.5 percent. However, states like Michigan, Florida, Colorado, and Oklahoma all permit 3 to 5 percent fees.

In Michigan, authorizing school districts (LEAs) and state public universities (HEIs) may charge an administrative fee not to exceed 3 percent of total state aid received by the charter school. In Florida, the chartering authority, whether a school district or the State Board of Education (SEA), may charge an administrative fee of up to 5 percent of available funds, though that is reduced to 2 percent if the charter school is considered high-performing. In Colorado, the chartering school district may choose to retain up to 5 percent of the per pupil revenue designated for a charter school. Finally, in Oklahoma, the charter-sponsoring school district (LEA), State Board of Education (SEA), public university (HEI), or Native American tribe may withhold an administrative fee of no more than 5 percent of a charter school's state aid. Overall, Illinois' 3 percent rate is comparable to or more favorable than the administrative fees in Michigan, Florida, Colorado, and Oklahoma.

Conclusion

Sixty-nine percent of the 957 charter authorizers across forty-one states deduct administrative fees from their sponsored charter schools' per pupil funding. The administrative fees required range from low (0.5% of school budget in D.C.) to high (5 percent of per pupil revenue in Colorado), with the national average at 2.6 percent. Illinois' 3 percent fee policy—and the Commission's current 2.5 percent fee— compares favorably to that national average. The most recent data shows that 43 percent of all ICBs across the nation charge administrative fees, and that number continues to grow as new ICBs like the Indiana Charter School Board, the Maine Charter School Commission, and our own Illinois State Charter School Commission establish administrative fee policies. Illinois' 3 percent fee policy and the Commission's 2.5 percent current fee compare favorably to Indiana's proposed 2 percent fee policy and Maine's proposed 3 percent fee policy.

Overall, the Illinois State Charter School Commission finds itself among the majority of charter authorizers who believe that charging administrative fees will help them better evaluate charter applications and serve sponsored charter schools.

PART III. FROM THE CHARTER SCHOOLS

In this section, authors from CICS and LEARN charter school networks describe lessons learned from their expansion beyond Chicago. In addition, Commission-authorized schools Prairie Crossing Charter School and Southland College Prep report on recent successes, Concept Schools describes their experience applying to the Commission, and the Urban Education Institute discusses the benefits of university-charter school partnerships.

CICS's Expansion Outside of Chicago

By Beth Purvis

As Chicago International Charter School (CICS) explored opportunities outside of Chicago, it was even more apparent that large cities like Chicago have many resources available that are often not available in smaller cities where there are fewer corporate citizens and less tax revenues. The geographic location of city has much to do with the interest of national organizations to enter the school and social services landscape, putting school districts in an increasingly precarious situation. Too often, they may find themselves trying to be all things to all students and families. As we began our conversations with civic leaders, community members, and parents, we learned that there simply weren't enough academic resources, or more specifically, even a choice among those resources.

For an organization like CICS, the ability to work inside a mid-sized city allows us to have a greater proportional impact. Compared to a city like Chicago, providing school choice in even one neighborhood of a city like Rockford, Waukegan, or Peoria has a larger effect on the system as a whole. Additionally – and perhaps most importantly – because of the relative stability of the school systems in smaller communities, through thoughtful partnering, we knew we could be an asset to the city and not an adversary of the system.

Until 2008, CICS operated 14 campuses, all within the city of Chicago. Since then, it has twice made an effort to expand on its mission outside of the city limits. The first time proved unsuccessful; the second – after an improved approach and alternative strategy – resulted in a unanimous vote of the school board to open the CICS Patriots campus in Rockford, (recently renamed CICS Jackson).

Through our attempts to open schools outside of Chicago, we learned several key lessons about charter expansion and replication away from home. It became evident that expansion efforts should focus on towns where community members and political decision-makers are aligned with charter expansion. Increasingly, charter schools across Illinois must balance the interest of political and academic stakeholders. The consideration of political factors may create friction for an organization like CICS, whose mission

Beth Purvis is the Chief Executive Officer of Chicago International Charter School, a network of 16 charter schools in Chicago and in Rockford that are committed to providing, through innovation and choice, an attractive and rigorous college-preparatory education that meets the needs of today's students. Beth also serves on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Network of Charter Schools.

A classroom at CICS Jackson in Rockford, Illinois. Today, CICS Jackson, formerly known as CICS Patriots, recently moved into the historic Jackson Elementary building in Rockford and serves over 500 students in grades K – 7.

and focus is purely academic; however, academics must not be overlooked when replicating.

Waukegan: Politics and the Drawbacks to a Campaign Approach

In the spring of 2008, CICS partnered with Lake County United (LCU) with the goal of opening a charter school in Waukegan, Illinois. Unfortunately, in December 2008, the Waukegan school board rejected the charter application by six votes to one. According to the board's remarks, the Waukegan charter initiative failed not because of a weak educational design, but because the campaign was antagonistic. This experience taught CICS the invaluable lesson that having quality academics wasn't enough – we had to be more thoughtful and conciliatory when entering new markets. Our failure to engage the broader Waukegan community in meaningful and honest dialogue doomed the application.

LCU approached Chicago International in the spring of 2008 about providing school choice for Waukegan families. LCU is a local community organization with strong ties to local families and churches, two groups whose support is essential when opening new charter schools. With CICS's successful track record in Chicago and LCU's wide support from community members, both organizations presumed a successful partnership. However, CICS and LCU focused more on the failure of the Waukegan Schools than on the success of CICS charter schools. Although they attempted to engage board members in conversation, the message was invariably about the failure of the Waukegan schools and the need for change.

LCU recruited 800 supporters to attend a community meeting at a local church shortly before the final vote. The move was intended to show board members the widespread community backing in Waukegan of both charter schools and of CICS. In reality, the showing led the board to perceive CICS as a big-city outsider aiming to impose an urban method of education in its smaller community. Perhaps beset by the crowd of supporters, perhaps offended by the strong critiques of current district performance, or perhaps simply opposed to the idea of charter schools in general, this crucial group of decision-makers was put on the defensive in what felt like a surprise attack by LCU and CICS.

This rally resulted in a complete breakdown of communication among the decision-makers: board members, superintendent, and school leaders; and the grassroots supporters: LCU, parents, and community members. CICS suddenly found its proposal mired in a political battle that it was not equipped to resolve. Ever more apparent, this effort no longer resembled CICS's model for establishing new charter school campuses where working hand-in-hand with decision-makers is an integral part of the process.

Regardless, CICS submitted its proposal in the fall but was not provided the opportunity to correct problems in the submission. In November 2008, in front of hundreds of supporters, the CICS team answered questions from the school board for over six hours. The open hostility between the crowd and board foreshadowed the December 2008 Waukegan school board vote of 6-to-1 against the charter application.

A "campaign" at the grassroots level certainly has its place in our society. Extensive cooperation is often required for success. The trouble is that the campaign approach tends to pit the decision-makers against the campaigners, who too easily come across as protesters rather than willing partners. We don't know that a different approach would have led to a different application; however, we know that by engaging in conversations about the values of the school model we were proposing and by focusing on providing a college preparatory education, we would have been aligned more closely with our organizational mission and values.

In hindsight, Waukegan taught us the importance of evaluating the local political landscape before initiating expansion. It became crystal clear that efforts must focus on towns where community members and political decision-makers are already developing partnerships. CICS learned the hard way that its core approach to charter approval – cooperation and communication with all stakeholders – is a strategy that is well-served.

Rockford: Successful Community Partnerships

Ninety miles northwest of Chicago sits the city of Rockford, Illinois. In the early part of this century, Rockford public schools were criticized as "drop-out factories" and inadequate to serve the needs of their children. When Rockford's business and community leaders began to push for improvement among Rockford's schools, they recognized the potential of charter schools to help accomplish that goal.

After the Illinois Network of Charter Schools (INCS) referred the Education Director for the City of Rockford to CICS, Rockford Mayor Larry Morrissey came to meet with Executive Director Beth Purvis and key CICS staff in May of 2008. The mayor explored options and toured several CICS campuses. After his meeting, he asked the Rockford Charter School Initiative (RCSI) to take up the charter school issue. RCSI's executive director Laurie Preece did everything right. She built relationships with prominent business leaders, had conversations with school decision-makers, held informational meetings in neighborhoods all over town, and invited established charter school organizations, including CICS, to submit proposals. Before submitting its proposal, CICS searched for a few months to find the right local partners as well as an adequate school facility. The neighborhood trio of

Patriots Gateway Center (PGC), Zion Development Corporation (ZDC), and Zion Lutheran Church included established organizations who were committed to serving Rockford for the long-term. Fortunately, PGC owned a community center in a neighborhood very much in need of a high quality school.

In October, CICS submitted its proposal, supported by ZDC and Zion Lutheran Church, to open a school in the Patriots Gateway community center. The advance conversations and relationship-building with RCSI, PGC, ZDC, and the larger business community allowed for a different process than the Waukegan experience.

Not all school board members were immediately convinced, but they remained open and interested in working on the issue. Board members, local educators, and district leaders raised questions that helped us to refine the proposal. When the Rockford school board voted in February 2009, its approval of CICS's Rockford charter was unanimous.

Focusing our early efforts on authentic relationship building did not mean that the application would be approved; however, the process allowed for trusting relationships to be built through meaningful conversations. Because of RCSI's meticulously planned meetings, forums, tours, news interviews, articles, and even advertisements, all of Rockford was talking about charter schools in largely positive terms. No campaign was required. Instead, a gradually expanding flow of communication reached all members of the community, wherever they sat, until it was no longer a question of whether to approve charter schools, but when and which ones.

Lessons Learned

CICS views deep and meaningful engagement with its community as critical to the success of the network. This is evidenced in our interactions with parents, families, and community leaders at all of our current campuses. What we have learned in our expansion attempts is the absolute necessity of incorporating these practices into our plans to expand to a new community.

A new school cannot succeed on the strength of its academic program alone. Ample time, thought, and effort must be given in order to meaningfully engage with key stakeholders, parents, and educators. The engagement should stay centered on academic achievement and school choice for families, but it should also be reflective of the unique context of the target community.

In Waukegan, CICS failed to appreciate the broader landscape and took a one-sided approach to spreading our message. The result was an unequivocal rejection – not of the academic program – but of the approach we took toward expansion. We were able to call on that experience and lessons learned when pursuing our expansion a second time. In Rockford, we called on the strength of the CICS track record as well as the input and support from a broad and diverse set of community stakeholders to both support and guide CICS's expansion efforts.

Today, CICS Jackson, formerly known as CICS Patriots, recently moved into the historic Jackson Elementary building in Rockford and serves over 500 students in grades K – 7.

LEARN's Expansion Into North Chicago

By Gregory White

LEARN Charter School Network is a nationally recognized network of high-performing, college prep elementary schools. Our mission is to provide children with the academic foundation and ambition to earn a college degree. We currently educate nearly 3,000 students across eight campuses in the Chicagoland area – North Lawndale, East Garfield Park, Auburn Gresham, South Chicago, and recently North Chicago on the Naval Station Great Lakes. Inherent in our mission is providing a high-quality elementary education in historically under-served communities. In the twelve years LEARN has operated charter schools in Chicago, it has become clear that neighboring Chicago suburbs are equally in need of excellent educational options.

