DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 455 585 EA 031 142

AUTHOR Anderson, Lee; Finnigan, Kara
TITLE Charter School Authorizers and Charter School Accountability.
INSTITUTION SRI International, Menlo Park, CA.
PUB DATE 2001-04-00
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Seattle, WA, April 10-14, 2001).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; *Administrator Role; *Administrators; *Charter Schools; Early Childhood Education; Elementary Secondary Education

ABSTRACT

The accountability mismatch between the theory and the reality of charter schools and charter-school authorizers in the United States is identified in this report. The roles and characteristics of charter-school authorizers are not well understood, but they are positioned to play a key role in ensuring and enforcing charter-school accountability. This paper begins with an overview of the sample and methodology of the charter-school authorizer study. It is followed by a discussion of the theory and practice of charter-school accountability, presenting data on the role of authorizers. Charter-school accountability is then examined within the larger accountability policy context. The paper concludes with a discussion of the mismatch between the theory and reality of the accountability roles played by charter-school authorizers. Study findings suggest that the key roles authorizers play might become eclipsed by state assessment mandates and other accountability requirements. Charter-school level goal setting is also likely to be usurped by external accountability systems. Hence, the original vision of charter-school accountability is compromised by larger developments in the world of public-school accountability. (Contains 17 references and 6 tables.) (RT)

Charter School Authorizers and Charter School Accountability

Lee Anderson, SRI International
and
Kara Finnigan, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, April 2001, Seattle, WA

Abstract

The authors identify the accountability mismatch between the theory and the reality of charter schools and charter school authorizers in the United States. The roles and characteristics of charter school authorizers are not well understood, but they are positioned to play a key role in ensuring and enforcing charter school accountability. However, their role is likely to be eclipsed by state assessment mandates and other accountability requirements. Charter-school-level goal setting is also likely to be usurped by external accountability systems. Hence, the original vision of charter school accountability is compromised by larger developments in the world of public school accountability.

I. Introduction

Charter schools are the subject of lively debate among education policy-makers, researchers, and citizens, particularly in the area of accountability. A charter school is authorized by an agency with the understanding that the school will be freed from all or some of the provisions of the state's education code in exchange for meeting the goals identified in its charter agreement (or "charter"). If the charter school fails to meet the terms of its charter, the school can be closed by its charter school authorizer or the state, according to the accountability theory of this reform.

What are "charter school authorizers"? Charter school authorizers are very important participants in the charter school movement, but their basic characteristics and roles are almost completely unexplored and undefined in the current literature (Hassel and Vergari, 1999). Charter schools and their authorizers are found in the states that have enacted charter school legislation (38 as of early 2001, including the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico). Among other things, these laws stipulate a wide range of accountability and flexibility provisions for charter schools. They also specify the types of agencies that are allowed to award charters, the approval process, and, in broad terms, the monitoring expectations for charter school authorizers. Also known as chartering agencies, sponsoring agencies, and charter-granting agencies, charter school authorizers include: local educational agencies (LEAs), county offices of education, state boards of education, chief state school officers, state educational agencies (SEAs), institutions of higher education (IHEs), municipal governments, and independent or charter school boards. Interestingly, although most charter school authorizers are LEAs, SEAs and IHEs have awarded much larger proportions of charters.

Since charter agreements are negotiated with charter school authorizers, authorizers have an important role in ensuring that these schools are held accountable at different stages of their existence. However, the reality of accountability relationships between charter schools and charter school authorizers is at odds with the accountability theory of charter schools. Although charter schools were envisioned to have individualized accountability relationships, these schools must be understood within the larger accountability context of public education. Charter schools remain public schools—a fact often overlooked by the media—and public schools are typically facing increasing accountability demands from states and school districts. Their status as public schools has led to charter schools' being swept up in a rising tide of externally imposed accountability requirements (typically, mandatory participation in large-scale student assessment programs). As a result, the original vision of charter schools as unique institutions with individualized accountability plans is not likely to be realized in the current intergovernmental configuration of states and charter school authorizers. This conclusion is a cautionary note to those who believe that charter schools may bring a new type of accountability to the public school system.

This paper focuses on charter school accountability and the role of charter authorizers. It is based on a subset of data collected during the first year of SRI International's 4-year evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education's Public Charter Schools Program.[1] The paper begins with an overview of the sample and methodology of our study of charter school authorizers. Next, we discuss the theory and practice of charter school accountability, presenting data on the role of authorizers. Third, we examine charter school accountability within the larger accountability policy context. We conclude with a discussion of the mismatch between the theory and the reality of the accountability roles played by charter school authorizers.

