



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS**

105 W. Adams Street, Suite 3500  
Chicago, IL 60603-6253  
312.376.2300

[www.qualitycharters.org](http://www.qualitycharters.org)

FOURTH ANNUAL REPORT  
ON NACSA'S AUTHORIZER SURVEY

# THE STATE OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZING

# 2011

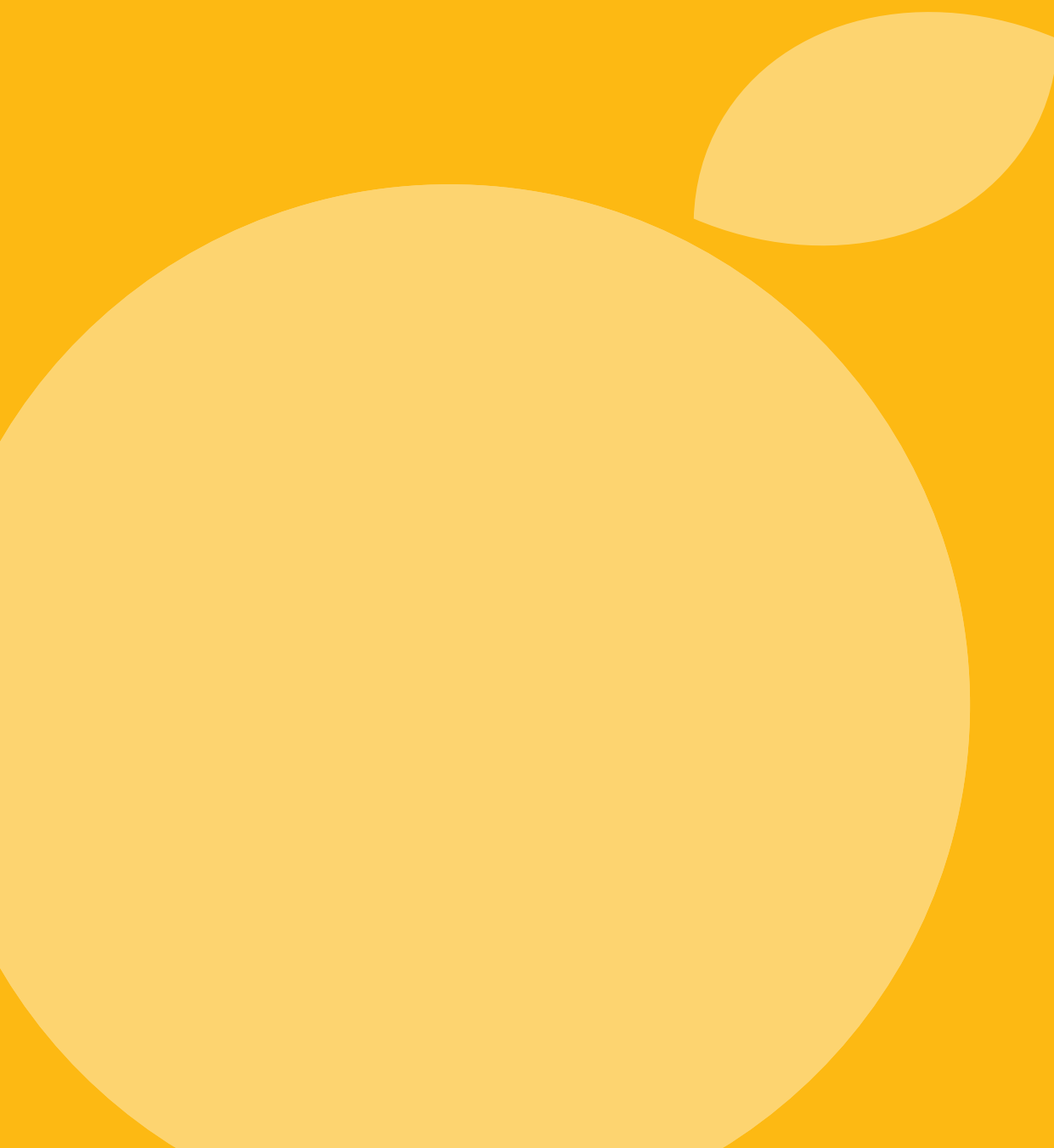


**nacsa**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS



nacsa  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

*NACSA develops quality authorizing environments that lead to a greater number of quality charter schools.*





# Table of Contents

---

LETTER FROM NACSA PRESIDENT AND CEO GREG RICHMOND	2
INTRODUCTION	3
A PROFILE OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS	4
NACSA'S <i>INDEX OF ESSENTIAL PRACTICES</i>	11
A CLOSER LOOK: OPENING AND CLOSING SCHOOLS	17
CONCLUSION	23
APPENDIX A: SURVEY METHODOLOGY	24
APPENDIX B: NACSA RESOURCES FOR AUTHORIZERS	25
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	26
ENDNOTES	28



January 2012

Dear Colleagues:

The public discussion about quality and accountability within the charter school sector has never been more vigorous. Across the country, state legislatures, news media, and advocacy organizations routinely debate whether too many or too few proposals for new charter schools are approved and whether too many or too few poorly-performing existing charter schools are being closed.

As the public debates these issues, the entities that are actually responsible for approving and closing charter schools go about their work. But who are these charter school authorizing agencies and what are they doing? What can we learn from their practices in order to improve the entire sector?

This report presents the findings from a rigorous national survey of charter school authorizers conducted in 2011 by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers. This is the fourth time NACSA has conducted this type of national survey.

As in years past, the vast majority of authorizers (90 percent) are school districts and they oversee a slight majority of charter schools (52 percent of all charter schools). Put another way, 10 percent of authorizers are not school districts and they authorize 48 percent of all charter schools. Yet differences among authorizers' practices have more to do with the number of schools they oversee than the type of institution they are. Authorizers that oversee 10 or more charter schools implement a greater number of professional practices than those that oversee fewer schools.

Continuing a pattern seen in 2009–2010, closure rates have fallen for charter schools that go through a review at the end of their charter term. Among authorizers responding to our survey, only 6.2 percent of charters reviewed for renewal were closed during the 2010–2011 school year, down from 8.8 percent in 2009–2010 and 12.6 percent in 2008–2009. It's too soon to know whether this is a short-term anomaly or a larger trend. We also don't know whether the decline reflects a change in authorizer practices, an improvement in school quality, or other factors.

These data and more are presented in this report. NACSA collects and presents this data so that public debates about charter schools are informed by facts—facts that speak to the actual experiences of schools and students. Only in this way can we make progress toward ensuring that all children have the opportunity to attend a high-quality school.

Sincerely,

Greg Richmond  
President and CEO

[www.qualitycharters.org](http://www.qualitycharters.org)

# Introduction

---

The work of charter school authorizers matters. While individual school operators determine how good their own schools will be, authorizers determine which applicants will be allowed to open and which schools must close. Collectively, authorizers' decisions shape both the scale and quality of the charter school options available to families in their communities. NACSA studies and works to improve the practices of all authorizers. This report represents NACSA's latest effort to document who these authorizers are and what they do.

As in previous years, NACSA's annual survey of authorizers reports on noteworthy similarities and differences between authorizers based on their type and size. The size and type of authorizers do seem to matter, but they don't always affect practices as one might expect. For example, many in the charter movement expected school districts to reject any charter options in their communities because of the conflict of overseeing both traditional public schools and their potential competitors. However, this year's report finds that small district authorizers<sup>1</sup> approve the highest percent of all new applicants compared to other authorizers. Large school district authorizers approve charter applications at rates similar to other large authorizers. And the vast majority of charter schools in the country are still overseen by entities that also oversee traditional public schools (e.g., school districts or state education agencies).<sup>2</sup> This year's report also finds charter closure rates declining. The 2010–2011 school year saw the lowest percent of charters closed during renewal reviews in three years. Whether this decrease in closure rates during renewal review is part of a larger trend or simply an anomaly is unclear.

In addition to using data to better understand how different types and sizes of authorizers behave, those interested in the growth and efficacy of the charter school movement must become familiar with the professional practices of individual authorizers. Within group averages, individual authorizers are using the tools available to them. The practices they implement provide them with data and an infrastructure to make their decisions.