An RFP in North Chicago

In November 2011, LEARN pursued the opportunity to open a high-quality charter school in North Chicago- a historically under-served community. The North Chicago School District 187 initiated a competitive RFP process to open a new charter school serving the community of North Chicago School District– a district with no charter options. Everyone at LEARN was excited about the prospect of bringing our proven academic model to both military and civilian families. The unmet needs of North Chicago aligned with LEARN's goal of serving communities with limited high quality elementary school options.

After submitting a 53-page proposal and undergoing a rigorous interview process, our proposal to open a LEARN elementary charter school in North Chicago was approved in March 2012. LEARN staff spent a significant amount of time educating the community and community leaders about charter schools. Gaining the trust of the North Chicago community and its families became our first priority.

Community Partnerships

LEARN was very intentional in reaching out to North Chicago families, residents, and organizations to understand the unique needs and priorities of such a diverse community. Founding Principal Anik Zampini notes, "We came to North Chicago humbly. It was our job to listen and understand what the community needed from us as a school for their children." LEARN selected Anik in April 2012 to be the principal of the new North Chicago campus. He was uniquely equipped to serve as principal in North Chicago given

Gregory White is the President and CEO of LEARN Charter School Network, a nationally recognized network of high-performing charter schools.

Students a LEARN 6 Campus in North Chicago practice their writing. LEARN's North Chicago campus opened in September 2012.

his proven track record as an educator and Principal in low-income communities. Anik was also the founding principal of LEARN's Hunter Perkins Campus in Chicago's Auburn Gresham neighborhood, where he led efforts to design and renovate the school, hire staff, establish curriculum, and build the foundation and culture critical to every LEARN school.

We knew from opening previous schools that community involvement and partnerships were integral to the success of our school, short and long term. As an example, it was important for us to foster a strong relationship with the Navy whose families accounted for 20% of the North Chicago population. Prior to our expansion to North Chicago, the Navy experienced difficulty attracting young families to the Great Lakes Naval Base due to the lack of educational options. The Navy became our ally and a valuable partner. The Navy's support and partnership resulted in our ability to secure beautiful space for our sixth campus in a former training facility on the Great Lakes Naval Station. The building exceeded our expectations and accommodated common program functions like a cafeteria, auditorium, and administrative offices with minimal renovation. It has proven to be the perfect space for our school, providing a safe and secure location, simple and necessary separation between grade levels, parking in close proximity, and outdoor play areas for different ages.

"Stay Humble"

Student recruitment efforts in North Chicago were modeled after our motto of "stay humble." We partnered with local churches, neighborhood councils, block clubs, and organizations to circulate information about LEARN's programs. Led by the Principal and Community Engagement Coordinator, we held information sessions to ensure all families had the opportunity to make an informed decision about entering our lottery. We also used direct mail and community media outlets to publish information and reach families.

On June 6, 2012, our new campus in North Chicago held its first public lottery open to all North Chicago residents. The lottery was a resounding success, well-attended by applying and interested families. In its inaugural school year, LEARN 6 Campus in North Chicago served 250 students, Kindergarten to 2nd grade and 6th to 7th grade, eventually planning to grow to Kindergarten through 8th grade.

Similar to student recruitment, LEARN leveraged community partners to recruit and find exceptional talent for its North Chicago Campus. We were very deliberate in selecting instructional staff that had experience in teaching in diverse environments, lived in the community, or had experience working with ELL students or military families.

Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition Matthew Smith remarked, "Finding the best staff to open our North Chicago campus was essential. We were grateful to the community for allowing us to hold a Job Fair at Foss Park District and utilize local communication outlets to recruit the top talent in the region." Additionally, we believed it was important for our staff to reflect the great diversity of the students we serve.

Upon opening, LEARN North Chicago had recruited

all of its teaching and administrative staff. North Chicago staffed 23 teachers for the 2012-2013 school year. In its first year of operation, LEARN 6 Campus in North Chicago exceeded expectations on all fronts.

Due in great part to the community's support, LEARN 6 opened fully enrolled and fully staffed on its first day on September 6, 2012 – a significant achievement given its introduction into a new community.

Equally notable, has been the strong academic results achieved at LEARN 6 in North Chicago in just two years.

LEARN's expansion into North Chicago has been a positive experience. We are thrilled to be in a community where offering a high-quality elementary education will significantly change the life trajectory of hundreds of children.

Beyond Urban

Charter Schools in the Suburbs

By Geoff Deigan

Founded in 1999 by a group of local leaders looking to create a public school centered on environmental studies, Prairie Crossing Charter School (PCCS) opened in Grayslake, Illinois with kindergarten, 1st and 2nd grades. At the time of our initial charter, PCCS was the first school in Illinois to be chartered directly by the Illinois State Board of Education. Now, entering its 14th year, PCCS is a free public school of choice (K-8) for residents in the Woodland District #50 or Fremont District #79.

Beginning in 1999, and still today, charter schools in the suburbs are a complex and misunderstood entity. Many do not recognize that charter schools in the suburbs are also public schools. Because charter schools are public schools, there is no tuition for students who attend; one quality that distinguishes a charter school from another public school is that students at charter schools are accepted based upon a lottery drawing. Charter schools were established to serve as schools that offered specialized features to their students while still ensuring that the basic tenets of education were taught to each student.

Teaching Skills for the 21st Century

From our inception, the innovative curriculum we offer our students has provided them with unique opportunities to integrate the study of the environment with math, science, writing, social studies, reading, and fine arts in order to develop a full academic picture within their units of study.

Beyond developing an educational model that is unique because of its commitment to environmental stewardship, this school challenges its students both academically and socially. Besides the general curriculum offered at PCCS, students are also charged with participating in group projects. Public speaking is a component of learning that all students, beginning

Geoff Deigan is the Executive Director of Prairie Crossing Charter School, a K-8 public school of choice located in Grayslake, Illinois. Students that reside in Woodland District 50 and Fremont District 79 may submit their names for inclusion in the PCCS lottery held annually each winter. PCCS provides a full complement of services for all students, including students with disabilities and students with Limited English Proficiency. PCCS supports the transportation needs of all its students. For more information, visit www.prairiecrossingcharterschool.org.

Students from Prairie Crossing Charter School learn math, science, history, and language arts while planting and harvesting tomatoes and peppers.

Lessons from Peppers and Tomatoes

If you spend a day in the life of a PCCS student, you will find a school day filled with a variety of experiences. Take our 5th and 6th grade students, for example. After starting the year off by tending to the tomato and pepper gardens they had planted and cultivated last spring, the students spent some time in early fall harvesting hundreds of pounds of tomatoes, peppers, basil, and oregano.

The students used math early on in the harvesting process, estimating the number of pounds of tomatoes and peppers they harvested. Once a menu was developed, the students integrated math into planning their menu—multiplying and dividing fractions in the course of their calculations—to yield the proper measurement conversions. Once the students adapted their menu, they planned, prepped, and helped cook an entire meal for the group of 5th/6th grade students – about 90 people. After assessing the successes of their meal and any modifications for the future, the students' menu was replicated for the school's award-winning Farm to Table program. This menu, as well as the hundreds of pounds of tomatoes and peppers they harvested, was used to feed 300 people during our September Farm to Table lunch. To help the diner understand the process for this meal to be created, the students wrote and made presentations to a variety of audiences regarding the steps they took. Many different types of learning and course subjects were employed in this unit of study.

in kindergarten, employ in small groups, within their classrooms and even to the whole-school population.

Students in all grade levels also take part in service learning projects that benefit the school community, the larger community and other organizations. Service learning is the meaningful integration of community service and academic learning; through service learning, we impart in our students 21st century skills, which include communication, collaboration, self-efficacy and problem-solving. Service learning and public speaking both serve to strengthen our school's environmental focus upon which our charter is based.

Seventh grade students at Prairie Crossing conduct water quality tests. In 2013, PCCS was award the National Blue Ribbon Schools Award for its academic achievement.

Students researched different types of tomatoes, the history of the tomatoes grown in their classroom gardens, and why those specific types of tomatoes were chosen for planting. Students also completed written reflections, sharing their perspectives on the experience, from harvesting, to planning, to cooking, and then presenting their experiences to the larger community. During science class, students learned about artificial selection—the process of people selecting certain foods for seed to glean the type of crop they preferred, and how this evolved into changing the variety of crops commonly found today.

At the conclusion of this unit, our students learned how something as simple as a tomato had greater complexity than originally thought; they were taught math, science, writing, public speaking, and environmental studies—and enjoyed a delicious meal.
This is just one of many examples showing how PCCS provides an original curriculum centered on the environment. PCCS is proving that the natural world is a springboard, sparking children's natural curiosity. Further, PCCS' outdoor classroom provides an ideal integrating context for learning, as the environment is connected to social and political history, economics, STEM disciplines, and serves as the inspiration for literature and writing.

Nationwide Recognition

Along the way, PCCS has been recognized as a successful school throughout the nation. In 2004, PCCS was acknowledged by BP as one of the Chicagoland's Most Valuable Resources and presented the school with their Natural Leaders award, stating that PCCS "went beyond in math and science education and environmental leadership." The Illinois Network of Charter School (INCS) gave its first Charter Up award to PCCS for the Farm to Table Program in 2004. The Center for Education Reform named Prairie Crossing as its 2007 National Charter School of the Year. In 2012, the U.S. Department of Education has complimented the PCCS integrated environmental curriculum and its results by presenting their first Green Ribbon Schools award in 2012. Most recently, PCCS was honored again by the USDOE as a 2013 National Blue Ribbon Schools Award recipient for academic achievement.

Despite our short history as a school, the commitment of our school community of parents, students, and staff is the greatest ingredient to our success.

Southland College Prep Charter High School

Unlimited Possibilities, Unlimited Potential

By Dr. Blondean Davis

There is no football field on Southland College Prep Charter High School's campus. Nor are there any baseball diamonds, soccer fields, or a swimming pool. Its cheerleaders perform when the school's Eagles take to their "home court" at nearby Governor's State University.

However, students enrolled in the first and only public charter secondary school to serve Chicago suburbs, now in its fourth year, place quite well in state competitions for such lifelong sports as cross-country, tennis, golf, volleyball, and bowling. Two of Southland's juniors took a state championship in Speech last year and one represented Chicago in the prestigious August T. Wilson Monologue Competition on Broadway. The newly formed Southland band earned a Superior Rating in state competition.

So why do these young people—predominantly African-American, economically diverse—compete in a public lottery to enroll at Southland College Prep where they spend a nine-hour school day pursuing a rigorous academic curriculum that earns them 32 credits, more than one full year of courses taken by most other Chicago-area high schools?

For the answer, one must replay the voices of south suburban parents and community leaders who five years ago petitioned the Illinois State Board of Education to offer their children a better opportunity for the future than the then existing alternatives. ISBE listened to those voices and became convinced that south suburban Chicago area students needed a better choice and far more hope for their future.

In less than one year of planning, Southland's core team created a curriculum designed to prepare all of Southland's students to graduate from high school, be accepted by a college or university of their choice, and earn a bachelor's degree. For many, this will be the first such academic accomplishment in their family.

Dr. Blondean Y. Davis is the Superintendent of Matteson School District 162, the CEO of Southland College Prep Charter High School, and the former Chief of Schools and Regions for the Chicago Public Schools.

The Southland Speech team performs in a competition. Two of Southland's juniors took a state championship in Speech last year.