II. Methodology

This paper is based on data from a sample of charter school authorizers across the United States. Because so little was known about the universe of charter school authorizers when this study began, a purposive sampling strategy was adopted. The evaluation team and its 11-member Technical Work Group wanted to maximize the diversity of authorizers surveyed to explore the variation in organizational and accountability relationships. The team received nominations of authorizers from the Technical Work Group and identified additional sites from its state-level research. From this list, the team selected a sample of 50 authorizers that varied by state, type, and number of schools chartered. The team designed a structured telephone survey

[1] For the full set of year 1 findings, see U.S. Department of Education (2000), *Evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program: Year One Evaluation Report,* Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary, Planning and Evaluation Service, Elementary and Secondary Program Division (December). The report is available on-line: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OUS/PES/chartschools/index.html. The authors wish to thank colleagues Nancy Adelman, Kyo Yamashiro, Mary Beth Donnelly, Jose Blackorby, Lynyonne Cotton, and Bonnee Groover for their contributions to the research reported in this paper. The authors also appreciate the comments of the student s and faculty participating in the School of Education Research Training Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.

and administered it in the fall of 1999 to 48 of the 50 authorizers in the sample, a response rate of 96 percent. The 48 authorizers were located in 22 states and the District of Columbia. The survey included a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions and was designed to document charter school authorizers' experiences in assisting and monitoring charter schools; granting, renewing, and revoking charters; and other relevant areas, including financial relationships with their schools.

This first round of data collection has informed survey instrument design and sampling for the next two years of data collection with charter authorizers. We will be surveying random samples of charter authorizers in the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years. In future years of the study, our data from charter school operators will provide additional information about charter school accountability relationships at the school level, as well as allow us to triangulate the data and analyses reported here.

In addition to the data collection described above, the study team identified the entire population of charter school authorizers in summer 2000. The team examined Web sites and documents of state departments of education and charter school resource centers and extracted information from federal files to create the first list of authorizers across the country. The purposive sample in year 1 was designed to reflect the estimated universe of authorizers, but that universe was not precisely defined until SRI's recent work. Exhibit 1 summarizes the information regarding the universe of authorizers, as well as the sampling frame of authorizers across the three years of data collection for this study. Detail for year 1 is presented in **bold** type.

Exhibit 1
UNIVERSE AND SAMPLING FRAME OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

Type of Charter School Authorizer	Percentage of Universe as of Summer 2000	Number in Universe as of Summer 2000 (N=482)	Number Included in Sample		
			Year 1 (n=48)	Year 2 (n=150)	Year 3 (n=150)
Local school boards or districts; county boards or offices; intermediate school districts	90%	434	**34**	118	118
State boards of education, state education agencies, or chief state school officers	4%	17	**8**	17	17
Universities, colleges, and community colleges	6%	27	**3**	12	12
Other, including independent or special charter school boards	<1%	4	**3**	3	3

III. Accountability and Charter School Authorizers

In this section of the paper, we compare the theory of charter school accountability with the practice of authorizers as reported in our survey. Before describing these differences, it is important to note two problems affecting any analysis of charter school accountability. The first is the young age of the charter movement. Although some of the first states to enact charter legislation have had charter schools in operation for seven or eight years, many of the states are new to this movement, and their schools are newer. Past researchers have found that it is extremely difficult for states, authorizers, and charter schools to set up accountability systems. One study found that most authorizers were not even sure what they would use to evaluate their schools when their charters were up for renewal (Hill, Pierce, and Lake, 1998). In many cases, educators and administrators report learning valuable lessons in the first cycle of a charter school's existence, indicating that stronger accountability systems may result from increasing numbers of charter renewals. However, to date, most accountability systems are underdeveloped (Manno, 1999). Another issue we encountered was the difficulty of distinguishing problems with the charter school accountability systems from the effects of other state and district policies. As one study reported, holding schools accountable for outcomes did not always occur as planned because of changes in district or state testing requirements (WestEd, 1998, p. 60).

Charter School Accountability and the Role of Authorizers in Theory

The charter school movement is based on the willingness of state legislatures to accept a simple principle: in exchange for being accountable for their results, charter schools are permitted the freedom to design their educational programs and organizational structures.[2] This principle is commonly referred to as "accountability for results." Charter school advocates view this exchange in different ways. Indeed, the diverse viewpoints reflected in the charter school movement may explain its current popularity. According to some advocates, the rules and regulations that govern the public schools are one reason why public schools are not producing the results that Americans expect. If schools can be relieved of some of this burden, they might produce better results. Others believe that schools will improve only if they are threatened with binding consequences for poor performance, consequences that include reconstitution, takeover, and/or closure.