This year's report adds a new emphasis, presenting data on NACSA's *Index of Essential Practices*. This resource summarizes authorizer implementation of practices ranging from having established application criteria and interviewing applicants to having established charter renewal and revocation criteria. More than the type or size of an authorizer, the implementation of key practices and how well they are executed likely influence whether authorizers approve strong applicants and close underperforming schools.

# A Profile of Charter School Authorizers

Currently, 41 states and the District of Columbia have charter school laws. These laws empower authorizers to open, oversee, and close charter schools. NACSA has identified six types of authorizers—Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Independent Chartering Boards (ICBs), School Districts or Local Education Agencies (LEAs), Mayor/Municipalities (MUNs), Not-For-Profit organizations (NFPs), and State Education Agencies (SEAs).

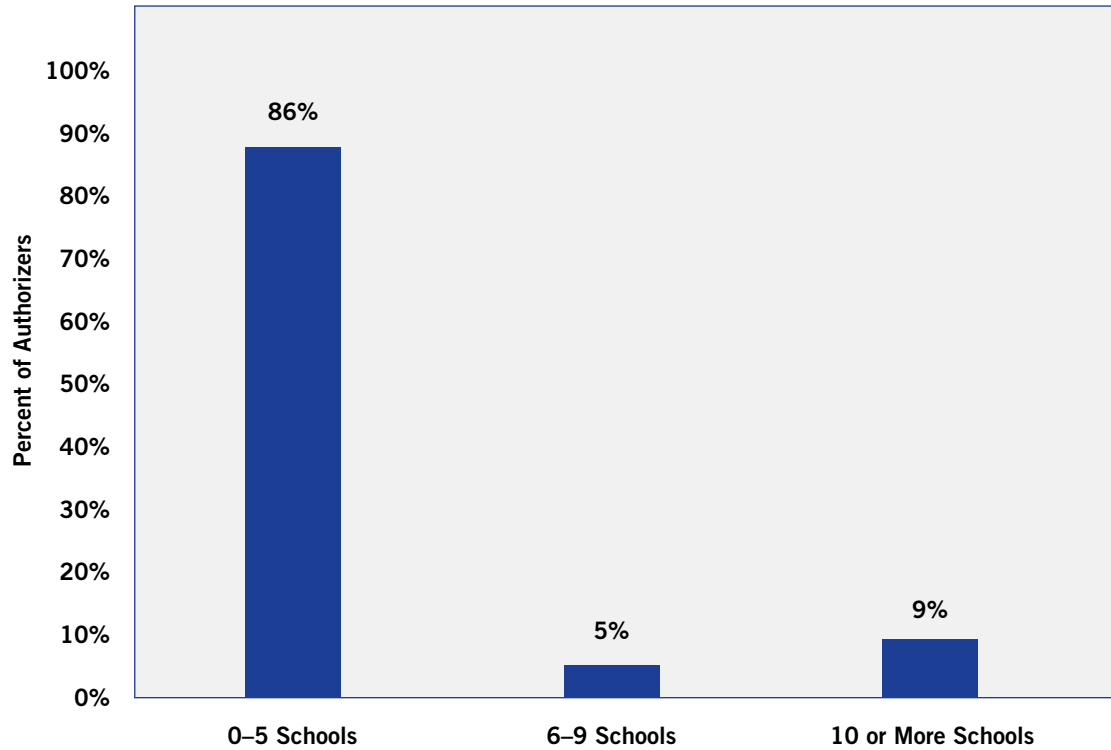
As of fall 2011, there were an estimated 957 authorizers across the nation, up from 955 the year prior. These authorizers oversee and hold accountable more than 5,600 schools serving more than two million students.

**TABLE 1.1:** *Number of Charter School Authorizers, by Type*

AUTHORIZER TYPE	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010	2010–2011	2011–2012
HEI	38	42	47	49	46
ICB	5	7	7	8	10
LEA	624	726	776	857	859
MUN	2	2	2	2	2
NFP	20	21	20	20	20
SEA	23	21	20	19	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>872</b>	<b>955</b>	<b>957</b>

- Between fall 2010 and fall 2011, there was little change in the total number of authorizers. However, the relatively stable total number of authorizers over the past year hides significant changes in charter school authorizing. HEI authorizers declined in number, entirely in Minnesota. Illinois, Indiana, and Nevada<sup>3</sup> all added ICBs while Georgia closed its ICB. One NFP authorizer closed and another opened in Minnesota. Thirty-eight LEA authorizers stopped charter school authorizing and 40 began. Maine’s new charter law empowered its Department of Education to authorize charter schools. NACSA has also identified the Georgia Department of Education as an authorizer and added the agency to its count of charter school authorizers.<sup>4</sup>

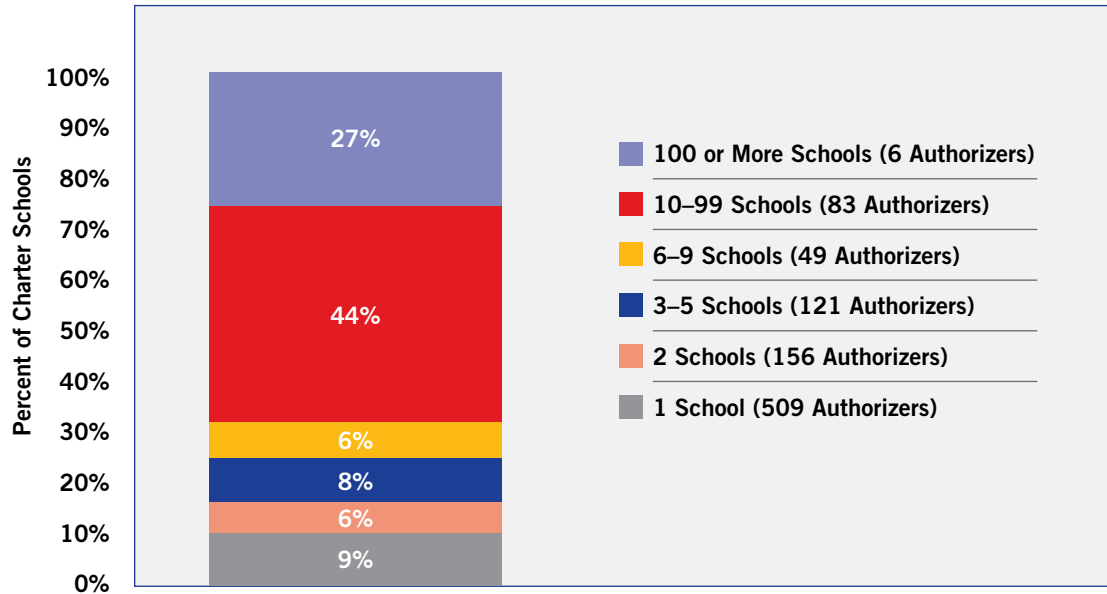
**FIGURE 1.1:** *Percent of Charter School Authorizers, by Portfolio Size*



- Authorizers vary profoundly in the number of charter schools they oversee. As reflected in Figure 1.1, a large majority (86 percent) of charter school authorizers oversee fewer than five schools. Only nine percent of authorizers oversee 10 or more schools. This distribution of portfolio sizes appears to be stable. It has not changed significantly in the last three years.