A 21st Century Education

At Southland, we believe that children can achieve their highest potential to learn, despite socioeconomic realities that are frequently cited as insurmountable barriers to achieving optimal educational results. The Southland curriculum includes four years of English, Math, Science, Social Studies, World Language, Technology, Physical Education and three years of Fine Arts. Ninety percent of Southland graduates are projected to earn 32 credits or more.

The model embraces the traditional while placing a strong focus on college readiness and career preparation. STEM careers are given an added emphasis and our science courses utilize state-of-the-art data gathering to provide students with aggregated real-time modeling of physical, chemical, and biological processes.

Each year of curriculum builds upon prior year concepts, plus a strong tutorial program is included in every school day which accounts for individual differences and provides every student with an opportunity to move forward.

Technology is an important part of each curriculum year and is integrated into every subject. Southland's students use 21st century classroom tools including an electronic portfolio of work. We provide all our seniors with iPads and a blog for each subject area. Students engage in technology-based collaborative learning with others and have access to video conferencing, while technology assisted home-school communication keeps parents informed of progress.

Graduates have the ability to communicate both visually and in print and are taught to utilize the method that will best serve their purpose. Southland has a basic television studio and students produce daily news programs that are beamed via closed circuit around the campus.

During the final 90 minutes of each school day, Southland students have options to participate in art, band, chorus, dance, debate, speech and forensics,

and other offerings.

Unencumbered by the rituals and rote of the past, Southland is focused on the future. We offer our students an education that challenges them to think, to create, to communicate, and to prepare themselves to become citizens of the 21st century.

Adjusting for Student Needs

We strive to affect positive change by maintaining a high level of student accountability. Our approach is a brisk curricular pace for all students with adjustments depending on student levels and needs.

Southland uses a range of educational tools to evaluate students' performance and to place them into focus groups. All students have 90-minutes of math and 90- minutes of English every class day. Half of the time is spent on content building with tutorial support while the balance of the class is spent focusing on any gaps in previous content.

To maintain Southland's rigorous curriculum, we require mastery of gaps before the next learning module is addressed. Our expectations are high. To maintain the level of accomplishment, teachers collaborate, analyze and are critical of their own delivery and design in the classroom and never leave content mastery to chance.

Senior Year

The Southland senior year curriculum is by far our most unique course offering. Southland offers seniors an English/Technology integrated team taught course that urges students to find their literary "voice" and create college level research and individual portfolios that are published in an interactive e-book format using the full capabilities of iPads which are issued to every senior.

The senior social studies course, Global Issues, uses digital textbooks from the Brown University series, "Choices", and introduces students to real-world issues such as population growth, environmental issues, and global terrorism. The final piece of this integrated curriculum is environmental science where students learn the science that underlies the politics of the global environmental debate.

Beyond the Classroom Walls

Student learning at Southland is not restricted to the classroom experience. By most accounts the opportunities afforded our students through unique learning opportunities have had significant impact. During the summer, Southland juniors have had the opportunity to participate in a broad range of academically enriching programs on college campuses, at cultural sites, and in business settings.

These activities have ranged from day-long seminars

to month-long classes and excursions. Students have traveled from California, to Washington D.C., Boston, Costa Rica, and many points in between.

Some Southland juniors had invaluable summer experiences at engineering camps at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, University of Wisconsin, University of Illinois, and Purdue University. Others participated in seminars at Howard University Law School, John Marshall Law School, University of Chicago Law School, University of Chicago Booth Graduate School of Business, and Vanderbilt School of Law. In addition to these campus-based activities, students have worked with Wall Street investment banking firms, such as Morgan Stanley and Deutsch Bank. Others served on the staff of some of Chicago's world-class cultural centers such as the Museum of Science and Industry, Field Museum, Adler Planetarium, and the John G. Shedd Aquarium.

Opportunities beyond the walls are available throughout the school year. Students have benefited from numerous day-long college field trips to such campuses as: University of Notre Dame, Monmouth College, Illinois State University, University of Illinois (Chicago) and Northern Illinois University.

Southland students have interacted with others through their association with organizations such as Chicago Scholars, Quest Bridge, and 100 Black Men of Chicago. All of these activities offer Southland's students the opportunity to work with their teachers, peers, and others as they place their classroom learning into context and balance it with real life experiences.

Proof Points

Ian Katiku, originally from Kenya, described his fears of entering a high school with visions of "fights, pregnancies and social pressure, but I comforted myself that it would all be over by 3 p.m."

"You can imagine how I felt when I heard about Southland, a high school with nine-hour days, where students wear uniforms and where I would be a stranger," he said. "However, I soon learned that my trepidation was misplaced. Here I'm able to achieve all of my potential with an environment that is dedicated to learning. While some schools value sports and others value fashion, at Southland we have a chance to place academics at the top of the social pyramid. Our class has been granted the power to determine what Southland students strive to be—peer pressure can be positive."

Southland students spend far more time "on task" compared to other American high school students. We believe that they will apply all that they learn within our labs and classrooms far beyond this charter school's walls. We are also convinced that when Southland College Prep Charter High School students enroll in college that they will stay and earn their degree, for they've learned that perseverance and commitment do make a difference and will lead to unlimited possibilities and unlimited potential.

Appealing a District Denial to the Illinois State Charter School Commission

The Experience of Concept Schools

By Salim Ucan

As the first charter school operator to have successfully appealed a school district's denial of a proposal for a new school to the Illinois State Charter School Commission, Concept Schools, with a broad network of schools across the Midwest and experience with multiple authorizers, is in a unique position to be able to share our experience of going through the appeals process with the Commission. The process for an appeal is articulated by Illinois law (Senate Bill 79); therefore, our experience will not differ substantively from any other appellant. However, because we were the first charter school operator to see an appeal to the Commission through completion, and because the Commission was newly formed at the time, we hope the following account of our experience will be valuable to other charter school applicants and also help debunk some of the misconceptions about the appeal process.

We are a not-for-profit charter school network that currently operates 30 schools in six states across the Midwest. Our mission is to create high-quality educational opportunities and prepare students for college through a rigorous STEM-focused curriculum in underserved communities. In a research study released in January 2013 by The Center for Research on Educational Outcomes (CREDO) of Stanford University, Concept was identified among the highest-performing charter networks in the 25 states that were included in the study.

Preparing Students for STEM Careers

We take very seriously the message expressed by President Obama back in 2010, that "Leadership tomorrow depends on how we educate our students today, especially in science, technology, engineering and math." That same message was repeated in his 2014 State of the Union Address when he stated that America must focus on "preparing students with skills

Salim Ucan is the Vice President of Concept Schools, a charter school network with 30 STEM-focused college prep charter schools in the Midwest. The central offices are located in Des Plaines, Illinois.

for the new economy—problem solving, critical thinking, science, technology, engineering, and math." The President declared [this] "requires everything from more challenging [curricula] and more demanding parents, to better support for teachers and new ways to measure how well our kids think." These critical elements are at the very heart of Concept Schools' educational model.

Fifth grade students at Horizon Science Academy-McKinley Park engaged in a classroom utilizing technology.

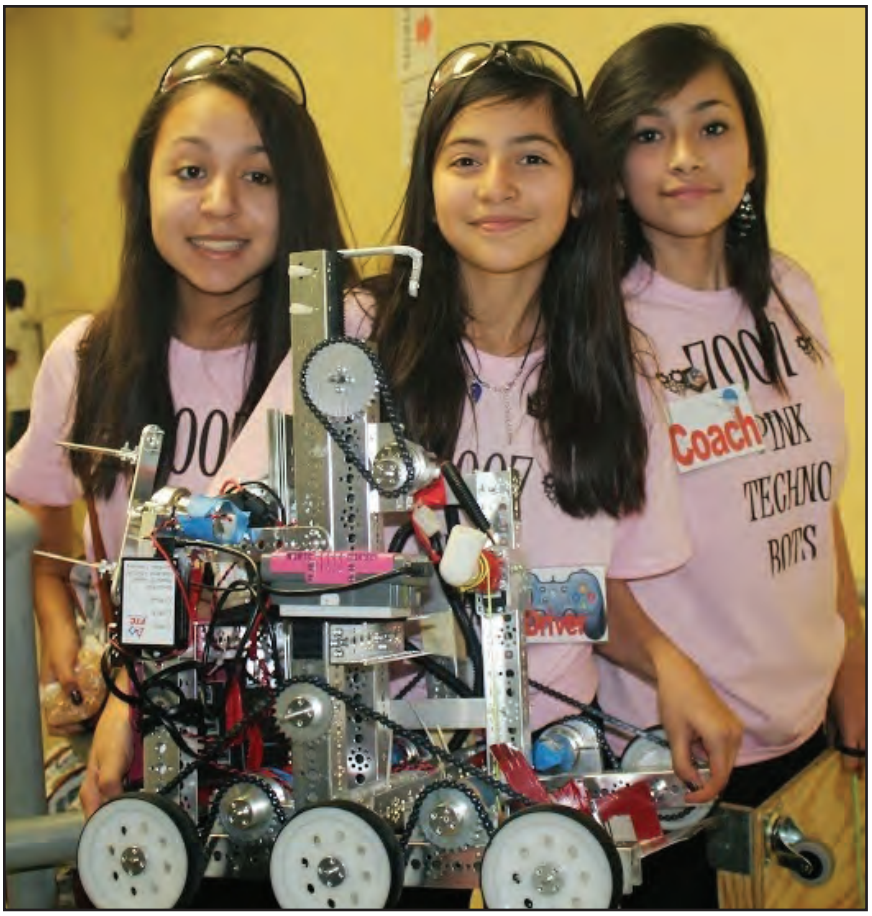
Volumes of data are available that clearly indicate there is a STEM crisis in America—particularly in K-12. According to the most recent published Program for International Student Assessment (PSIA) data (2012), the U.S. ranks lower than 27 countries in math and 17 countries in science. The latest ACT results indicate that 56% of U.S. high school graduates are not college-ready in math, and only 36% of high school graduates are college-ready in science (Condition of College & Career Readiness 2013). These sobering statistics are of great concern when you take into account that 92% of all U.S. STEM jobs are predicted to require a postsecondary education by 2018. Moreover, while only 4% of U.S. workers are in STEM careers, they create jobs for the other 96% of workers (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

If you dig a little deeper into these statistics, you will find a consistent and distinct achievement gap between white students and their minority counterparts. The latest ACT scores show that 54% of white students are considered college ready in math, while only 14% of African Americans and 30% of Hispanic students are in that category. In science, 45% of white students are college ready, while only 10% of African American and 21% of Hispanic students demonstrate proficiency.

African Americans and Hispanics are highly underrepresented in STEM careers. This is in large part due to these groups of individuals being less likely to hold a bachelor's degree. The U.S. Census Bureau reports that in 2010 39% of non-Hispanic whites ages 25-29 had bachelor's degrees, while 19% of African-Americans and 14% of Hispanics held one.