In every state with charter school legislation, a charter school must be approved by a charter school authorizer. Interestingly, there is little detail in these laws about the role of authorizers, aside from the type of agency that is allowed to fill this role. Charter school authorizers represent many levels of the educational system (SEAs, LEAs, IHEs, and bodies organized for the sole purpose of awarding charters) and typically have a variety of responsibilities for public education, over and above their authorizer role. As a result, these authorizers are positioned at

[2] Starting with Milton Friedman's school voucher proposal in the 1950s, competition sometimes has been identified as another type of accountability. The belief is that competition and choice make schools more accountable to their communities. This argument is actually bigger than the charter school movement, and this view is not unanimously held by individuals within the charter school movement. It is not addressed in this paper, which focuses instead on the concept of charter school accountability for results and the role of the authorizer.

the crossroads of the charter school movement. Through the granting and monitoring of charter schools, authorizers are administrative and accountability gatekeepers in states that have enacted charter school legislation.[3]

Charter School Accountability and the Role of Authorizers in Practice

The theory of charter school accountability is very clear: freedom to implement an educational program in exchange for accountability for results. However, this theory has proven challenging for charter school authorizers to put into practice (Finn, Manno, and Vanourek, 2000; Hill, Lake, and Celio, 1999). In this subsection, we describe our findings regarding the accountability roles of charter school authorizers, including some of the important differences between the theory and practice of charter school accountability. Although these findings are preliminary and will be refined on the basis of generalizable data to be collected in 2000-2001 and 2001-2002, we believe they are important indicators of the current state of charter school accountability. The findings also are important because little attention has been paid to the role of charter school authorizers in the charter school movement.

Charter school authorizers have a fair amount of latitude in designing their accountability systems because the laws tend not to provide details about how they should hold schools accountable (Hassel and Herdman, 2000). Both charter school researchers and advocates point to the need, in developing these systems, for clear expectations and criteria for evaluating charter school performance (WestEd, 1998; Hill, Pierce, and Lake, 1998; Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, 1996). The existence of written policies is an important indicator of charter school authorizers' formal processes for working with charter schools. Our data indicate that most charter school authorizers have established written policies or guidelines for the charter school application and granting process and for monitoring and revoking charters. Although the purposive sample of charter school authorizers did not allow us to draw generalizable conclusions, the sample indicated trends and patterns across different agencies. Our analyses examined the variation between the type of authorizer and the numbers chartered regarding the existence of written policies. (It is important to bear in mind that the type of charter school authorizer is closely linked to the number of schools chartered.) We found that authorizers that are not local entities (particularly those that are states) and those that have chartered large numbers of schools are more likely than local authorizers to have well-developed accountability systems.[4] Of the 48 authorizers surveyed, only 9 reported that they had not developed *any* written policies on charter schools. All of these were local agencies and had chartered five or fewer schools. When an agency charters a large number of schools, it may find it necessary to establish these types of formal policies. Exhibit 2 indicates the variation in whether local and nonlocal charter school authorizers reported having established their own written policies, procedures, or guidelines in a number of areas.