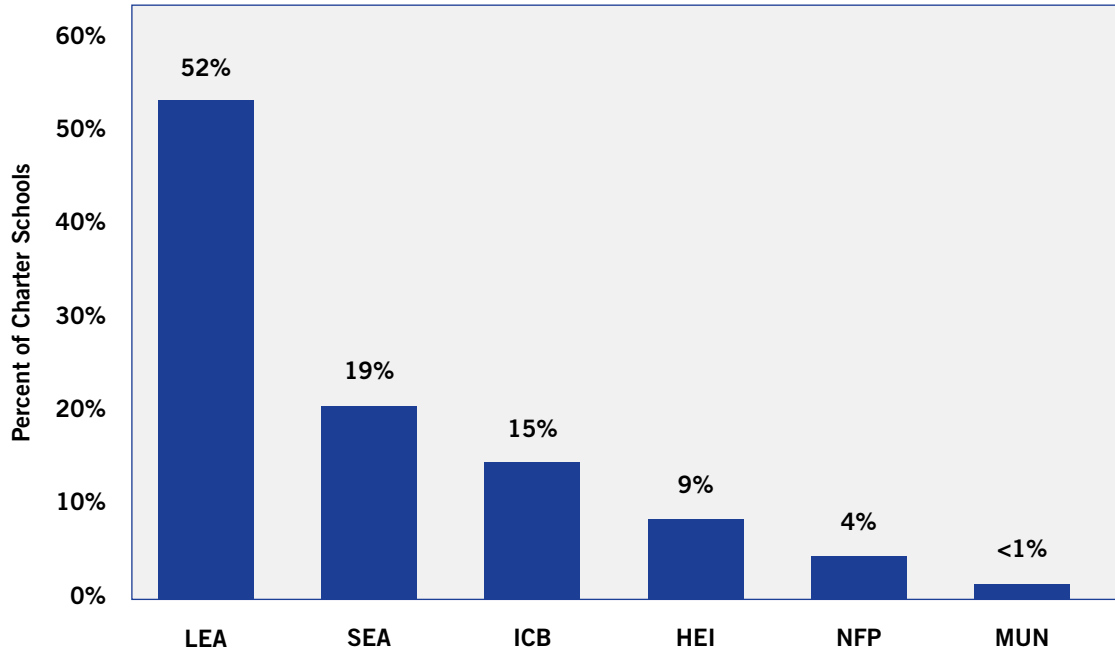


**FIGURE 1.2:** *Percent of Charter Schools, by Authorizer Portfolio Size*



- Figure 1.2 describes the percent of charter schools overseen by authorizers of different sizes. Despite their small numbers overall (nine percent of all authorizers), authorizers with 10 or more schools oversee the majority of charter schools in the nation (71 percent of all charter schools). The largest six authorizers oversee 27 percent of charter schools in the nation. These authorizers are the Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, Los Angeles Unified School District, North Carolina Department of Education, Texas Education Agency, New Jersey Department of Education, and Miami-Dade County Public Schools. In contrast, 509 authorizers oversee only one school (nine percent of the charter schools in the nation).

**FIGURE 1.3:** *Percent of Charter Schools, by Authorizer Type*



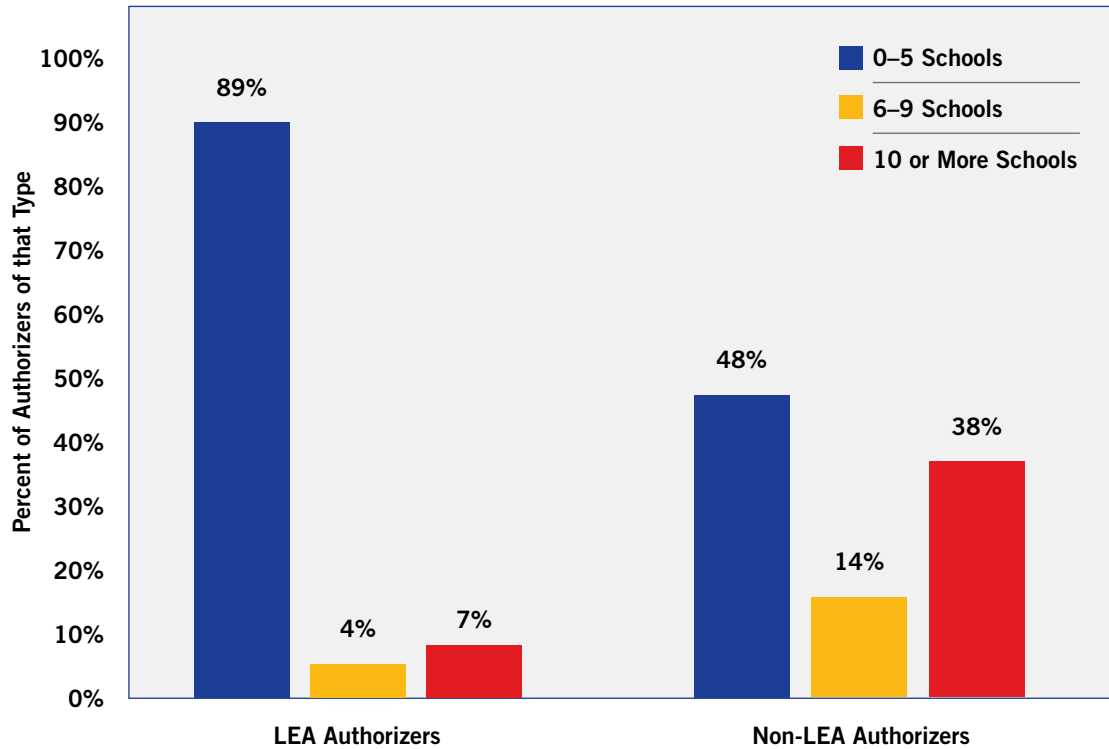
- Figure 1.3 describes the distribution of charter schools across authorizer types. LEAs oversee more than half of the nation’s charter schools (52 percent). SEAs monitor a much smaller percentage (19 percent). Less than one percent of all charter schools are overseen by MUN authorizers.

**TABLE 1.2:** *Portfolio Size, by Authorizer Type*

TYPE	1-5 SCHOOLS	6-9 SCHOOLS	10 OR MORE SCHOOLS	TOTAL
HEI	28	6	12	46
ICB	2	0	8	10
LEA	776	38	45	859
MUN	0	1	1	2
NFP	8	3	9	20
SEA	5	0	15	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>957</b>

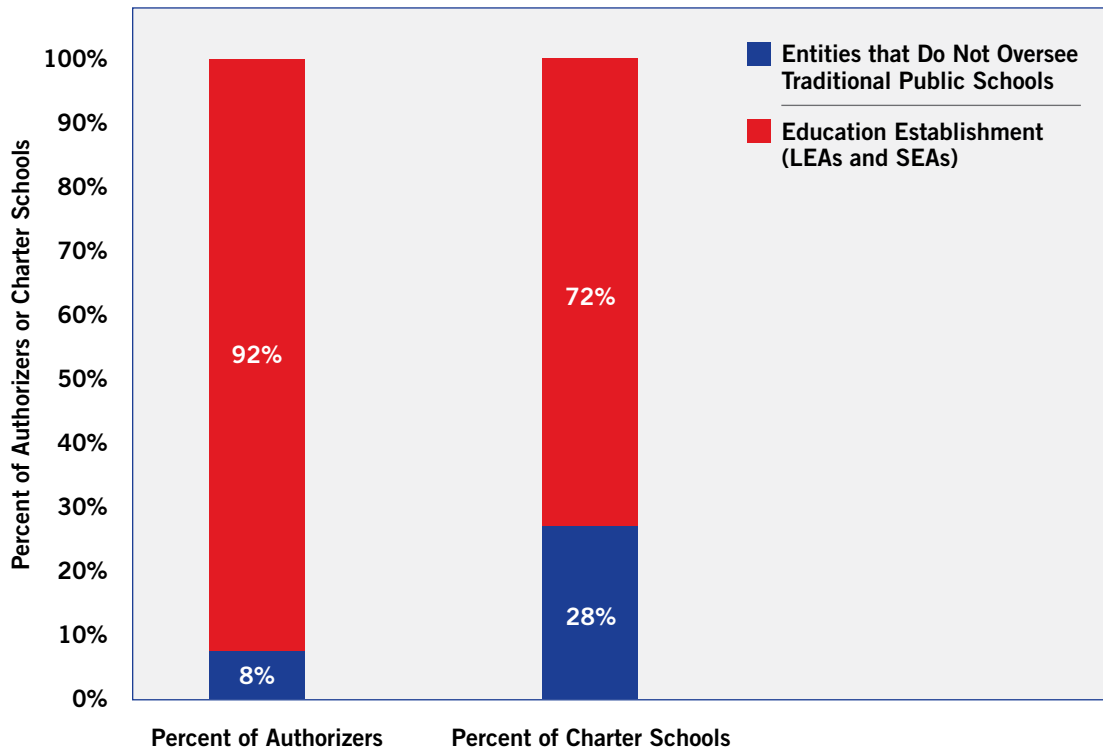
- Table 1.2 describes frequencies of authorizers of different types and sizes. LEAs are the majority of authorizers in both the 1–5 school category and the 6–9 school category, and half of all authorizers with 10 or more schools. HEIs and NFPs have diverse portfolio sizes, but tend to be either very small (1–5 schools) or large (10 or more schools). Other than two new ICBs with zero schools, all ICBs have 10 or more schools.<sup>5</sup>

**FIGURE 1.4:** *Portfolio Size, LEA v. Non-LEA Authorizers*



- A large majority of LEA authorizers have five or fewer charter schools. The portfolio sizes of non-LEA authorizers are more distributed. Nearly 40 percent of non-LEA authorizers have portfolios of 10 or more schools.