Opening Two New Schools in Chicago: A Rigorous Appeals Process

This is where Concept Schools seeks to make a difference and why we proposed opening two new charter schools in 2012 in the McKinley Park and Belmont neighborhoods of Chicago. These are two predominantly minority and low-income communities that lacked a quality STEM-focused education and viable option for families. When Chicago Public Schools voted to reject our proposals, for reasons with which we respectfully disagreed, we believed so strongly in



HSA-McKinley Park's Pink Techno Bots, winners of the Best Rookie Team Award, the Motivate Award, and finalists in FIRST Tech Challenge in Indiana. In a recent competition, the Pink Techno Bots won the 2nd Place Inspire Award, which is the second-highest award granted by the judges. They also are one of five teams that have advanced to the State Championship.

the quality of our model and the importance of the services we could provide to these two communities that we moved to appeal the decision to the Illinois State Charter School Commission.

Concept Schools has a strong track record of successful replication, as our network has grown from two schools to 30 since 1999. As the Vice President of Concept Schools, I have actively led ten proposals to successful approval with different authorizers, ranging from state universities, to local school districts, to mayor's offices, in multiple states. The appeal and authorization process with the Illinois State Charter School Commission is by far one of the most thorough and rigorous that I have encountered. We experienced the Commission operating under strict standards that, as disclosed by the Commission, were based on the standards of the leading charter school authorizer organization, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA). The Commission offered open channels of communication with flexible and numerous opportunities to clarify points within the proposal.

Under Illinois law, the Commission is required to review proposals seeking an appeal de novo, meaning that it must consider the proposal as a whole and not just address the areas of contention between the school district that denied the proposal and the appellant. No ex parte communication was allowed. If the Commission sought to consult with either us or the district at any point while reviewing our proposals, all three parties were included in the conversations. At every step of the appeals process, from the very beginning to the very end, the Commission encouraged both Concept Schools and the District to sit down and try to resolve the areas of disagreement.

One of the first steps the Commission took in the process was to form a panel of national charter school experts to study our application in-depth. This panel conducted interviews with both Concept Schools and the District regarding our application. Both our team and the District were in the room simultaneously while interviews were being conducted. The scope of interviews reached beyond the points of disagreement in the proposals and, again, addressed the proposals de novo, based on their overall merit for consideration.

The next steps in the appeal process were so thorough and similar in scope and procedure that they can actually be likened to the approval or re-authorization process for existing charter schools. The Commission's panel arranged to visit one of our existing schools, Chicago Math and Science Academy (CMSA),

for extensive observations. District officials were also extended an invitation to attend, which they accepted. The panel visited classrooms while school was in session and conducted impromptu interviews with teachers, students, administrators, CMSA board members, and community partners of the school. Afterward, the Commission called the authorizers of Concept Schools in other states to ask about their experiences working with our organization and their views on the performance of our schools. At various points in the review process, the Commission requested additional data from us regarding our existing schools' performance and clarification on certain aspects such as governance and facility development. An extensive data review was conducted by the Commission, and the proposals were further studied.

Upon completion of the Commission's review process of our proposal, and after the points of disagreement between Concept Schools and the District were found irreconcilable, in March 2013 the Commission authorized Horizon Science Academy (HSA)-McKinley Park and Horizon Science Academy (HSA)-Belmont to open in the fall of 2013. The District retained the right to challenge the Commission's decisions if there was strong disagreement.

Our Chicago Schools Today

HSA-McKinley Park currently serves 430 students in grades K-8, and HSA-Belmont serves 280 students in K-5. The student population at HSA-McKinley Park is 88% minority and 82% come from economically disadvantaged families. At HSA-Belmont, the ratios are 94% and 81%. Both schools have extensive waiting lists of 400 and 300 respectively. Each school will add a grade each year and at full capacity will each serve 725 students in K-12. In their first year in operation, these schools are already making a dramatic and positive impact on students and families.

As a mother of three students at HSA-McKinley Park, Patricia Taylor, recounts, before her children attended HSA, she literally had to drag them out of bed to go to school, where they encountered fighting and bullying and their academics suffered. She likened their attitude toward school to a "dying heartbeat." Since starting at HSA, she says her children now pull her out of bed to get to school. They are excelling academically, and the whole family is encouraged to be, and is, actively involved in their education and extracurricular activities. She says, "HSA has opened a new window of opportunity. I would not have believed if I hadn't lived it."

Also during its first year in operation, HSA-McKinley Park has one of the few all-girl robotics teams in Illinois. Not only are the members of the Pink Techno Bots excited about STEM, but they are also in middle school and competing against high school students from wealthier suburbs and winning awards. In its first year, HSA-Belmont boasted a first-place victory by a fifth-grade student in the multi-state Concept Schools Spelling Bee and several students trained in the Math Cadets program and competed in the national Noetic Learning Math Contest. Opportunities and achievements like these are available to hundreds of students at HSA-McKinley Park and HSA-Belmont because in 2011 Illinois legislators paved a way to afford charter school applicants access to what any administrative democratic decision process makes available to all in America, the right to appeal.

The University of Chicago Charter School

Schooling and Scaling Excellence

By Timothy Knowles

For nearly one in four American children, education is the only viable escape hatch from poverty. Greater educational attainment means a person will live longer, earn more, go to prison less, vote, volunteer, and give blood more, and have children with higher levels of educational attainment. In essence, educational attainment precipitates enormous positive changes in the lives of our nation's most disadvantaged youth, changes that resonate through generations.

UChicago Charter School: Record of Success

My colleagues and I at the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI) are engaged in this transformative work with a singular mission—to create knowledge to produce reliably excellent schooling nationwide. We do this by undertaking rigorous applied research, training exemplary teachers, sharing tools and training with schools across the nation, and working directly with over 1,900 students at the four campuses of the UChicago Charter School.

Guided by UEI's rigorous research on what really works in schools and classrooms, our results tell us we are on the right track. The North Kenwood/Oakland elementary campus is consistently one of the highest performing non-selective elementary schools in the city of Chicago. At the Carter G. Woodson middle school campus, 20 percent of our students were accepted to selective enrollment high schools in 2012—the highest acceptance rate of any non-selective school on Chicago's South Side and higher than all but two non-selective schools citywide.

At our prekindergarten through fifth grade Donoghue Campus we have built a true community school, where deep wells of family and community engagement contribute to significant academic growth. And at the Woodlawn Campus, which serves students in grades six through twelve, we celebrated 100 percent college acceptance for the last two graduating

Timothy Knowles is the John Dewey Director of the University of Chicago Urban Education Institute (UEI). UEI's mission is to create knowledge to produce reliably excellent schooling nationwide. UEI conducts applied research, trains teachers and leaders, distributes school-improvement tools and training across the country, and operates a multi-campus charter school serving students from PreK to grade 12.

A student at UChicago Charter School prepares to graduate. The Woodlawn Campus, which serves students in grades six through twelve, celebrated 100 percent college acceptance for the last two graduating classes.

classes. Our graduates are enrolling, persisting, and completing college in places like Georgetown University, Oberlin College, Carleton College, Penn State, University of Chicago, University of Illinois-Urbana Champaign, and many more.

University of Chicago: Rigor in Theory and Influence at Scale

These successes are built on the ground-breaking work of researchers and practitioners dedicated to asking the right questions and relentlessly seeking—and heeding—the best available evidence. Anchoring much of our daily work is UEI's Consortium on Chicago School Research.

Over the last twenty years the Consortium has provided policy makers and practitioners with remarkable insights for improving instruction, leadership, school culture, college readiness, and post-secondary success. In essence, at UEI we have married the traditional work of higher education—developing knowledge—with on-the-ground work in practice. And we have found it pays remarkable dividends. The knowledge we create addresses the very real challenges encountered in urban schooling, and therefore is invaluable to policy makers and practitioners in Chicago and nationwide. The tools we build are not just research-based, they are practice-proven, and so are reliably useful and widely used. And the teachers we train engage in intensive clinical preparation in our school. As a result, they not only stay in the profession, they excel in it.

As a part of UEI at this powerful intersection, the UChicago Charter School is uniquely positioned not only to educate, but also to innovate and demonstrate. The STEP™ literacy system is an important example of what can happen when the best of research and practice combine. The STEP™ system was developed over the last decade by researchers at UEI and refined on-the-ground at the UChicago Charter School. STEP™ is now the literacy solution of choice in hundreds of schools in 39 cities and 21 states, including some of the highest performing urban schools nationwide. KIPP, Rocketship, Uncommon, and Achievement First schools use STEP™ for rigorous reading instruction. Likewise UEI's college readiness curriculum—6to16—informed by work at the Consortium and built in our school, is being used in charter and traditional public schools nationwide.

In the midst of our ambitious work at scale, the UChicago Charter School keeps us firmly grounded in the

enormously complex and rewarding work of schooling, and reminds us that data is only as good as the people that put it into action within the schoolhouse. Essentially, we operate a charter school to serve Chicago's children and families at the highest levels and to guide and ground the Urban Education Institute's work to advance educational excellence nationwide.

A PreK-12 Superhighway: Modeling the Best of Research and Practice

Looking forward, we aim to bring the best of our expertise and experience to bear in tightly aligning the four campuses of our charter school into a single prekindergarten through 12th grade "superhighway" to college. This model is rarely found in public schooling and is absent altogether among Chicago's public schools. Our data show that the longer we educate students at the UChicago Charter campuses, the more the students achieve and improve.

By consistently cultivating critical thinking capacity and strength of character from the ages of 4 to 18, we are convinced we can dramatically improve the educational attainment and life outcomes for the children we serve. In essence, the UChicago Charter School PreK-12 superhighway will redefine what is probable in urban schools. And by doing this work at the intersection of practice, research, and national scale, we are convinced that we can have significant impact—creating reliably excellent schooling for children growing up across urban America.

PART IV. UPDATES ON PROGRESS AND IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

As described in the foreword to this Biennial Report, the Commission chose deliberately to invite organizations with differing views to dissect current issues, present innovative solutions, and discuss thought-provoking ideas regarding charter authorizing and charter schools in Illinois. The articles in this section should not be interpreted as reflecting the views and positions of the Illinois State Charter School Commission and are presented here for the purpose of sparking intellectual conversation across the State.

In this section, the Illinois Network of Charter Schools reports on charter school academic results and STAND for Children discusses why parents choose charter schools. In addition, the Commission provides a summary of recommendations on virtual schooling released earlier this year, and authors from Advance Illinois and the Illinois Facilities Fund discuss recommendations for improving educational outcomes in Illinois, including gathering better data on early childhood performance, addressing systemic obstacles to college completion, and creating a new "Here and Now" report describing the educational landscape of all of Illinois.

Chicago Charter School Results

CREDO's recent analysis of student achievement

By Andrew Broy and Jill Gottfred

In June 2013, The Center for Research on Education (CREDO) at Stanford University released the biggest national study on charter school performance to date, as well as an in-depth examination of charter school performance in Illinois. While the national trends vary, the report shows greater learning gains in both reading and math for elementary charter school students in Illinois compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools.

National Study

CREDO looked at 2.3 million charter students in 25 states and two cities -- New York and Washington. On the national front, the news is promising. Charters schools have shown both improved quality over the results from 2009 and an upward trend in their performance over the past five years using the same methodology:

- In the 2013 study, CREDO reports that 29% of charter schools outperformed their traditional public school counterparts in math. In the 2009 study, 17% of public charter schools outperformed their traditional public school counterparts in math.

- In the 2013 study, CREDO reports that in reading, 25% of charter schools outperformed their traditional public school counterparts. Reading performance was not reported in 2009.