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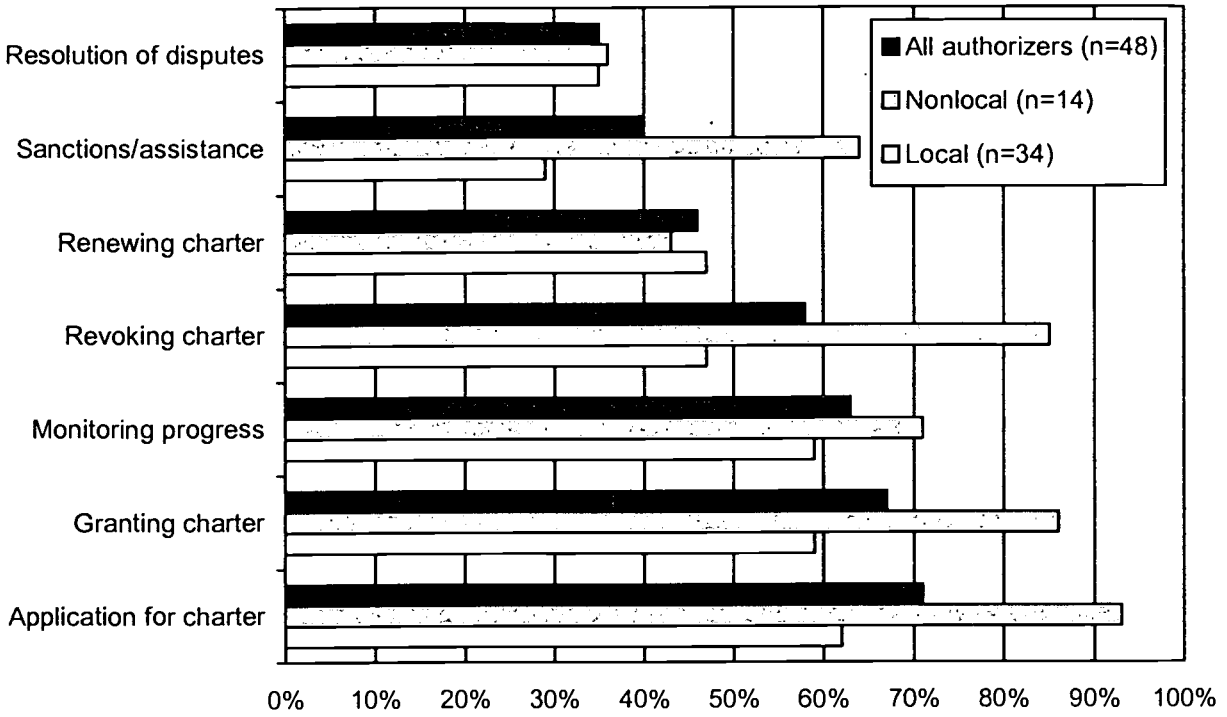
[3] Massell and Goertz (1999) make a similar point about districts and the "gatekeeper" role.

[4] We clustered our survey respondents into *local* and *non-local* authorizers for our analysis. Local authorizers include local educational agencies, local school boards, and county offices of education. Non-local authorizers include state boards of education, chief state school officers, state educational agencies (SEAs), institutions of higher education (IHEs), municipal governments, and independent or charter school boards

Exhibit 2
EXISTENCE OF WRITTEN POLICIES, BY TYPE OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER



Regardless of the degree to which charter schools have formal policies concerning their accountability processes, our data indicate that authorizers tend to have a three-component accountability system: awarding charters to charter schools, monitoring charter schools, and imposing consequences. Depending on the stage of this process, authorizers reported focusing on different aspects of charter school operations. For example, during the charter-granting process, authorizers reported focusing on curriculum, finances, assessment, and accountability. On the other hand, once charter schools were up and running, authorizers focused on monitoring student achievement, financial record keeping, and compliance with federal or state regulations. The components of charter school accountability systems are discussed in the following subsections.

Awarding Charters to Charter Schools

Charter school authorizers are positioned to play an important "front-end accountability" role vis-à-vis their charter schools. That is, authorizers can build accountability mechanisms into each stage of a charter school's development. They also have the power to make these accountability mechanisms "stick" by requiring the development of measurable goals in a school's charter, by having founders make changes to their charter application, and by denying charter applications. This is a unique role for charter school authorizers, a role that does not occur in the regular public school system.

The charter approval process is the first step in the accountability system because it is where schools and authorizers negotiate goals and expectations. In many cases, authorizers use the approval process as a way of strengthening charter school proposals, either by requiring that changes be made to particular areas of the charter school contract or by screening out proposals that do not appear to be viable. The authorizers reported that the factors of greatest importance to them when reviewing an application for a charter were finances, curriculum, and accountability provisions. In contrast, an applicant's personnel policies or requirements, targeted population, and student discipline policies were considered less important. Exhibit 3 illustrates the importance of various program elements when charter school authorizers are determining whether to issue a charter. In addition to these elements, 11 respondents reported examining the ways that schools addressed one or more of the following: special education, language needs, insurance, parent involvement, racial diversity, projected enrollment, transportation, and student recruitment.

Exhibit 3
IMPORTANCE OF PROGRAM ELEMENTS IN DECISION TO ISSUE A CHARTER, AS REPORTED BY CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS (n=45)

Program Element	Importance in Granting Charter (percent of respondents)				Mean*
	Not at All Important	Somewhat Unimportant	Somewhat Important	Very Important	
Finances	0%	0%	16%	84%	3.84
Accountability provisions	0%	0%	18%	82%	3.82
Curriculum	0%	2%	13%	84%	3.82
Mission and goals of the school	0%	2%	22%	76%	3.73
Assessment	0%	4%	22%	73%	3.69
Health and safety issues	0%	5%	36%	60%	3.55
Instructional strategies	0%	5%	43%	52%	3.48
Admission procedures and student selection criteria	2%	5%	36%	57%	3.48
School management or leadership	4%	7%	38%	51%	3.36
Governance structure	0%	11%	48%	41%	3.30
School facilities	5%	12%	56%	27%	3.05
Targeted population	9%	19%	44%	28%	2.91
Student discipline policies	5%	22%	54%	20%	2.88
Personnel policies or requirements	8%	23%	48%	23%	2.85

*The mean scores were based on converting responses to a four-point scale with "not at all important" equal to 1, "somewhat unimportant" equal to 2, "somewhat important" equal to 3, and "very important" equal to 4.