**FIGURE 1.5:** *Percent of Authorizers and Charter Schools within Education Establishment*



- The education establishment (the entities that oversee traditional public schools) continues to authorize more charter schools than the other types of authorizers. LEAs and SEAs represent the majority of charter school authorizers (92 percent) and oversee the majority of the nation's charter schools in 2011–2012 (72 percent of all charter schools). This distribution is similar to the distributions reported in the previous two years.<sup>6</sup>

# NACSA's *Index of Essential Practices*

---

NACSA has identified 12 practices central to the work of charter school authorizing. The selection of these 12 practices reflects the emerging consensus on specific authorizing practices that are necessary in order to authorize high-quality charter schools.

**The practices are:**

1. Authorizer signs a contract with each school.
2. Authorizer has established, documented criteria for evaluating charter applications.
3. Authorizer publishes application timelines and materials.
4. Authorizer interviews all charter applicants.
5. Authorizer uses expert panels that include external members to review charter applications.
6. Authorizer grants charters with five-year terms only.
7. Authorizer requires and/or examines annual, independent, external financial audits of its charter schools.
8. Authorizer has established renewal criteria.
9. Authorizer has established revocation criteria.
10. Authorizer provides an annual report to each school on its performance.
11. Authorizer has staff assigned to authorizing within the organization or by contract.
12. Authorizer has a published and available mission for quality authorizing.

These practices are drawn from NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*. NACSA's *Principles & Standards* serves three aims: 1) to maintain high standards for schools, 2) to protect school autonomy, and 3) to protect the public and the students' interests. Implementing these practices is an important first step towards quality charter school authorizing and better charter schools for our nation's children.

Using responses to its 2011 authorizer survey, NACSA scored 123 authorizers with complete survey responses on the *Index of Essential Practices*. Authorizers received one point for each of the 12 essential practices they reported.<sup>7</sup>

Implementing the practices described in the Index can be complex. To implement those practices well is an even greater challenge. The Index is not designed to evaluate how well authorizers implement these practices. Other tools, such as the in-depth formative evaluations of authorizers conducted by NACSA, better provide a detailed look at authorizing practices. The Index is an important starting point for discussions about how to improve authorizing practices. If there are individual practices that authorizers have not adopted, they should work to put them in place. For those that already use these practices, how can they be done better?

## How are authorizers doing?

The Index indicates that authorizers varied in their implementation of essential practices. Scores ranged from a high of 12 practices to a low of only three practices. The average score earned by authorizers was 8.7 out of 12. More information about the particular scores of authorizers can be found in NACSA's 2011 *Index of Essential Practices*. While the Index report focused on the practices reported by each authorizer, essential practices can also be examined individually.

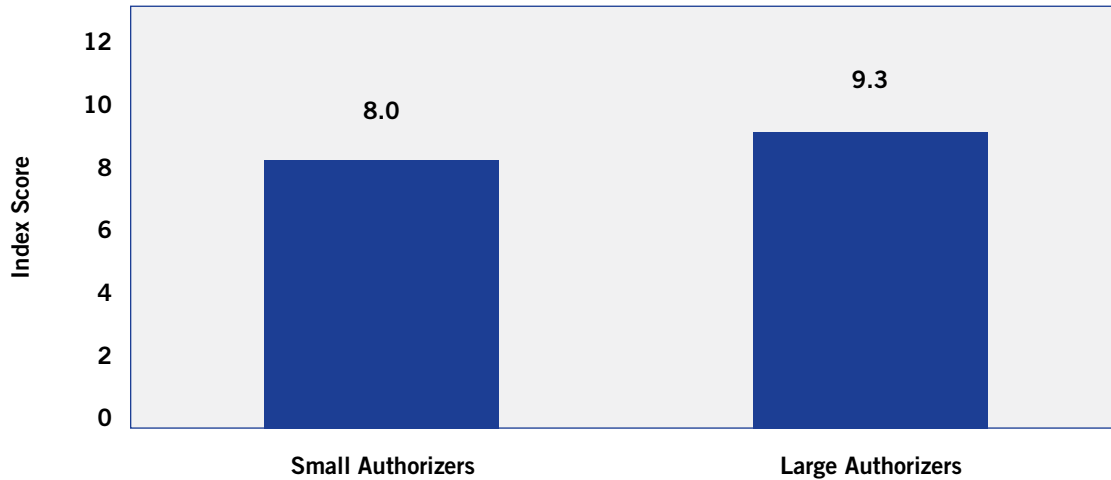
**TABLE 2.1:** *Frequency of Essential Practices 2010-2011*

PRACTICE	PERCENT (%)
Financial Audit	99
Contract	93
Application Criteria	87
Renewal Criteria Established	85
Applicant Interview	81
Application Timeline	78
Designated Staff	73
Revocation Criteria Established	70
Annual Report to Schools	54
Mission	50
Expert Panels with External Members	42
Five-Year Term Length	34

- Looking at the frequency of implementation of individual essential practices, results are mixed. Some appear to be consensus practices while only a minority of authorizers implements others. It can be a challenge for some authorizers to implement essential practices. Institutional inertia, lack of authorizing experience, and insufficient scale can all interfere with implementation. Committed authorizers may still face obstacles outside their control, such as state policy. Only 34 percent of surveyed authorizers grant five-year terms only. Some states mandate charter terms longer than five years. Others mandate shorter charter terms. Some states allow authorizers discretion to set various terms or allow longer terms under various circumstances.
- State policy can also support the implementation of essential practices. Annual financial audits of charter schools, the most frequently reported essential practice, is mandated by law in 35 states and has become nearly a universally reported practice among authorizers.

Are certain sizes or types of authorizers more likely to implement essential practices?

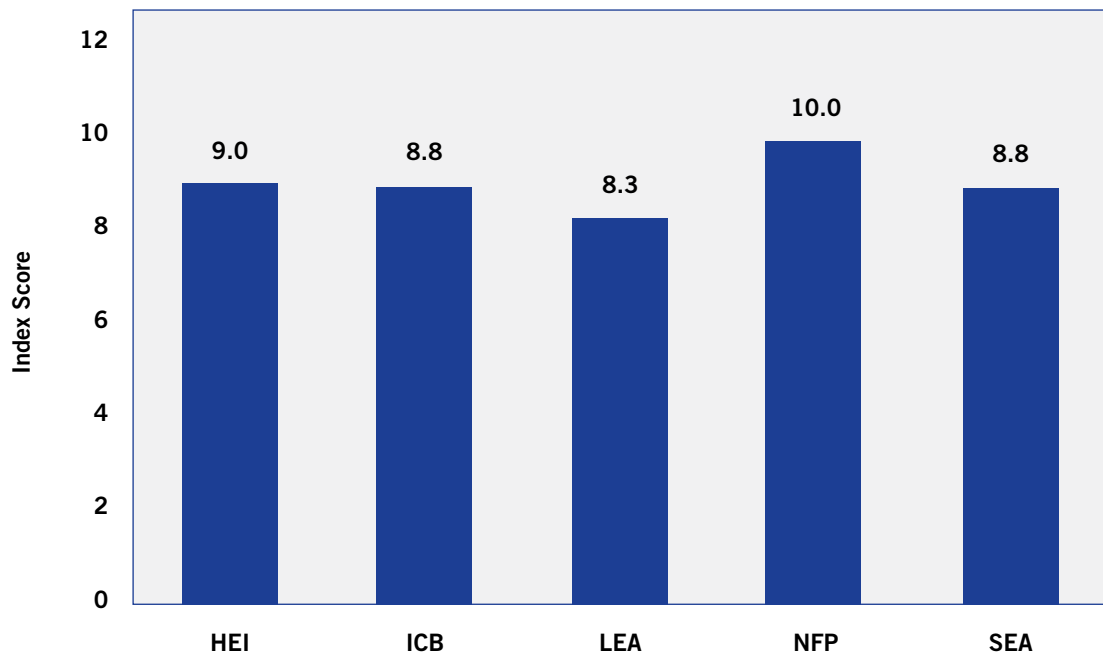
**FIGURE 2.1:** Average Index Score by Authorizer Size



- On average, large authorizers (those with 10 or more charter schools in their portfolios) scored higher than small authorizers (those with less than 10 charter schools in their portfolios) on the *Index of Essential Practices*. Perhaps having a large portfolio of schools necessitates the use of basic authorizing practices. It is also possible that the implementation of basic authorizing practices contributes to larger charter school portfolios. Even if this is the case, there are small authorizers with many practices in place and large authorizers with few.