- In the 2013 study, CREDO reports that on the whole, 69% of charter schools performed the same or better than their traditional public school counterparts in math. In reading, 81% of charter schools performed the same or better than their traditional public school counterparts.

Illinois Study

For Illinois, the performance is stronger than the national charter average. Like the national sample, the Illinois study found greater academic gains for low-income, minority students in Illinois charter schools as a whole than they would have experienced had they attended traditional public schools:

Andrew Broy is the President of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, a statewide advocacy and charter school support organization serving 152 charter campuses in Illinois that collectively educate more than 55,000 public school students. Jill Gottfred is the Policy Manager of the Illinois Network of Charter Schools, where she advocates for strong education policies at the district and state levels.

	Significantly Worse		Not Significant		Significantly Better	
Subject	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Reading	13	21.3%	36	59.0%	12	19.7%
Math	13	21.0%	26	41.9%	23	37.1%

Table 4 from page 32 of the CREDO report highlights the following: In reading, about 20 percent of charter schools in Illinois perform significantly better than their traditional public school market, while 37 percent perform significantly better in math. Both of these results are better than the national average proportion of better-performing charters (17%). The table above demonstrates the strength of Illinois charter schools when compared to schools throughout the country. The CREDO report authors write in their introduction that "Compared to the educational gains that charter students would have had in a traditional public school, the analysis shows on average that students in Illinois charter schools make larger learning gains in both reading and mathematics."

- Hispanic students and low-income Hispanic students made greater gains in math compared with their similarly situated peers

- Low-income students and low-income African American students experienced greater gains in reading compared with their similarly situated peers

- Low-income Hispanic students in charter schools are not only outpacing their similarly situated peers in traditional public schools in math, but they are growing at the same rate as white students who are not living in poverty in traditional public schools

CREDO's national study on charter schools serves to improve empirical evidence and provide research that drives our understanding about the successes and challenges that exist for the charter sector across the country and by state. The data revealed in CREDO's study on charter school performance in Chicago and Illinois is critical for charter authorizers and policy makers to both identify student achievement trends in the charter sector compared with traditional district schools, and inform strategic decision-making regarding where to invest in what works for students, specifically for historically disadvantaged student groups.

The data reported in the CREDO study demonstrates that charter schools are improving outcomes for students nationally and in Illinois, while also highlighting there is still more work to be done to ensure a quality education for every student. As Dr. Margaret Raymond, Director of CREDO at Stanford University puts it: "The results [in the national study] reveal that the charter school sector is getting better on average and that charter schools are benefiting low-income, disadvantaged, and special education students."

As welcome as these changes are, more work remains to be done to ensure that all charter schools provide their students high-quality education. The variance in quality across the education sector suggests the need for Illinois charter school authorizers to continue to be rigorous in their approval of new, innovative charter models, act swiftly to close low performing charter schools that repeatedly underperform traditional district schools, and add capacity and replicate schools that are achieving high academic results for their students.

Findings from the Virtual Schools Report

By Dr. Karen E. Washington

In May 2013 the Illinois General Assembly amended the charter school law (105 ILCS 5/27A-5). The amendment placed a moratorium on the creation of virtual schools in Illinois through April 1, 2014, and called for the State Charter School Commission to "submit to the General Assembly a report on the effect of virtual schooling, including without limitation the effect on student performance, the costs associated with virtual schooling, and issues with oversight" and including to make policy recommendations for virtual-schooling."

The Commission appointed an advisory group made up of people with an expertise and interest in virtual schooling to inform the Commission's deliberations. The advisory group met 3 times to inform and clarify the choices and options for consideration by the Commission. Members were invited to submit written comments on the initial draft of the report and recommendations. At its February 18, 2014 meeting, the Commission reviewed the report and approved the recommendations for the state.

The legislation defined "virtual-schooling" as "the teaching of courses through online methods with online instructors, rather than the instructor and student being at the same physical location," and noted that virtual schooling "includes without limitation instruction provided by full-time, online virtual schools."

Background on Virtual Schools

Virtual or on-line learning describes a continuum of instructional models that include: 1) programs that supplement traditional brick and mortar school-based instruction with online instruction, 2) programs that blend traditional brick-and-mortar school-based instruction with online instruction that includes some element of student control over time, place, path,

Dr. Karen Elise Washington currently serves as Deputy Director of the Illinois State Charter School Commission and assisted the Commission, including its Chariman, Greg Richmond, and consultant Laurence Stanton, in the production of the Commission's Virtual Schooling Report and Recommendations. The entire report may be found on the Commission website, and a link is also provided in the Appendix to this Report. Dr. Washington was first a principal in Country Club Hills School District 160 and later served as both an elementary and a high school principal for charter and contract schools in high-poverty Chicago neighborhoods for the American Quality Schools network, eventually being promoted to Regional Manager at AQS.

and/or pace, and 3) full time virtual (or online) schools where students take all, or most, of their courses online.

Many students enroll in individual online courses to supplement or serve as part of a full-time course or program in a traditional school, e.g., advanced placement courses in schools without a qualified instructor. Although students often cannot enroll in a course without the approval of their home school or district, they may access the course at home or in designated spaces within the school building.

Increasing numbers of brick and mortar schools are providing a blended learning model by offering a combination of online and face-to-face instruction mixed throughout the school day. The actual amount of time spent in online learning depends on the student and the model—it ranges from very little to most of their time.

Full-time virtual schools teach courses through online methods with online instructors, rather than the instructor and student being at the same physical location. Students may receive some instruction and support at drop-in centers or other physical locations, but generally do not attend classes with other students in physical school buildings. Virtual schools often serve students from multiple districts and reaching across an entire state. Some virtual schools are organized as charter schools, but some states and districts offer their own virtual programs.

Summary of Findings

During the course of their research, Commission staff and the advisory group looked specifically at the population of virtual schools, the difference between virtual and brick and mortar schools, and virtual school funding.

The Commission concluded that virtual schools provide an opportunity for some children to receive a quality education that they may not otherwise receive. The number of such students may be relatively small, but the state has a public interest in helping those students succeed, wherever they may live. However, the overall record of academic performance of virtual schools across the country is weak and there are important aspects of virtual schooling that do not align with aspects of the state's charter school law.

Thus, to serve children and the public well, Illinois' charter school law should be amended to address these key aspects of virtual schooling. Illinois' moratorium on virtual charter schools should continue for approximately two and a half years while the details of new policies are developed and implemented.

Virtual charter schools have the potential to benefit Illinois children for whom they are appropriate under a regulatory structure consistent with charter school oversight principles. This is consistent with state policy objectives that all children have access to a quality public education, regardless of their zip code or family income.

With new legislation and rules, virtual charter schools could be authorized by a state body or a school district. Statewide virtual charter schools would be authorized by a state body and virtual charter schools serving a local school district or districts would be authorized by the district or districts they serve. State-approved virtual charter schools should be funded by the state. Locally-approved virtual charter schools should be funded locally.

Recommendations

Based on these discussions and the findings within the virtual schools report, the Commission approved the following recommendations for virtual schooling in Illinois on February 18th:

1. Existence

Because some students could benefit, Illinois should allow virtual charter schools to exist and should work to ensure that all Illinois children for whom a virtual school is appropriate have access to a virtual school, regardless of where they reside.

However, state policies must first be amended to

reflect an appropriate oversight structure, and Illinois' moratorium should be extended until December 31, 2016 to allow development of such a structure (see recommendation 7).

2. Significant Modifications to Charter Law

In order to address the unique characteristics and needs of virtual charter schools and their students, existing laws and administrative rules should be modified to require authorizers of a virtual school to:

- solicit proposals for virtual schools (as explained in recommendation 6),
- determine pricing through a competitive process,
- base payment on student success and evidence of student engagement,
- hold schools accountable based on both state tests and other measures appropriate for virtual schools,
- require schools to establish legally permissible criteria and processes for enrollment based on the existence of supports needed for student success, and
- require schools to demonstrate the capacity to deliver services to students with special needs and students who are English Language Learners.

3. Capacity to Develop New Rules and Processes

Because the development of the rules and processes needed to implement these recommendations will require capacity and resources that do not currently exist within the State Board of Education or State Charter School Commission, the General Assembly must appropriate resources to enable these rules and processes to be developed and implemented.

4. Approvals by State or Districts

Any local school district or group of local school districts should be able to authorize a virtual school consistent with the new laws and rules, but should not be required to consider unsolicited applications for virtual schools.

The authorizer of statewide virtual charter schools should be the State Charter School Commission. So long as two routes to authorization exist, as provided for in these recommendations, a decision to approve or deny a virtual charter school proposal by the state or by a local district should not be subject to administrative appeal.

"Virtual charter schools have the potential to benefit Illinois children for whom they are appropriate under a regulatory structure consistent with charter school oversight principles."

5. Funding

A state-authorized virtual charter school should be fully funded by the state through the General State Aid formula. A virtual charter school authorized by a local district should be funded by the authorizing district(s).

For each virtual charter school (whether authorized by the state or a district) per pupil payment amounts should be determined as proposed and approved in the virtual charter school application, without regard to districts' per capita tuition charges. In no case would the per pupil payment to a state-authorized virtual charter school exceed the state foundation level. Payments to the virtual school should be based primarily upon a student's successful course or program completion and evidence of engagement, not only on enrollment.

6. Requests for Proposals

Following the approval of laws and rules addressing

virtual schools by the State Board of Education, the State Charter School Commission, should issue a request for proposals for a statewide virtual charter school, award a charter to school(s) that meet the requirements, and closely monitor the operation and performance of such schools.

7. Moratorium Extension

Illinois' current moratorium on virtual charter schools expires on April 1, 2014. The General Assembly should pass new legislation that incorporates the Commission's recommendations and extends the moratorium. The moratorium should expire on December 31, 2016 or when the State Board of Education certifies that new rules have been put in place to implement the new virtual school law, whichever is sooner. If the State Board of Education fails to so certify by December 31, 2016, the moratorium shall expire, the provisions of the new virtual school law shall have no effect, and new virtual charter school proposals shall be permitted under the terms of the current law.

8. Data and Report

The new law permitting virtual schools should provide for funds for the ongoing collection of data on virtual school performance and shall require an independent study of virtual school costs and performance be provided to the General Assembly seven years after the law's effective date.

Conclusion

The foregoing eight recommendations were transmitted to the legislature as required before the March 1, 2014 delivery date. The Commission is grateful for the participation of the members of the advisory group for their input and recommendations, although the Commission takes full responsibility for the substance of its report and the recommendations summarized here. The Commission looks forward to assisting in the development of the administrative rules for virtual charter schools in Illinois as suggested in these recommendations if such is the will of the Illinois legislature.

Public Charters from the Parent's Perspective

By Mimi Rodman

"I want the best school for my child, period. To us, the only thing that matters is the quality of education my child receives at that school."- Martha Casas, mother of students at Noble Pritzker College Prep and Alfred Nobel Elementary School

For the thousands of parents we work with in Chicago Public Schools, sending children to a high-quality public charter school isn't a political statement. It's strictly an attempt to secure the best possible education for their children. Cornelia Twilley, for example, is a mother of five who lives in Chicago's Austin neighborhood. Sixteen years ago, she attended an informational meeting held by the staff of the public charter school Chicago International Charter School – Bucktown. "They promised a rigorous curriculum and that my child would be a year or two ahead of their peers," Twilley said. "And they delivered." Four of her children, some of whom were previously struggling with performance issues in their other schools, are now thriving. Two are enrolled in college, two enrolled in the same high-performing magnet high school, and her fifth is excelling in 6th grade at the charter.