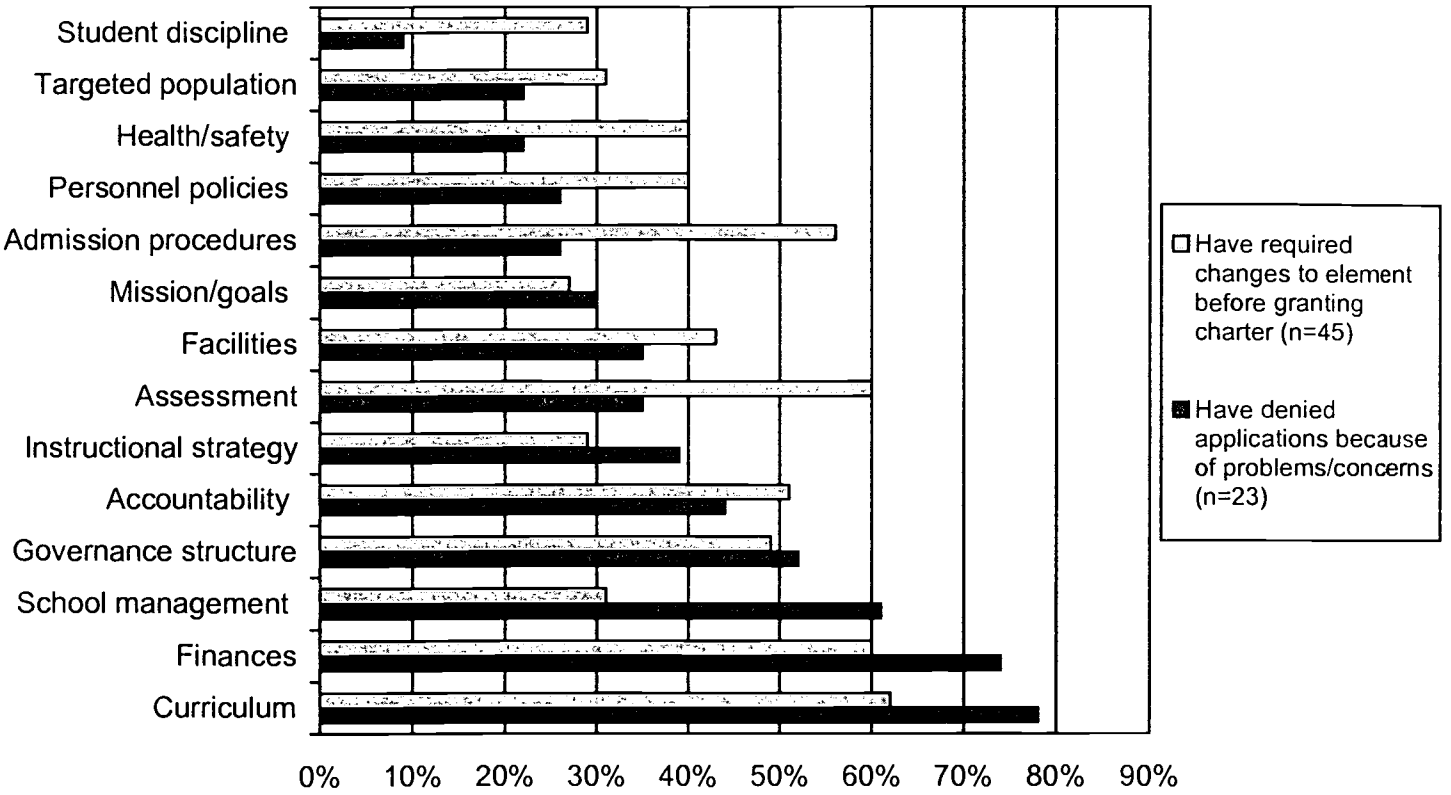
Charter school authorizers also reported that, in some cases, they require charter applicants to make changes to their application or program during the review process. Not surprisingly, many of the same areas authorizers thought were important in deciding whether to issue a charter were also important in requiring charter modifications: curriculum, assessment, and finance were cited as the top areas in which charter school authorizers requested that changes be made. Exhibit 4 displays those areas in which charter school authorizers frequently require changes to be made, as well as the areas that commonly cause authorizers to deny applications. Approximately one-third