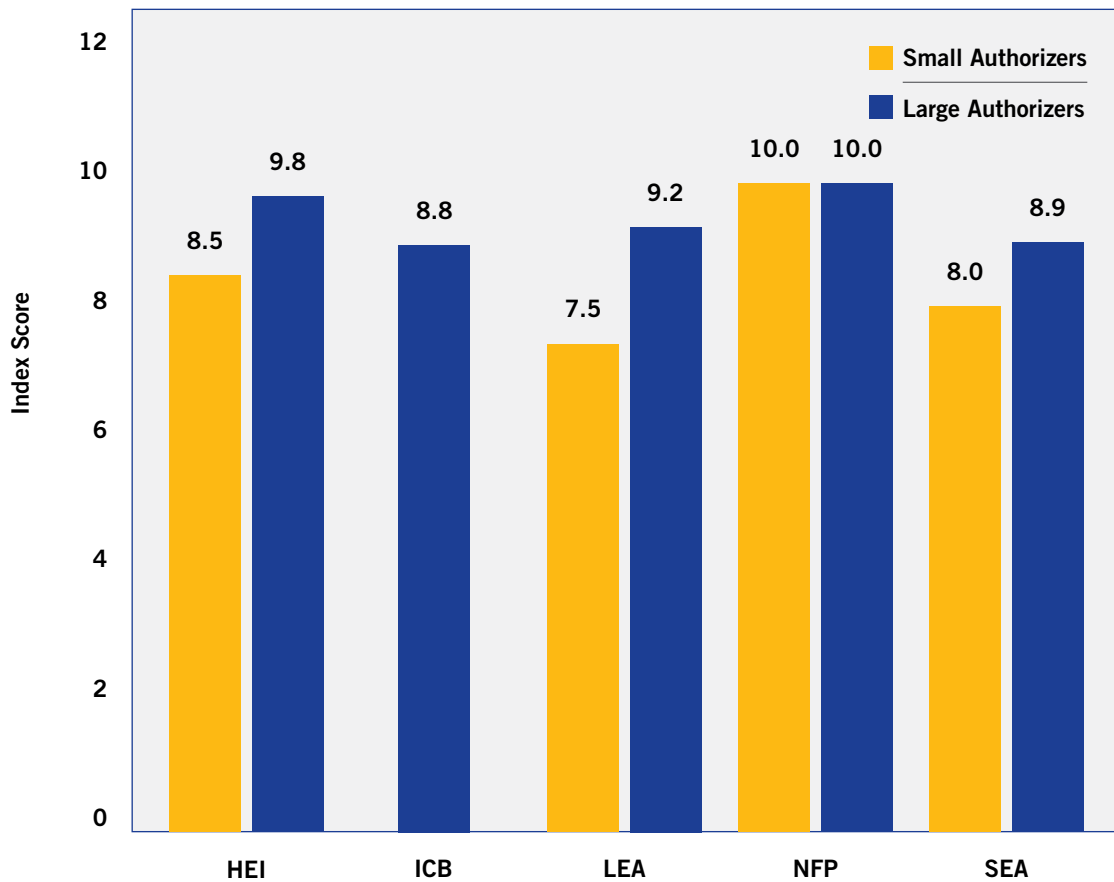


**FIGURE 2.2:** Average Index Score by Authorizer Type<sup>8</sup>



- Different types of authorizers differ in their average scores on the Index. LEA authorizers had the lowest average (8.3 practices). In 2010, NACSA found that a high proportion of NFP authorizers did not follow recommended best practices.<sup>9</sup> In 2011, NFP authorizers had the highest average number of essential practices (10 practices). This apparent improvement is likely due to both improvement in practice by some authorizers and changes in the composition of authorizers responding to the survey. Two NFP authorizers have improved their scores in the last year. One previously low-scoring NFP authorizer has closed and two other NFP authorizers declined to respond to the 2011 survey. As NACSA implements its *Index of Essential Practices*, questions may arise whether authorizers declining to respond to the survey do so because of the weakness of their practices. If the two NFP authorizers that did not respond to the survey in 2011 were included in Figure 2.2 using their responses from the 2010 survey, the average Index score for NFPs would be 9.3.

**FIGURE 2.3:** Average Index Score by Type and Size of Authorizer

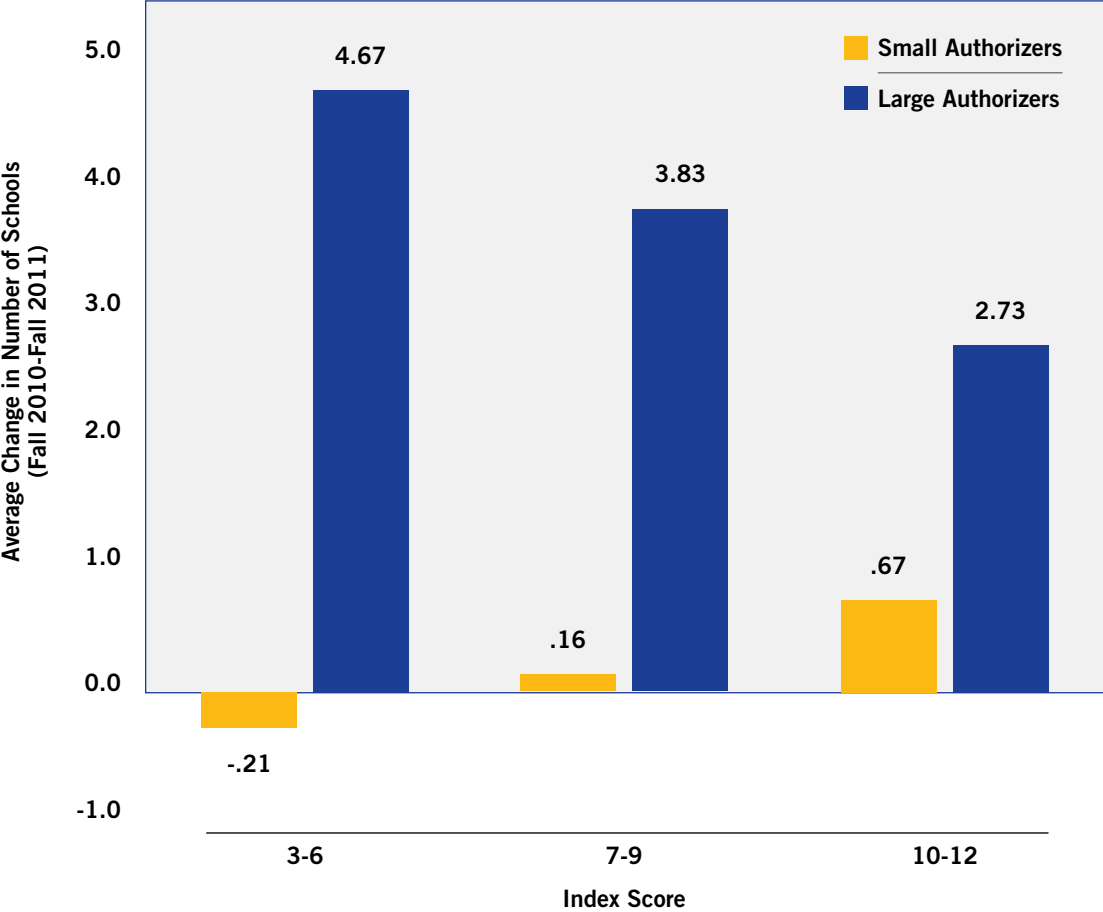


*Note: At the time of the 2011 survey, there were no small ICBs in the nation.*

- While LEA authorizers may score low as a group, further examination of their scores reveals that the scores of large LEA authorizers are very similar to the scores of other types and sizes of authorizers. Small LEA authorizers score the lowest among all sizes and types. Small authorizers may perceive less of a need for certain essential practices. For example, an authorizer with a single school that isn't seeking additional charter schools may not see the benefit of codifying a systematic application process. Still, the high average score of small NFP authorizers suggests that while size matters, small authorizers can and do implement essential practices.