Closing the Gap

The charter success stories we've heard from hundreds of parents like Twilley are supported by a recent report from Stanford's Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO). The study, on Illinois charters specifically, finds that students enrolled in public charter schools gain two weeks a year in reading comprehension and one month in math learning every year, compared to identical peers in traditional public schools. According to the report, charter schools serve a higher percentage of children in poverty than traditional schools, and poor children in charter schools perform significantly better in reading and the same in math as their peers in traditional schools. The positive impact of enrolling in a charter is especially high for Hispanic students in poverty: Hispanic students in poverty at a charter school have similar learning gains as non-poverty white children

Mimi Rodman is the Executive Director of Stand for Children Illinois, a statewide public education advocacy organization that works with parents to ensure all children, regardless of zip code, are prepared for and have access to a college education.

in traditional public schools in Illinois. Charter schools, says the study, have "erased the learning gap and are closing the achievement gap" between non-poverty white students in traditional public schools and Hispanic students in poverty in charter schools.

All of this research points to what our parents already know: the existence and growth of high-performing charter schools in low-income neighborhoods is good for parents and for their children. But this doesn't mean that all charters are created equal.

Ensuring Quality and Closing Low-Performing Schools

Currently, 20% of charters are "significantly better" than their counterparts in reading, and 37% are "significantly better" in math, but there are still far too many low-performing charters.

The CREDO report analyzes charters compared to their local markets, and finds that 21% of charters are performing "significantly worse" in reading and math than their comparison schools. School districts and states need to be more aggressive about closing the 20% of charter schools that consistently underperform traditional public schools.

Closing low-performing charters has a few clear benefits. First and most obviously, closures immediately intervene on behalf of all students enrolled who are receiving a sub-par education. Second, an active regulation policy boosts parental confidence that the charter school they are considering sending their child to exists because of its positive impact on student learning. Third, Illinois needs more high quality charter schools serving more low-income students. The reality is that the existence of even one bad charter school gives policy makers a reason to refuse to authorize more schools that could provide an excellent option for families.

How charter schools serve students with special needs is also an important issue for parents. Some, like mother of three Tracy Brown, found a charter to be a more hospitable place for a student with special needs. "My son has Asperger's, and he was teased at our local neighborhood school," explains Brown. Last year Brown found Noble Pritzker College Prep and learned about its strict anti-bullying policy. She enrolled her son. "It's a much better place for him and he's doing really well," Brown says.

> ***" If the charter movement is to succeed in the long term, it must be serious about self-policing to keep quality at the forefront."***

All of this leads us to one very important conclusion when it comes to charter schools: the role of the charter authorizer matters tremendously. Many charters, especially in Chicago, are leaders in the nation in providing a great public education for the neediest children. But others are not.

Quality Authorizers for Illinois Children

Charters operate under two fundamental pillars of autonomy in exchange for accountability. We have to uphold both. If the charter movement is to succeed in the long term, it must be serious about self-policing to keep quality at the forefront. And the entity that enforces that high bar, grants promising charters, denies ones that aren't ready for prime time, and revokes charters that aren't getting great outcomes for kids...that's the authorizer that Illinois kids deserve. Maintaining a high-quality charter standard ultimately rests with having high-quality, independent, child-centered authorizers.

Recommendations for Education in Illinois

By Robin Steans

Advance Illinois is an independent, objective voice in support of a strong public education system in Illinois that will prepare all students in the state for work, college, and democratic citizenship.

As all of us work together to improve our state's education system, it is important to understand the current performance levels of our 2 million students from birth through postsecondary across an array of measures. In our most recent report on these measures, which you can download at www.advanceillinois.org, we assess the academic performance from early childhood through postsecondary and examine how Illinois compares to other states and nations as it works to prepare all students for the opportunities and challenges of today's world. We also shine a light on some hopeful, recent progress.

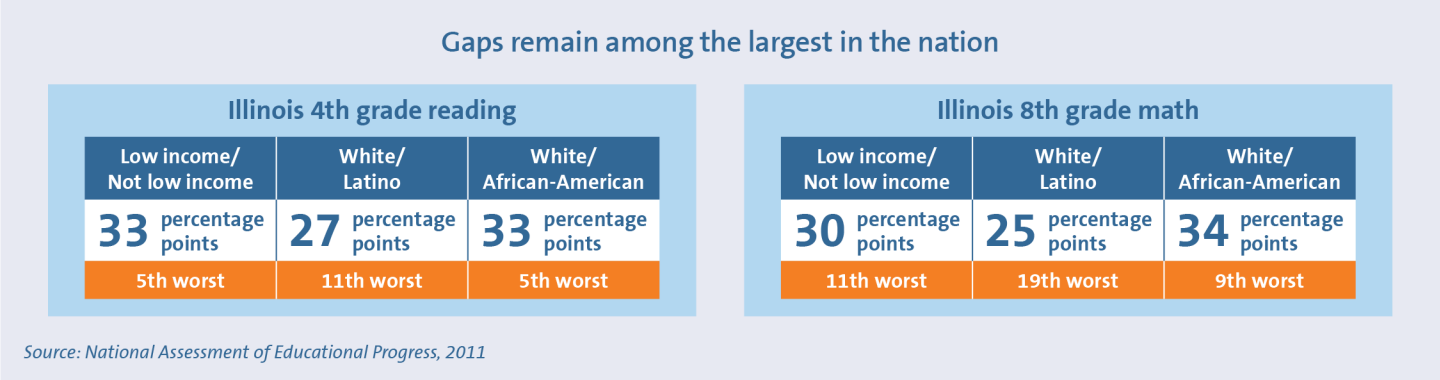
Early Education

The cornerstone of Illinois' educational strength lies in providing all children with a strong, early start in school and in life. How Illinois develops, educates, and supports its young children bears directly on the future of the state. Several national measures suggest Illinois ranks as a leading state in providing children, particularly children in need, a strong foundation.

According to the National Institute of Early Education Research, Illinois improved access to early education during the past decade and today enrolls 20 percent of 3-year-olds and 29 percent of 4-year-olds in state-funded preschool programs, making Illinois a leading state in this effort. The rate of growth slowed recently, however, as the economy worsened and state funding declined.

National research suggests that before they even begin kindergarten, 4-year-olds who live in poverty are nearly 14 months behind their classmates. But in Illinois, when students arrive in kindergarten – the front door of the K-12 education system – the state knows

Robin Steans is the Executive Director of Advance Illinois, an independent, objective voice to promote a public education system that prepares all students in the state for work, college, and democratic citizenship.



little about where they stand cognitively, emotionally, and socially. This critical information would help educators target the resources and supports that students need early in their academic lives. As importantly, information about students' kindergarten readiness encourages families to engage sooner and in smarter ways.

In order to get an accurate picture of how prepared our youngest students are to be in school, beginning in the fall of 2012, select districts in Illinois began piloting a developmentally-appropriate kindergarten readiness measure that is expected to roll out statewide in 2015-16.

The lack of clarity about student readiness is not the only information gap that constrains Illinois' early education efforts. As a state, we know little about the quality of children's early education experiences, the demographic and economic backgrounds of students served in state-funded programs, and whether students eligible for bilingual early education instruction, in fact, receive the services state law requires. Such information would help identify gaps and target resources at a time when Illinois' resources are finite.

Kindergarten to 12th Grade

The single most reliable indicator of long-term academic success is whether a child can read proficiently by 3rd or 4th grade. Students who do not transition from learning to read in the early grades to reading to learn by this point often fall further behind and are at greater risk of dropping out. Illinois' academic performance has remained flat for much of the past decade. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, currently, just 33 percent of all Illinois students, 12 percent of African American, 18 percent of Latino, and 16 percent of low-income students achieve that milestone by the end of 4th grade.

Despite gains, the gap between disadvantaged students and their classmates continues in most subjects. Illinois was one of only four states to narrow the gap in 8th-grade math since 2003, but 17 percent of low-income 8th graders scored proficient or better in math in 2011 compared with 47 percent of non-poor students. The performance gap is equally wide in 8th-grade reading.

The achievement gaps in Illinois remain among the largest in the nation. Certainly, Illinois changed significantly during the past decade. Nearly half of Illinois students are low-income and, for the first time, according to ISBE, more than half of schools statewide serve 40 percent or more economically disadvantaged students.

That said, the consequences of not enough students scoring proficient or better is clear: too few students complete postsecondary, and too many who enroll require remediation and ultimately drop out.

Post-Secondary

At a time when postsecondary education matters more than ever, few students finish high school ready for further academic study or work. These students are far less likely to enroll in postsecondary and far more likely to drop out before they earn a two- or four-year degree. In fact, as reported by Education Week, for every 100 Illinois students who begin high

Metric	Current	Rank
4th-graders proficient in reading on NAEP	33%	27th
8th-graders proficient in math on NAEP	33%	28th
Students demonstrating college readiness on at least three subject benchmarks on the ACT	38%	3rd of 9
Students who meet ACT College Readiness Benchmarks ... English = 18; Reading = 21; Math = 22; Science = 24 ... have a 50 percent chance of earning a B in an introductory college course.		
Percentage of students graduating high school AND demonstrating college readiness on at least THREE of FOUR subject benchmarks on the ACT	27%	*Data unavailable*

school, less than one-third will go on to earn a two- or four-year degree.

Compounding the challenge to completing postsecondary is the increasing expense. According to NCHEMS, it costs an average family 21 percent of its income to send a student to a four-year public university, making Illinois one of the least affordable states to earn a degree.

As a state, we must recognize the systemic challenge at hand if Illinois is to meet the goal set by state education, legislative, civic, and business leaders to ensure 60 percent of students earn a postsecondary degree by 2025. That's more than double the number of Illinois students who currently persist through postsecondary.

The Plan for Progress

As a state, we cannot wait until high school to intervene. The good news is that we're not.

For the first time in a long time, Illinois has a broad reform plan of interlocking strategies that aims to strengthen the education system from the early years through college graduation day. Building upon initiatives that enroll more children in early education programs, creating a developmentally-appropriate method to gauge student development early in their schooling, raising expectations for students and professionals, supporting collegial environments in schools, giving teachers and principals the feedback and development they need to constantly improve, and providing families more relevant information about their students and schools so that they can play their part more effectively will all serve to improve outcomes for students in Illinois.

A robust charter school system can be integral to these efforts and we support the presence of high-quality charter schools throughout the state. The state should work to replicate best practices from charter schools throughout the system, including some of the fundamental flexibility at their core. These and other reforms lay a strong foundation for change. But the work does not end there and the road ahead may be challenging. As a state, we must work urgently to implement and build upon these reforms lest we continue to see the results we've always seen. Whether as parents or policy makers, classroom teachers or community members, we all have a role to play in improving public education.

We appreciate the opportunity to share this critical information about the state of our public education system. As we work to further improve our system, it is important that we continue to work collaboratively, as only collective and sustained effort will begin to make a difference for Illinois students.