of the surveyed charter school authorizers described changes that they recommended in other areas besides those listed in Exhibit 4, including special education (n=3), language needs (n=2), transportation (n=4), and the number of signatures on the charter petition (n=2). A trend emerges when the data are examined according to the number of schools chartered: higher-volume charter school authorizers require applicants to make more changes than lower-volume charter school authorizers.[5] This finding suggests that higher-volume charter school authorizers may have learned from experience to be clear about their expectations at the beginning of their relationship with charter schools.

The reasons most often cited for application denial—curriculum, finance, and management concerns—were similar to those cited in other steps during the charter-authorizing process. In addition, a closer look at the data reveals some differences in reasons for denying charters, based on type of authorizer. For example, the fact that seven LEAs reported that charter school applications were denied because of facilities (compared with only one nonlocal agency) indicates that facilities may have been a more pressing concern for local charter school authorizers than for nonlocal agencies.

[5]Some local agencies that have chartered few schools reported working closely with applicants as they developed their charters rather than requiring changes during the charter application process.

Exhibit 4
APPLICATION CHANGES REQUIRED AND DENIAL OF APPLICATIONS RELATING TO PARTICULAR PROGRAM ELEMENTS



Monitoring Charter Schools

Although the charter legislation in most states specifies a five-year cycle for charter school renewal/nonrenewal, the laws also include an implicit assumption that authorizers will be monitoring the performance of the schools regularly once the charters have been approved. As we have already noted, this process is facilitated by "front loading" the accountability process with clear procedures for approving and monitoring charter schools.[6]

Measurable goals are seen as a key component of an accountability system, so that decisions about a school's performance are not made arbitrarily (Manno, 1999). Clear, measurable goals are important because authorizers find it difficult to hold schools accountable for vague or undefined goals (UCLA, 1998; Hill, Pierce, and Lake, 1998). One evaluation stressed the combination of measurable goals and clear criteria: "Greater clarity about what charter schools

[6] The front-loading argument also applies to states. In their evaluation of the charter school initiative in Michigan, Public Sector Consultants, Inc., and Maximus, Inc., (1999) argue that the problems the state encountered around the role of authorizers in the first few years of charter schools in that state could have been avoided if the state "had devoted more resources to assisting and monitoring authorizers' activities" (p. 26).

plan to accomplish and how progress toward those goals will be measured would help define the terms of accountability. Such terms should consider what constitutes a measurable objective, how it will be analyzed over time, and what happens if some targets are met and not others" (WestEd, 1998, p. 60).

Most authorizers in our sample reported that all of their charter schools had measurable goals in their charters. The most frequently cited goal area was academic achievement, followed by goals in the areas of student attendance, student behaviors, parental involvement, and student promotion/graduation. Other types of measurable goals that were reported included goals for staff performance and attendance, parent satisfaction, student retention, course completion in high school, community service/service learning, and efforts to reduce racial, economic, and ethnic isolation.

Most charter school authorizers reported monitoring the following areas, whether they were included in a charter school's goals or not: student achievement, financial record keeping, compliance with federal or state regulations, enrollment numbers, and other student performance indicators, such as attendance rates. These areas are consistent with the monitoring activities most frequently reported by charter schools in the National Study of Charter Schools (Nelson et al., 2000, p. 50). Exhibit 5 indicates the program areas monitored by charter school authorizers and whether these areas apply to all, some, or no charter schools. Respondents also reported monitoring the delivery of special education services, test administration, maintenance of facilities, insurance coverage, health and safety, employee rights and qualifications, adhering to the orientation and mission of the charter school, student discipline, and meeting curriculum standards. As we will demonstrate in more detail in the next section, the areas most likely to be monitored by charter school authorizers include both school inputs (financial record keeping, compliance with federal or state regulations) and school outcomes (student achievement rates).

Exhibit 5
AREAS MONITORED BY CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS (n=47)

	Percent of Charter School Authorizers			
	All Schools	Some Schools	No Schools	Mean*
Student achievement	96%	2%	2%	2.93
Financial record keeping	91%	2%	6%	2.85
Compliance with federal or state regulations	89%	4%	6%	2.83
Enrollment numbers	79%	2%	19%	2.60
Other student performance indicators, such as attendance rates	68%	13%	19%	2.49
Parent satisfaction	65%	11%	24%	2.41
Governance/decision-making	60%	13%	28%	2.32
Diversity of student body	58%	7%	36%	2.22
Instructional practices	53%	13%	34%	2.19
Staff or student turnover rates	56%	7%	38%	2.18
School waiting list	55%	7%	39%	2.16

* The mean scores were based on converting responses to a three-point scale with "all" equal to 3, "some" equal to 2, and "none" equal to 1.