Does implementing essential practices hinder charter school growth?

FIGURE 2.4: Index of Essential Practices and Charter School Growth



- In some circumstances, one might expect authorizers that do not want charter schools to hide behind accountability and public scrutiny to limit their growth. Figure 2.4, however, describes a different relationship between authorizing practices and charter school growth. For small authorizers, as Index scores increase, charter school growth increases. For large authorizers, as Index scores increase, charter school growth moderates, but is still present. One might expect that more rigorous authorizers would be more likely to be discerning about charter applications and more likely to close charter schools. The data presented in Figure 2.4 suggests that growth and quality may not be at odds.

## *A Closer Look: Opening and Closing Schools*

---

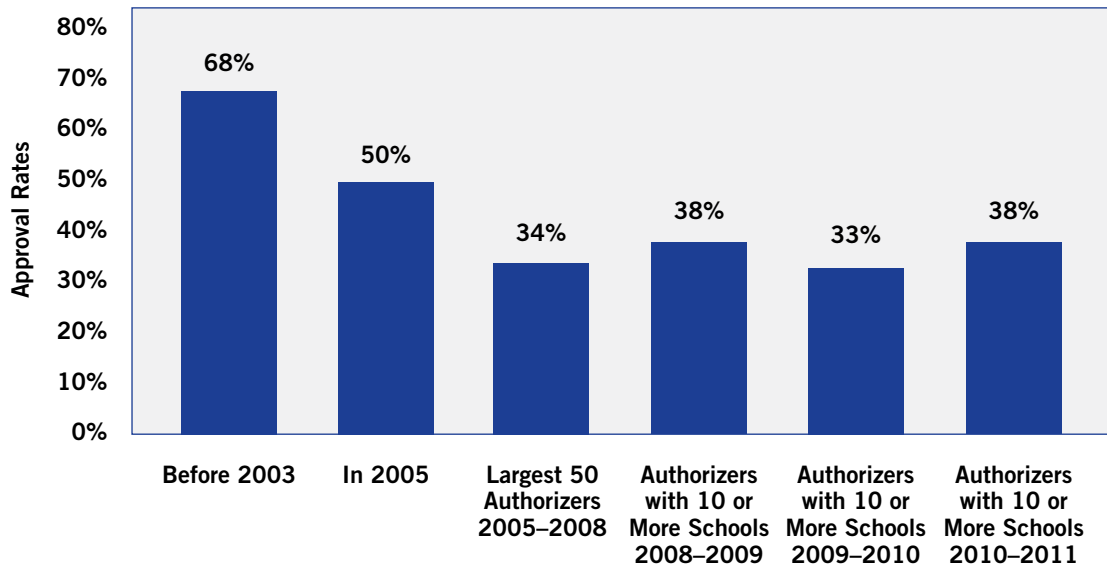
The most significant opportunities for authorizers to affect the quality of the charter schools they oversee occur when authorizers make decisions to open or to close schools. Strong application processes ensure that only quality charter school operators with the capacity to succeed are allowed to open schools. Rigorous revocation and renewal processes ensure that the quality promised in the charter school application is realized and maintained throughout the life of the charter school. The approval and closure rates of authorizers provide a unique perspective on authorizer practice.

There is no “best” application approval rate. Authorizers may be correct to deny all applications received if they are low quality or approve all applications if they are high quality. However, if no applications received by an authorizer are ever approved, no charter schools are ever created. If all of the applications received by an authorizer are approved, student performance is likely to suffer and the quality of an authorizer’s charter school portfolio is likely to diminish.

Like application decisions, there is no “best” closure rate. Closing all schools reviewed for renewal or revoking all charters will eliminate all charter schools, depriving students of the education they are receiving in any high-performing schools. When closure rates are too low, poorly performing schools remain open, adversely affecting students and wasting public funds. In this section, NACSA presents the 2010–2011 application approval and closure rates of authorizers that responded to its 2011 authorizer survey.

## Are application approval rates changing over time?

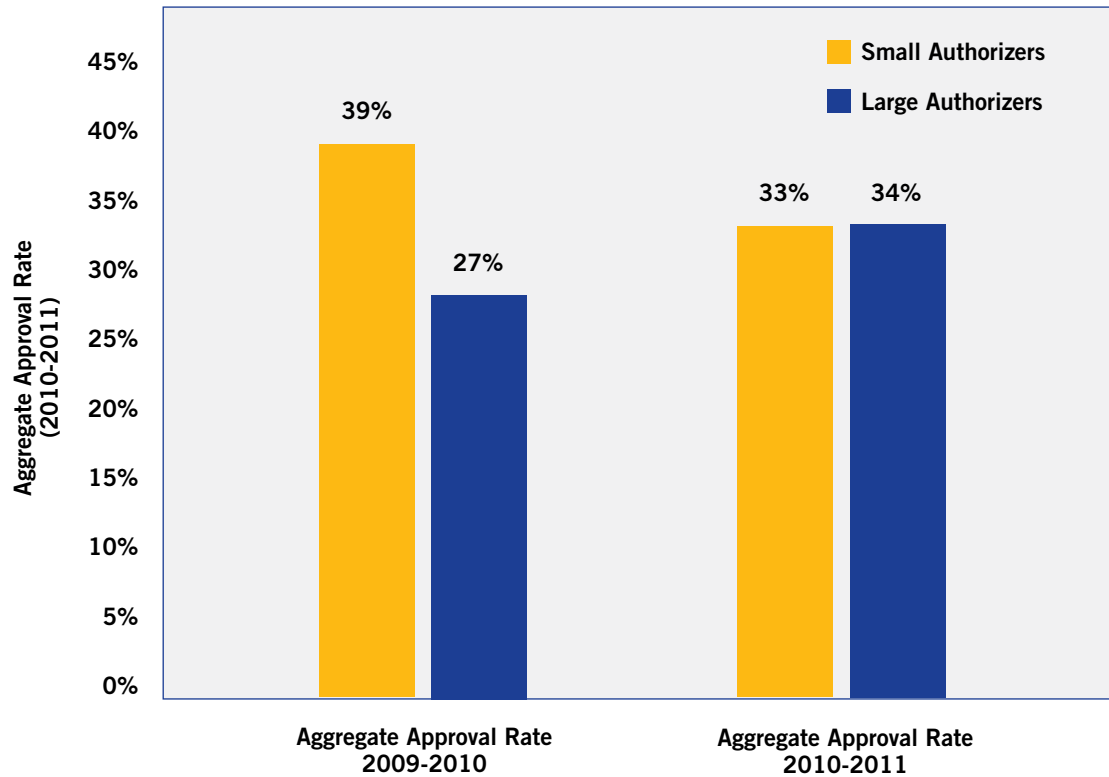
**FIGURE 3.1:** Trends in Application Approval Rates<sup>10</sup>



- Since the 2008–2009 academic year, NACSA has reported the average application approval rates for large authorizers. On average, large authorizers approved 38 percent of the charter applications they received during the 2010–2011 school year. This approval rate matches the approval rate found during the 2008–2009 school year and continues a pattern of approval rates in the 30–40 percent range.