Proposing a New "Here and Now" Report for Illinois

Issuing a Call for a Statewide Needs Assessment of Low Performing Schools

By Jovita Baber and Rachel Koch

Every child in Illinois should be able to attend a high performing school. However, of Illinois' 866 districts, 433, or 50 percent, have been targeted for Federal School Improvement intervention-- based on their low performance on state standardized tests. While Chicago has received this designation for the past 9 years, so have 122 other districts in the state. In fact, 154 districts—18 percent of the districts in Illinois—have received this low-performing designation for more than five years. Additionally, 88 districts in Illinois have less than 75 percent of their students meeting or exceeding state standards.

While standardized test scores do not capture the complexity of learning or identify all the characteristics that make a school high performing, they do provide an important measure of achievement. Schools in Illinois have improved over the past decade, according to the only nationally standardized test, the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP). In 2000, only 20 percent of fourth graders tested above proficiency in math. By 2011, that percentage had risen to 38. While relating strong improvement, these results also reveal that over 60 percent of Illinois students are not proficient in this core subject.

As part of a national effort to raise learning standards and improve college and career readiness, Illinois adopted Common Core State Standards in 2010. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) received a NCLB waiver and introduced report cards, which use comprehensive metrics to assess the quality of schools. By 2014, the Illinois State Achievement Test (ISAT) will reflect the learning objectives of the Common Core. While the state is positioning itself to be competitive on a national stage, current test results suggest significant reform is still needed. Recognizing the limited resources available to achieve this

Jovita Baber is the Director of Research at IFF, a nonprofit community development financial institution that works throughout the Midwest to strengthen non profits and the communities they serve. IFF provides capital solutions, real estate consulting, and independent research on schools, early childhood education, and comprehensive community development. Rachel Koch is a Senior Research Assistant on IFF's research team which contributes to the mission of IFF by conducting studies driven by empirical data which allow stakeholders and decision makers to build an evidence-based understanding of key issues.

ambitious goal, IFF school studies provide empirical data and rigorous analysis to direct reform efforts and strategically allocate resources to have the greatest impact on the most children.

IFF has developed a school study methodology that provides data and analysis to inform evidence-based decision-making that crosses stakeholder boundaries. IFF's school studies came out of Illinois' first charter school legislation. With the creation of this legislation in 1996, IFF partnered with Chicago Public School (CPS) leaders to evaluate operating and capital proposals from charter school applicants. This led to IFF's first school study, Here and Now: the Need for Performing Schools in Chicago's Neighborhoods (Here and Now 1). This study identified priority community areas for the location of new schools.

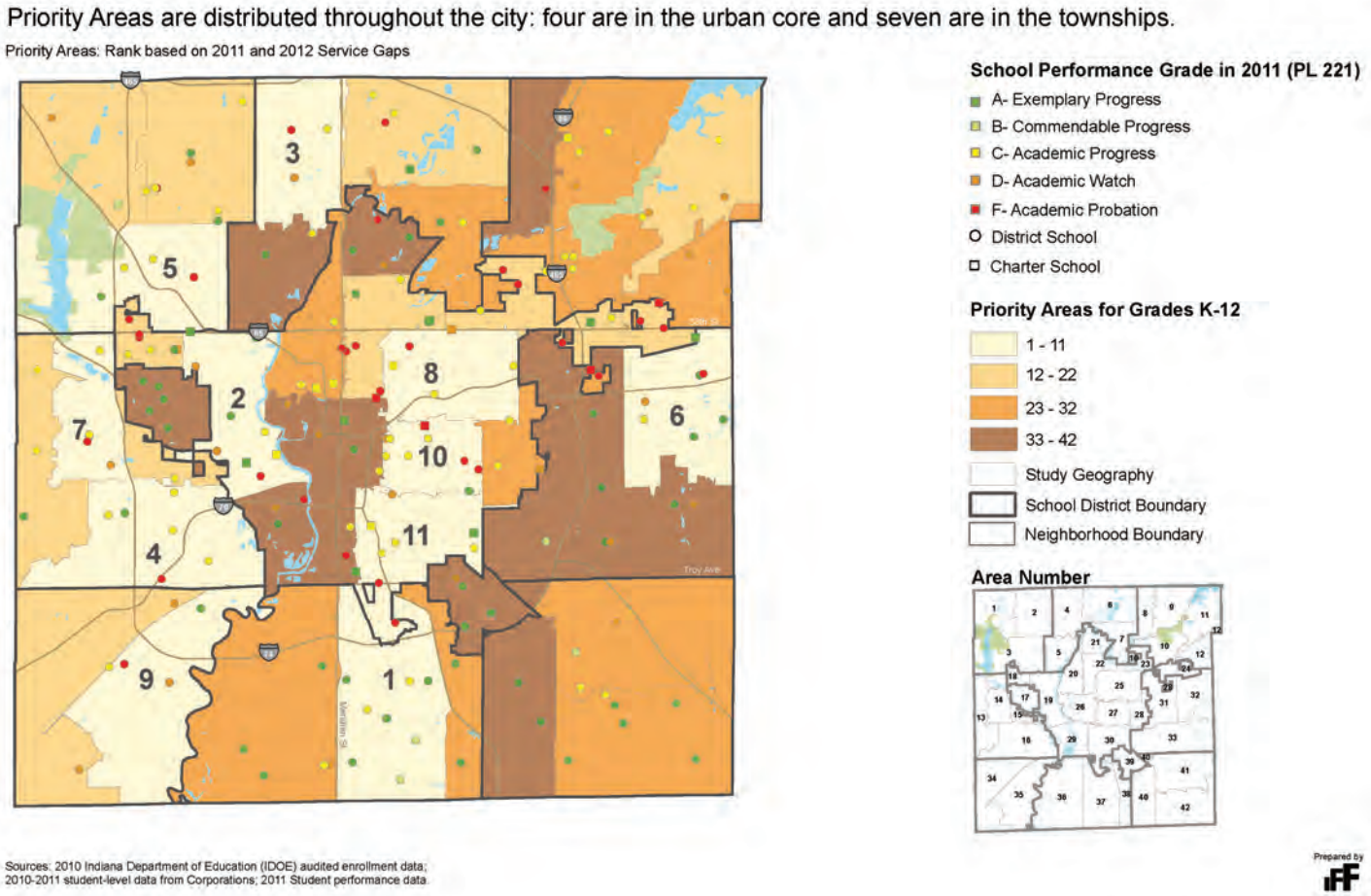
To transform the educational landscape of Illinois—a landscape that is both hopeful and challenging—stakeholders need to unite around the shared goal of providing quality schools for all children. Each stakeholder needs to allocate reform efforts and resources strategically in order to have the greatest impact on the most children. When IFF released Here and Now 1 in 2004, the study focused reform efforts by guiding strategic planning and assisting CPS in determining areas of greatest priority. This allowed for dramatic change in the opportunities available to many children in Chicago, and by the release of IFF's second Here and Now study in 2008, Chicago had begun to see the results of its ambitious reform efforts. Here and Now 2 continued to focus reform efforts as the study again pointed to communities with the greatest need for performing seats and importantly, communities that remained in greatest need. A statewide Here and Now report can be a tool that focuses reform efforts across Illinois by drawing stakeholders together through the provision of empirical data and actionable recommendations.

Since the inception of these school studies, IFF's methodology has evolved and been adapted to guide school reform efforts throughout the nation. IFF's school studies have guided public policy, strategic planning and the investment of public and private resources in Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Kansas City, Denver, Washington D.C., Cleveland, and Indianapolis. Currently, IFF is in the process of expanding its Indianapolis school studies into an Indiana statewide analysis. This study was commissioned by the Indiana Charter School Board with the goal of providing a data-supported platform that can serve as a discussion point for various stakeholders. The study will guide a dialogue as these stakeholders come together to determine how to maximize the impact of educational reform and resource allocation efforts across the state.

"A statewide Here and Now report can be a tool that focuses reform efforts across Illinois by drawing stakeholders together through the provision of empirical data and actionable recommendations."

Customized to address regional concerns and issues, IFF's school studies have guided stakeholders in strategic investment in facilities; the re-allocation of vacant and under-utilized school buildings; focused attention to curriculum or leadership training; solicitations for place-based charter schools applications; targeted communication regarding school choice options; and other deliberate educational reform decisions. As resources are allocated on a state level, understanding the performing capacity and the distribution of students across the state of Illinois can be a next step in bringing stakeholders together around the common goal of closing the access gap for the greatest number of children.

An example from IFF's state-wide analysis of Indiana schools:



In Indianapolis, the need for high-performing seats is concentrated in 11 areas, called Priority Areas. IFF calculated performing capacity and service gap for both 2011 and 2012, due to changes in Indiana's A - F grading system over that period. In 2011, 46 percent of the need for high performing seats was concentrated in the shown Priority Areas, and in 2012 the concentration increased to 56 percent. The stability of need across years, despite changes in the grading methodology, affirms the impact that focused reform efforts can have. This maps shows that providing quality schools for all children is a citywide challenge, not the unique challenge of one district.

IFF's school studies ensure that the investment of resources improves school opportunities for the greatest number of students. At the core of IFF's school studies is a supply and demand analysis that answers the question: where are quality schools most needed? The difference between the number of seats provided by performing schools (supply) and the number of high-performing seats needed by children (demand) results in a service gap. By calculating the service gap for all districts, IFF's school studies reveal areas with the greatest need for quality schools. Using a spatial analysis and quantitative data, communities are ranked according to need. Finally, to contextualize and amplify the findings, the studies examine influences on supply and demand, including demographic trends, performance patterns, school funding, facilities investments and other factors based on the significance of their impact on influencing student access to high-performing schools (see accompanying map).

IFF's school studies are designed to address the goals of many stakeholder groups. The methodology has been constructed to present a larger, data-driven picture of need. The results of each study provide a framework for stakeholders to engage in more targeted discussions about the allocation of resources based on a newly informed understanding of where those resources will be most impactful.

A statewide Here and Now report for Illinois would identify the districts where children have the greatest need for better access to a high performing school throughout the state. As Illinois politicians grapple with how to fund education, as charter school advocates look for opportunities to create charter schools, and as foundations and financial institutions identify how to focus educational investments, a statewide Here and Now report can streamline these efforts and inform strategies with empirical data and analysis.

Acknowledgements

The Commission staff gratefully acknowledges the 20 authors of *Chartering* articles. The authors agreed to work on a short time frame without compensation. While each is responsible for the content and conclusions contained within the article, any mistakes in editing are our own. We are extremely thankful for their contribution to the picture of authorizing and charter schools in Illinois captured within this report.

The Commission would also like to gratefully recognize the support of each and every member of the Illinois State Charter School Commission, whose tireless work on behalf of Illinois children and their families sets an example for the rest of the state.

State Charter School Commissioners, March 2014

Greg Richmond — Chair
President and CEO, National Association of Charter School Authorizers
Chicago, Illinois

Bill Farmer
Teacher, Evanston High School, Evanston, Illinois

Jaime Guzmán
Senior Director of Outreach, Big Shoulders Fund, Chicago, Illinois

Dr. Michael A. Jacoby
Executive Director, Illinois Association of School Business Officials, DeKalb, Illinois

Dr. Kathryn Robbins
Retired Superintendent, Leyden High School , District 212 Franklin Park, Illinois

Angela Rudolph
President, Think. Plan. Do. Consulting, Chicago, Illinois

Dr. Rudy Valdez
EIS Systems Engineering Lead, Aftermarket, Hamilton Sundstrand, Rockford, Illinois

Judge Milton Wharton
(Ret.) Circuit Judge, 20th Judicial Circuit, East St. Louis, Illinois

DeRonda Williams
Principal, DW, Inc. Consulting , Long Grove, Illinois

The Commission extends special thanks to the Managing Editor of the Biennial Report, Aviva Rosman, also a former intern at the Commission, whose careful, thoughtful, cheerful, and tireless work helped to bring this Report into existence.