Accountability Consequences

Charter school authorizers are responsible for evaluating the performance of their charter schools on a variety of indicators. According to the theory of charter school accountability, there will be consequences for schools that fail to deliver on their school and student performance goals. However, at this stage of the charter school movement, there is little evidence of closures and charter revocations based on student performance. Five-year charter cycles are common in most states,[7] and it appears that charter school authorizers are using charter renewal as an opportunity to conduct some sort of formal review of the school. To what degree, then, are authorizers imposing accountability consequences when their schools come up for renewal? What about charter revocation before the end of the charter cycle?

The 48 charter school authorizers surveyed had chartered a total of 837 schools, 71 of which (about 8 percent) had come up for renewal. Of those schools, 76 percent had been renewed. Several schools were still undergoing the renewal process when our data collection took place. Only 5 schools (7 percent of the 71 that have come up for renewal) had not been renewed, for several reasons, including financial problems, management or leadership issues, and student performance.

Our data also indicate that, out of the 837 schools chartered by the authorizers in our sample. a total of 27 charters (3 percent) had been revoked or otherwise terminated before the renewal cycle. Charters were revoked by 14 of the 48 charter school authorizers surveyed (6 by state agencies and 8 by local agencies). The tendency to take corrective action appears associated with the number of schools chartered by an authorizer: revocations typically were imposed by authorizers that had chartered six or more schools. The reasons authorizers reported for revoking charters involved fiscal mismanagement and leadership issues.

Few charter school authorizers have revoked or not renewed charters because of student performance problems. The data from the authorizer survey indicate that one authorizer had not renewed charter schools because of problems relating to student performance and two authorizers had revoked charters before the end of the renewal cycle because of failure to meet student outcomes specified in the charter. Some charter school authorizers reported using probationary status as a means of helping charter schools resolve operational problems before revocation became necessary. Nine of 48 charter school authorizers had used this strategy with a total of 15 charter schools. Once again, authorizers that had sponsored more schools were more likely to put a school on probation. As more charter schools come up for renewal, the study team will be able to analyze in greater depth the reasons why charter school authorizers revoke or do not renew charters.

IV. The Shift from Traditional to New Accountability

At the same time as the number of charter schools—and the number of states with charter schools—has multiplied, a larger public school accountability movement has also appeared on

[7] A few states allow longer cycles, as long as 15 years in the case of Arizona.

the scene. States are taking more and more steps to hold schools accountable as state legislators and other leaders take action to create new assessments, align these assessments with curriculum standards, and impose consequences if schools do not realize certain outcomes. Although the strength and consequences of these accountability systems vary by state, state-level accountability systems, in general, seem to have compromised the degree to which individualized accountability plans at the charter school level are realized.

The increased focus on public school accountability also has been accompanied by a shift in the discourse about accountability. Some observers have described this as a shift from "traditional" to "new" accountability systems. Traditional, or "old," public accountability focused almost exclusively on the legal expenditure of public funds and other "inputs" (Ladd, 1996). Districts and states used school inputs, including budgetary expenses and personnel allocations, as the basis of accountability systems.

In the 1990s, a "new" type of accountability emerged that focuses on school and student outcomes (Fuhrman, 1999; Elmore, Abelmann, and Fuhrman, 1996). Susan Fuhrman (1999) describes how the new accountability systems differ from the traditional systems:

> District/school approval is being linked to student performance rather than compliance to regulations; accountability is focusing more on schools as the unit of improvement; continuous improvement strategies involving school-level planning around specific performance targets are being adopted; new approaches to classroom inspection are being developed; more categories or levels of accreditation are being developed; school-level test scores are being publicly reported; and more consequences are being attached to performance levels. (Fuhrman, 1999, p. 1)

Through this new orientation toward accountability, states and districts are communicating expectations for student performance (e.g., through content, performance, and opportunity-to-learn standards). It is important to note, however, that states and districts have faced problems implementing this new vision of accountability, including technical and political hurdles (Elmore, Abelmann, and Fuhrman, 1996).