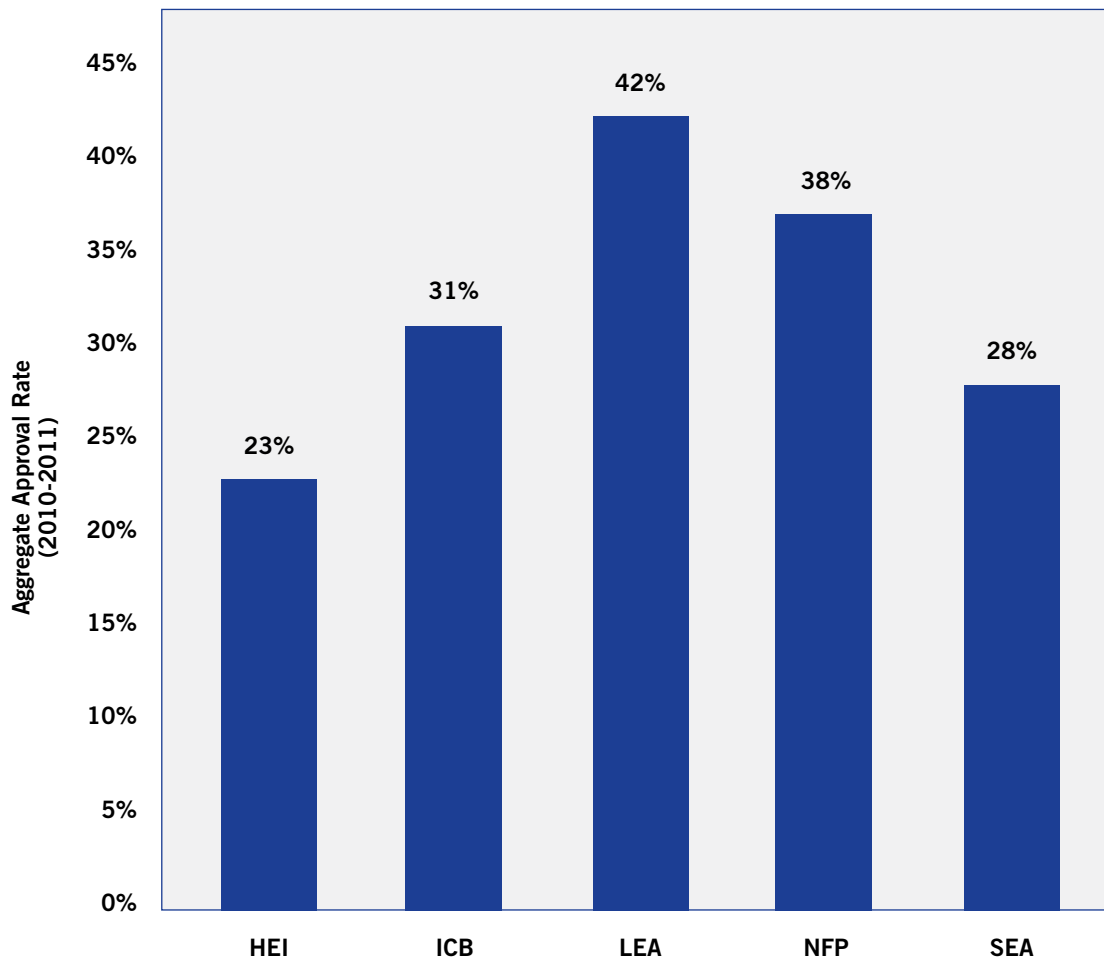
How do the approval rates of charter school applicants differ between different sizes and types of authorizers?

**FIGURE 3.2:** *Aggregate Approval Rates by Authorizer Size*



- Calculating application approval rates for large and small authorizers as groups, large authorizers approved 34 percent of all applications evaluated during the 2010–2011 school year.<sup>11</sup> Small authorizers approved 33 percent of the applications they received during the same period. Comparing 2010–2011 approval rates to rates obtained during 2009–2010, small authorizers appear to have reduced their application approval rates. This has led the approval rates of small and large authorizers to look more similar.

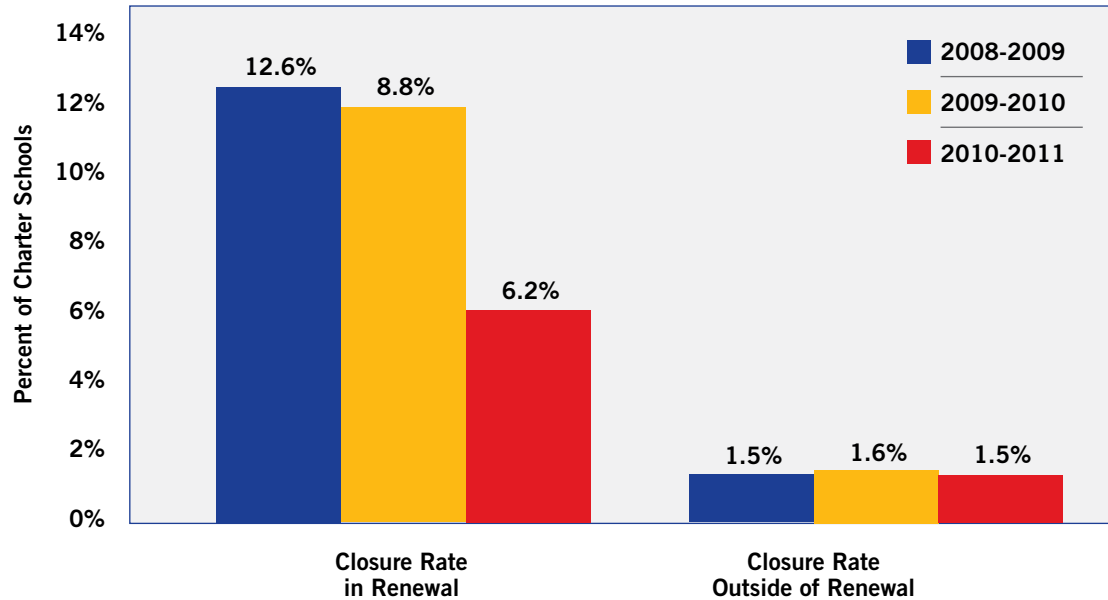
**FIGURE 3.3:** *Aggregate Approval Rates by Authorizer Type*



- LEAs report the highest aggregate approval rate, approving 42 percent of the applications received. This may lead one to conclude that LEAs are the most “charter-friendly” of all authorizer types. LEAs that authorize at least one charter school do appear more likely than other active authorizers to approve subsequent applications. However, NACSA has no current comparable data on LEAs receiving their first application or those that have never approved a received application.

## When are charter schools most likely to be closed?

**FIGURE 3.4:** *Charter Closure Rates Inside and Outside Renewal (Fall 2008–Spring 2011)<sup>12</sup>*



- Figure 3.4 describes the aggregate closure rates for all surveyed authorizers regardless of portfolio size over the past three years. Similar to previous years, charter closure rates during renewal in 2010–2011 were much higher than closure rates outside of renewal. The lower rate of closure outside of renewal than during a renewal review suggests that: 1) renewal reviews may be more rigorous than performance reviews that occur over the course a charter term, and 2) longer charter terms may reduce the chance of a low-performing school closing by reducing the frequency of their exposure to rigorous renewal reviews. Higher closure rates are found during renewal than outside of renewal regardless of the size of an authorizer’s portfolio.
- The closure data presented in Figure 3.4 enables comparisons across three years using the same methodology. NACSA has refined its methods for collecting closure data over the past three years. While differences in sampling across the three years may account for some of the difference in closure rates, it does appear that closure rates during renewal reviews have declined since the 2008–2009 school year. Without data from prior to 2008–2009, it is impossible to determine whether the higher rate of closure during the 2008–2009 school year was an anomaly or part of a larger decline in closure rates occurring over time. The impact of changing charter closure rates on school quality warrants further investigation.



How do closure rates differ across types of authorizers?

**TABLE 3.1:** *Closure Rates by Authorizer Type*

	CLOSURE RATE IN RENEWAL (%)	CLOSURE RATE OUTSIDE OF RENEWAL (%)	OVERALL CLOSURE RATE (%)
HEI	4.3	1.6	2.3
ICB	7.0	1.9	2.3
LEA	7.2	1.2	1.9
NFP	7.9	2.4	5.2
SEA	2.4	1.4	1.5
<b>Overall</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>2.3</b>

- Table 3.1 describes closure rates for different types of authorizers.<sup>13</sup> The overall closure rate is the percentage of charters overseen by authorizers of that type that closed during the 2010–2011 school year. NFPs reported the greatest percent of charter closures inside and outside of renewal. These numbers translate to the highest overall closure rate; 5.2 percent of charters overseen by NFP authorizers closed during the 2010–2011 year. SEAs report the lowest aggregate charter closure rate in renewal and the lowest overall charter closure rate.

# Conclusion

---

Charter school authorizers vary in important ways. Large authorizers implement essential authorizing practices with greater frequency than small authorizers. Despite differences between types and sizes of authorizers, those interested in the quality and growth of the charter school movement must look beyond who the authorizers are and focus on what they do. Every authorizer, regardless of size or type, must make informed decisions about the charter schools they oversee. Strong authorizing practices can support those decisions, leading to better outcomes for students and communities.