State Charter School Commission Staff, March 2014

Jeanne Nowaczewski
Executive Director

Dr. Karen Washington
Deputy Director

Commission Biographies

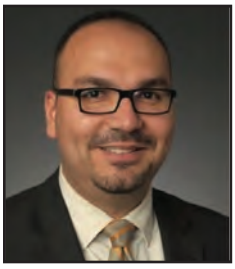
ISCSC Commissioners

Greg Richmond, ISCSC Chair, President and CEO, National Association of Charter School Authorizers, Chicago

Greg Richmond is President and CEO of National Association of Charter School Authorizers ("NACSA"). He was a founding board member of NACSA, serving as the chair of the board from 2000 - 2005. In 2005, Greg became NACSA's full--time President. Under his full--time leadership, NACSA's national influence has expanded substantially, including a significant role in the re--opening of New Orleans schools as charter schools, in--depth training of California Department of Education staff, a multi--authorizer training and development project in New York City, and multi--year projects in Florida and Ohio. Greg holds a B.S. degree from the University of Wisconsin--Madison and Master of Public Affairs from the University of Minnesota--Twin Cities.

Bill Farmer, Teacher, Evanston High School, Evanston

Bill is a biology and chemistry teacher at Evanston Township High School. He began his teaching career at ETHS in 2003. In 2009, he was elected as President of the district's local affiliate of the Illinois Education Association and National Education Association. Outside of the classroom, he sponsors several student activities including the Science Olympiad Team and Gay--Straight Alliance. Additionally, Bill serves as a Virtual Community Organizer for the Illinois New Millennium Initiative, a group of innovative, early--career teachers focused on promoting best practices through educational policy recommendations under the support of the Center for Teacher Quality. Bill holds a B.A. in Biology with Secondary Education Certification from Northwestern University (2003) and an M.A. in School Leadership and Administration from Concordia University (2007).



Jaime Guzmán, Senior Director of Outreach, Big Shoulders Fund, Chicago

Jaime Guzmán is the Senior Director of Outreach at Big Shoulders Fund , where he manages next generation board leadership, volunteer engagement, and external relationships to support the mission of the Big Shoulders Fund, which provides support to students to access high quality Catholic schools in the neediest areas of inner-city Chicago. Previously, Jaime served as Chief Advisor to the Board of Trustees of the City Colleges of Chicago. Jaime also worked in various senior leadership roles at the Chicago Public Schools, including as the Acting Officer of the Office of New Schools, managing the authorization of all district charter schools and new schools. Jaime's non-profit experience includes having served as the Midwest Regional Director for Education for the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), and as the Program Director of Teach For America--Chicago during its start--up phase. Jaime holds a B.A. in Government and Romance Languages from Dartmouth College and an Ed.M. in Education Policy and Management from Harvard University Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Michael A. Jacoby, Executive Director, Illinois Association of School Business Officials, DeKalb

Dr. Jacoby has served as an educator for 31 years–six years in the classroom, sixteen years as a school business official, four years as Superintendent of Schools and is now serving in his sixth year as the Executive Director of Illinois ASBO. His teaching career began in 1980 as the Director of Vocal Music at Morris Community High School. His leadership career began in 1986 as Director of Finance then Assistant Superintendent -- Business, and finally Superintendent of Schools, all at Geneva Community Unit School District 304. During his career he served as President of Illinois ASBO from 1999-2000 and has been an adjunct professor for Northern Illinois University, Aurora University, and Loyola University-Chicago. He also served as Chairman of the ASBO International Editorial Board for School Business Affairs, is the current Editor of The Journal of School Business Management, and was Founding Chairman of the Illinois Education Roundtable. Dr. Jacoby has a Bachelors Degree in Music Education from The University of Iowa (1980), a Masters Degree in Educational Administration from Illinois State University (1985) and obtained his Doctorate from Northern Illinois University (1993).

Dr. Kathryn Robbins, Retired Superintendent, Leyden High School District 212, Franklin Park

Dr. Kathryn Robbins is an educator with 34 years of service in public education, 10 as a high school business education teacher and 24 in administration. For the last 14 years, she served as Superintendent for Leyden High School District 212 in Franklin Park, Illinois.Dr. Robbins has been on the Board of Directors for the Illinois Association of School Administrators for eight years and served as president of the association in 2012-2013. She served on the Executive Board of the Illinois High School District Organization for twelve years, until her retirement from publiceducation in 2013. Dr Robbins also served as president of the Superintendents Round Table of NorthernIllinois in 2007-2008. Dr. Robbins earned an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Loyola University, Chicago in 1994, a Master of Science in Education from National Louis University in 1987, and a Bachelor of Science in Business Education from Northern Illinois University in 1977. In retirement, Dr. Robbins is a search consultant for School Exec Connect, a national educational searchand consulting firm.

Angela Rudolph, President, Think.Can.Do Consulting, Chicago

Angela Rudolph serves as the President of Think. Plan. Do. Consulting, a firm dedicated to providing services that create partnerships that work by delivering expertise on both issues and process, strategic communications, grassroots and government relations, policy analysis and social media strategy development and as the Policy Director at Education Reform Now/Democrats for Education Reform--Illinois. In addition, Ms. Rudolph currently serves as a board member of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority and a member of the Illinois Department of Corrections Advisory Board. Most recently Ms. Rudolph served as a Program Officer with The Joyce Foundation's Education Program spearheading their portfolio targeting grant making to support quality charter schools, early childhood education and the engagement in education reform. A former elementary school teacher, Ms. Rudolph has served as special assistant to former Mayor Richard M. Daley. Ms. Rudolph began her policy career working at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. She holds a master's degree in education policy from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and a bachelor's degree in American history from Union College in Schenectady, NY.

Dr. Rudy Valdez, EIS Systems Engineering Lead Aftermarket, Hamilton Sundstrand, Rockford

Dr. Rudy Valdez was the Hamilton Sundstrand Space Systems Program Manager working with NASA on the Space Shuttle and International Space Station programs. He was recognized by NASA with a leadership award and was later a finalist for the prestigious National Rotary Club Stellar Award for Advancements in Space. Rudy has held numerous engineering and management positions prior to returning to engineering to support Entry-into-Service for the new Boeing 787 Dreamliner aircraft. Rudy serves as the Rockford Mayor's Education Liaison and is an active member in local education committees and boards. Rudy's educational background includes a B.S. in chemical engineering from University of Illinois at Chicago, an MBA from Northern Illinois University, and a DM in organizational leadership from University of Phoenix. He recently became a SUPES Academy Fellow; formerly the Illinois Superintendent Preparation Academy.

Judge Milton Wharton, (Ret.) Circuit Judge, 20th Judicial Circuit, East St. Louis

Milton Wharton earned his law degree from DePaul University in 1975 and was appointed an associate judge in St. Clair County Circuit Court in 1976. In 1988, he was elected a circuit judge in the 20th Judicial Circuit of Illinois. Judge Wharton has been on the bench for more than 33 years and could have retired several years ago, but continues to handle a full caseload at no pay. Milton currently serves as the president of the St. Clair County Bar Association and has been widely recognized for his community service, with awards including the Kimmel Community Service Award, the Martin Luther King Humanitarian Award, Whitney E. Young, Jr. Service Award of the Boy Scouts of America, and Pro Ecclesia Et Pontifice from the late Pope John Paul II. Judge Wharton was named a "Legend in the Legal Community" by the St. Louis Argus Newspaper.

DeRonda Williams, Principal, DW, Inc. Consulting, Long Grove

DeRonda Williams has a national perspective and understanding of charter school finance and experience, having served as Network Finance Director for the highly regarded charter school organization, Knowledge is Power Program, "KIPP," for 5 years. Before joining KIPP, DeRonda worked at Pearson Education as a business unit CFO of the K-12 and college divisions for over 11 years in 3 cities, ultimately becoming Vice President and Director of Finance for Scott Foresman. Currently, DeRonda is a Principal of DW, Inc., providing executive search, professional development and financial planning and analysis services to school management organizations, including charter schools, as well as charter school authorizers, investors and other education reform organizations. DeRonda has a B.S. in Industrial Engineering from Northwestern University, and an MBA in Finance from the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

ISCSC Staff

Jeanne Nowaczewski, ISCSC Executive Director

Jeanne Nowaczewski's 25 year career encompasses both the practice of law and participation in the national charter schools movement. Jeanne served in various leadership roles at the Chicago Public Schools from 2001 to 2008; during her tenure as the Recruitment and Evaluation Director, over 60 charter and small schools were authorized in more than 6 different RFP processes featuring over 200 applications. Jeanne is also a founding member of Chicago's first all-girls charter school, Young Women's Leadership Charter School. Jeanne's legal career includes a clerkship with Judge William J. Bauer, United States Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit, and 10 years as an associate and then partner at Chicago's Schiff, Hardin & Waite, (1985-95). Most recently, on a national level, Jeanne led the American Bar Association's Litigation Section from 2008 to 2011. Jeanne earned a B.A. and an M.A. in English Literature, ('78, '80) from The University of Chicago, and a J.D. from The University of Chicago Law School, ('84).

Dr. Karen E. Washington, ISCSC Deputy Director

Dr. Washington began her career as a business and computer teacher in Catholic schools, was first a principal in Country Club Hills School District 160, and later served as both an elementary and a high school principal for charter and contract schools in high-poverty Chicago neighborhoods for the American Quality Schools network, eventually being promoted to Regional Manager at AQS, supervising and ensuring academic success for charter schools both in Illinois and Indiana. Dr. Washington left AQS in 2010 to complete her doctorate in curriculum and instruction from Loyola University, Chicago, after having earned a Masters in Teaching and Learning from DePaul, and a BA in Business Administration from the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Appendix

All Appendix items are located on the Commission website, www.isbe.state.il.us/scsc.

Commission Accountability System for Charter School Renewal
Commission Rubrics for Charter School Appeals
Commission Model Charter School Request for Proposals (RFP)
Virtual School Report and Recommendations
Charter School Funding Task Force Report and Recommendations

From the Authorizers

Chicago Public Schools
www.cps.edu

Illinois State Board of Education
www.isbe.state.il.us

Indiana Charter School Board
www.in.gov/icsb

National Association of Charter School Authorizers
www.qualitycharters.org

New York City Charter School Center
www.nyccharterschools.org

From the Charter Schools

Chicago International Charter School
www.chicagointl.org

Concept Charter Schools
www.conceptschools.org

LEARN Charter School Network
www.learncharter.org

Prairie Crossing Charter School
www.prairiecrossingcharterschool.org

Southland College Prep Charter High School
www.edline.net/pages/scpchs

Urban Education Institute
uei.uchicago.edu

Updates on Progress and Ideas for the Future

Advance Illinois
www.advanceillinois.org

Illinois Facilities Fund
www.iff.org

Illinois Network of Charter Schools
www.incschools.org

STAND for Children
www.stand.org/illinois

For more information on the Illinois State Charter School Commission, contact our office:

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