Another distinction in the literature on accountability focuses on external accountability versus internal accountability. "External" and "internal" indicate the locus of accountability, with reference to the school. External accountability refers to state- or district-imposed accountability requirements, usually requiring standardized tests, as well as fiscal accountability and other inputs. These systems "assume a world in which *all* schools are held accountable to the same expectations for student performance" (Abelmann and Elmore, 1999, p. 1). Internal accountability refers to accountability systems within the school, including goals that are set by the schools themselves. The current accountability rhetoric emphasizes both internal and external accountability systems that target outcomes, downplaying the traditional emphasis on inputs. The reality of accountability for charter schools appears to be quite different. Inputs have not gone away.

V. Conclusion: The Mismatch between Theory and Practice in Charter School Accountability

The shift from old to new accountability has proven difficult in the charter school movement, as well as in the larger public education system. Within the charter movement, the shift poses a dilemma. Many charter school educators and representatives of charter school authorizers appear to be relying on what they may already know about accountability: inputs and external mandates. Even though charter schools are based on the argument that they should have more autonomy in exchange for accountability for results, states appear to be giving conflicting messages to authorizers and schools. In other words, the "old" accountability is still embedded in the rules and regulations that govern charter schools.

Exhibit 6 is a visual summary of the four types of accountability described above. Each locus of accountability (external and internal) can be combined with each focus of the accountability system (inputs and outcomes). In the overall public education system, internal accountability occurs within the school, while external accountability is typically enforced by the state or a school district. Inputs and outcomes were discussed in detail in the previous section.

Exhibit 6
ACCOUNTABILITY RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

Focus of Accountability System	Locus of Accountability	
	External (often imposed by the state)	*Internal (within the charter school)*
Inputs	Fiscal management, audits, compliance with regulations	School-level resource allocation decisions, business plan, school mission
Outcomes/Results	Performance on standardized tests	Meeting goals set by the charter school

The theory of charter school accountability is represented in the gray box of Exhibit 6: charter schools are accountable for their results. Authorizers, in turn, are responsible for monitoring the outcomes of charter schools. This type of accountability is consistent with the new accountability movement because it puts primary emphasis on outcomes, at least in theory. The internal locus of accountability is a second distinctive feature of the theory of charter schools. That is, charter schools were originally envisioned as being free to establish and pursue their own goals. Internal accountability was supposed to take center stage in the charter movement by reducing the burden of external accountability regulations on charter schools (Manno, 1999).

In practice, however, charter school authorizers are caught between the different types and loci of accountability, playing roles that are both external and internal to the charter school and focusing on both inputs and outcomes. In fact, the roles and responsibilities of charter school authorizers in our sample fit into every box in Exhibit 6. As we indicated earlier, charter school authorizers focus on both inputs and outcomes at all stages of the charter accountability process.

Charter school authorizers focus on inputs in several ways, indicating that the reality of authorizer accountability differs from the theory of charter school accountability. Authorizers focus on inputs usually considered part of internal accountability systems when they require that schools make changes to their business plans and educational programs before awarding their charters, especially if they help the school set and refine its own goals. Authorizers also focus on internal accountability and inputs when they deny charter applications. In their monitoring roles, and when they are considering consequences (e.g., determining whether to renew or revoke a charter), authorizers continue to stress inputs rather than outcomes.

At the same time, charter school authorizers hold charter schools accountable for outcomes. These outcomes frequently include test scores on state- or district-mandated standardized tests, but may also include outcomes that address the goals set by the charter school. Some advocates argue that the requirement that charter schools be held accountable for performance on externally mandated tests is particularly problematic because charter schools are often required to use tests that are not consistent with their new philosophies and organizational reforms (Finn, Manno, and Bierlein, 1996). Some authorizers reported that they hold schools accountable for the goals in their charters, but our data do not indicate any instance where a charter was revoked or not renewed because the school failed to meet its goals. In most cases, student performance on standardized tests seems to be an externally imposed accountability requirement that is weighted heavily in charter agreements. Although charter schools may set their own goals in addition to standardized test scores, the scores are likely to be the most important outcome reported to outside audiences.

The distribution of the accountability roles of charter school authorizers implies that the original vision of charter schools with individualized, outcomes-focused accountability plans is not likely to be realized within the public school system as it is currently configured. This finding signals a mismatch between the rhetoric and the reality of the charter movement. In addition, it is a cautionary note to those who believe that charter schools may bring a new type of accountability to the public school system. Public school accountability is driven by external requirements. Although these requirements are increasingly focusing on outcomes, they also are continuing to emphasize inputs. As a result, charter school authorizers are finding it difficult to place individualized goals at the center of charter school accountability systems.

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