Within all authorizer types and sizes are authorizers that do not implement essential authorizing practices. While nearly 100 percent of responding charter school authorizers require annual, independent, financial audits of their charter schools, only 42 percent of charter school authorizers use expert panels that include external members to review new charter applications. Rigorous authorizing practices, such as expert panels with external members, contribute to authorizers' abilities to make good decisions about which schools open and which schools close, ensuring quality educational choices for students.

The past three years have seen relatively stable application approval rates and charter closure rates outside of renewal, but a notable decline in charter closure rates during renewal reviews. What this change in closure rates means for the quality of educational opportunities for children remains to be seen.

## Where do we go from here?

Individuals interested in the quality of charter schools in their communities should ask: does my charter school authorizer have recognized authorizing practices in place? And are those practices well executed? NACSA believes that greater transparency about authorizers and their work will lead to improved authorizer practices and informed decisions about the role of charter school authorizers in providing quality educational choices for children. NACSA will continue to track and report on the numbers, sizes, and types of charter school authorizers nationally. NACSA will also continue to track the implementation of authorizing practices by authorizers. Finally, NACSA will continue to investigate the impact of authorizers and their practices on schools and student outcomes.

# Appendix A: Survey Methodology

---

NACSA tracks the number, size, and types of charter school authorizers through reviews of state statutes, ongoing cooperation with partners such as the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, and frequent contact with state education departments and state charter school support organizations. Drawing on these sources of information, NACSA identified 159 charter school authorizers in the country with five or more schools in their portfolios and an additional 222 authorizers with fewer than five schools in their portfolios during the 2010–2011 school year. The sample of authorizers with fewer than five schools was constructed to include all remaining non-LEA authorizers and a convenience sample of LEA authorizers with fewer than five schools that could be linked to existing available student performance data sets. NACSA contacted all surveyed authorizers via mail and email to solicit their participation in the survey. All surveyed authorizers were asked to complete a 14-page, 122-item survey of authorizer practices, designed by NACSA. Participants were asked to answer questions across a range of topics related to charter school authorizing.

Of the 381 charter school authorizers contacted, 62 of 83 authorizers with 10 or more schools (response rate: 75 percent) and 114 of 298 authorizers with fewer than 10 schools (response rate: 38 percent) completed and returned an online version of the survey or a hard copy version via mail.

Questions regarding survey design and implementation should be directed to Sean Conlan, director of research and evaluation, at [seanc@qualitycharters.org](mailto:seanc@qualitycharters.org) or 817.841.9035.

# Appendix B:

## NACSA Resources for Authorizers

---

NACSA is committed to developing quality authorizing environments that result in a greater number of quality charter schools. To achieve this mission, NACSA provides authorizers with access to professional development and networking opportunities, advocacy, publications, and other resources, including:

### NACSA's Principles & Standards

NACSA's *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* is the foundational resource used to guide authorizing practices across the country and has been referenced in state statutes. It focuses on the ends that authorizers should be aiming to attain in creating and upholding high expectations for the schools they charter while recognizing that there are many means of getting there. Download *Principles & Standards* at [www.qualitycharters.org/principles-standards](http://www.qualitycharters.org/principles-standards).

### NACSA Resource Library

NACSA's Resource Library provides authorizers with publications on everything from performance contracting and ongoing oversight and evaluation, to renewal decision making and governance. Visit [www.qualitycharters.org](http://www.qualitycharters.org) to download NACSA's issue briefs, policy guides, and annual *The State of Charter School Authorizing*.

### Annual NACSA Leadership Conference

This annual event brings together hundreds of charter school authorizers and leaders in the education reform movement to learn about the latest trends in authorizing, to explore best practices, and to share insights with colleagues. Visit [www.qualitycharters.org/conference](http://www.qualitycharters.org/conference) for more information.

### NACSA Authorizer Development

NACSA is committed to the development of quality authorizing environments and provides authorizing entities with direct services to help them improve their practices. Through NACSA's Authorizer Development program, authorizers may receive professional guidance on strategic planning and board development; decision management; contracts, policies, and protocols; templates and model resources; and authorizer evaluations. Learn more about these services at [www.qualitycharters.org](http://www.qualitycharters.org).

# Acknowledgements

---

This report is only possible thanks to the contributions of time and effort by staff members of charter school authorizers around the country. NACSA extends its gratitude for their responses to its annual survey, and for their overall commitment to quality charter school authorizing.

NACSA sincerely thanks the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, and the Robertson Foundation for their support of this project and the organization.

This report was written by NACSA Director of Research and Evaluation Sean Conlan, Ph.D. in close collaboration with NACSA Vice President of Research and Evaluation Alex Medler, Ph.D. The report is based on a survey designed, conducted, and analyzed by NACSA's Research and Evaluation Division, which includes Medler, Conlan, and Policy and Research Analyst Courtney Smith.

NACSA acknowledges its entire staff for their advice and assistance with this project, as well as members of the NACSA Research Advisory Board for their invaluable input in the design and administration of the survey.



***The State of Charter School Authorizing 2011:***

***Fourth Annual Report on NACSA's Authorizer Survey*** provides an overview of the policies, practices, and characteristics of the nation's largest charter school authorizers as well as a sampling of smaller authorizing entities. It also builds upon the data presented in the first three reports on NACSA's authorizer survey and is organized around the [\*NACSA's Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing\*](#).

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to the establishment and operation of quality charter schools through responsible oversight in the public interest.



*The State of Charter School Authorizing 2011: Fourth Annual Report on NACSA's Authorizer Survey* is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.



© 2012 National Association of Charter School Authorizers

---

## Endnotes:

- 1 This analysis includes only those authorizers with at least one currently operating charter in their portfolio of schools. Thousands of districts are authorized by state law to approve applicants but have never received or approved an applicant to date. These potential authorizers are not included in our analysis until after they approve their first charter school.
- 2 For the purposes of this analysis, large authorizers are those with 10 or more charter schools in their portfolios and small authorizers are those with fewer than 10 charter schools in their portfolios.
- 3 The Nevada State Public Charter School Authority is now authorizing the charter schools previously overseen by the Nevada Department of Education.
- 4 After review, NACSA clarified its understanding and interpretation of Georgia practice. This does not reflect a change in policy or practice, but rather updated data reflecting a common treatment of similar state circumstances.
- 5 Two new ICBs with zero schools are included in the “1–5 Schools” category in Table 1.2.
- 6 Information about the distribution of charter schools across authorizer types over the past two years is available in NACSA’s 2009 and 2010 annual reports on its authorizer survey.
- 7 More information about each practice and the implementation of each practice by individual authorizers is available in NACSA’s *Index of Essential Practices* (NACSA, 2011).
- 8 Because of their small number, MUN authorizers have been omitted from the analyses presented in much of this report. More information about the practices of MUN authorizers is available in NACSA’s *Index of Essential Practices* (NACSA, 2011).
- 9 *The State of Charter School Authorizing 2010: The Third Annual Report on NACSA’s Authorizer Survey*. (NACSA, 2010).
- 10 Approval rates in 2005 and before 2003 are drawn from “Trends in Charter School Authorizing,” a report published by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation in 2005. These rates were calculated using different samples and different methods. Consequently, only tentative comparisons can be made across the earlier years. More information about application approval rates before 2003 and in 2005 can be found at: [http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2006/200606\\_trendsincharterschool/Gau%20Charter%20AuthorizerV2%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.edexcellencemedia.net/publications/2006/200606_trendsincharterschool/Gau%20Charter%20AuthorizerV2%20(2).pdf)
- 11 Unless otherwise noted, aggregate approval rates are reported in this section. Using an average obscures the impact of authorizers approving or denying large numbers of applications.
- 12 More information about closure rates during the 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 school years can be found in NACSA’s previous annual reports on its survey:  
*The State of Charter School Authorizing 2009: The Second Annual Report on NACSA’s Authorizer Survey*. (NACSA, 2010).  
*The State of Charter School Authorizing 2010: The Third Annual Report on NACSA’s Authorizer Survey*. (NACSA, 2010).
- 13 Unless otherwise noted, aggregate closure rates are reported in this section. The aggregate closure rate sums all the schools risking closure and the total number of closures by that group of schools.



© 2012 National Association of Charter School Authorizers