

ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL: 2016

THE BROKEN PROMISE OF MICHIGAN'S CHARTER SECTOR



FEBRUARY 2016



The Education Trust—Midwest

MISSION:

The **Education Trust-Midwest (ETM)** promotes high academic achievement for all Michigan students at all levels – pre-kindergarten through college. Founded in Michigan in 2010, ETM works alongside parents, educators, policymakers and community and business leaders in Michigan to transform schools and colleges into institutions that serve all students well. Lessons learned in these efforts, together with unflinching data analyses and research, shape the organization's work with the goal of closing the gaps in opportunity and achievement that consign far too many young people – especially those who are African American, Latino, American Indian or from low-income families – to lives at the margins of the American mainstream.

ETM is part of the national Education Trust, which is headquartered in Washington, D.C. Founded in 1996, The Education Trust speaks up for students, especially those whose needs and potential are often overlooked. The Education Trust is widely recognized as an unrivaled source of effective advocacy, expert analysis and testimony, concise written and spoken presentations, research and technical assistance to districts, colleges and community-based organizations. Ed Trust's California division, The Education Trust-West, has worked to close achievement gaps for more than 13 years in the state of California. Regardless of location or context, Ed Trust, Ed Trust-Midwest and Ed Trust-West maintain a relentless focus on improving the education of all students, particularly those the system traditionally has left behind.

WHAT WE DO

- **We serve as a nonpartisan source of information, data and expertise about Michigan education to Michiganders and stakeholders, including policymakers, education and business leaders, parents, community-based organizations, media partners and nonprofits.**
- **We conduct data analyses and research to identify best practices across Michigan to share and help build broader understanding of opportunity gaps and how to close them.**
- **We work alongside and in support of educators in their schools, as well as parents, to equip them with the information they need to influence policy and improve the quality of teaching and learning in Michigan's schools.**

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DISCOVERY CENTER

PHOTO: ERIK HOLLADAY

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ACCOUNTABILITY FOR ALL: 2016

BY SUNIL JOY AND AMBER ARELLANO

TODAY IN MICHIGAN, schools and educators are held accountable for performance more than ever before. Governor Rick Snyder recently signed into law a framework for new performance standards for educators. Teachers no longer receive tenure simply based on seniority; instead, tenure is now based on performance. And school districts that don't improve their lowest performing schools risk losing control of these schools, and the funding that comes along with them. But in Michigan, real accountability does not apply to all of our educational institutions. Charter school authorizers—the entities responsible for opening and overseeing new and existing charter schools—face almost no accountability for their performance. Indeed, not even the governor has the authority to shut down chronically low-performing charter authorizers in Michigan, despite the fact that authorizers serve nearly 145,000 Michigan children—and their charter schools take in more than \$1 billion taxpayer dollars annually.ⁱ

When Michigan leaders approved the opening of charter schools more than twenty years ago, it was under a simple premise: charters would produce better student achievement, especially in communities such as Detroit where local traditional schools had failed our most vulnerable students. That promise has proven to be hollow for far too many children. While some charter schools and their authorizers have lived up to their promise, they are few in number. For example, according to the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, roughly eight in 10 charters have academic achievement below the state average in reading and math.

It doesn't have to be this way. In a leading education state like Massachusetts, serious charter sector accountability has proven to be a huge difference in providing dramatically better educational outcomes—and such systems should address all of the sector's actors, from authorizers to operators to schools. For example, more than 90 percent of charter schools in Boston are actually showing stronger math learning gains than the already high-performing local traditional public schools.ⁱⁱ That is truly remarkable, given that Boston is among the top performing urban districts in the country—according to the national assessment—and the state's public schools are among the highest-achieving in the world.

In Michigan's current charter landscape, the enormous responsibility of authorizing has largely been taken for granted. Indeed, much as teacher tenure was once seen as an entitlement, the role of charter authorizer is now seen as an entitlement. This must change. Student achievement

matters in the lives of children: it dictates whether they read successfully, go to college, receive scholarships and take advantage of countless other opportunities. Student learning outcomes need to matter for Michigan authorizers, too.

To be sure, The Education Trust-Midwest (ETM) supports all high quality public schools—regardless of governance. We have celebrated both high-achieving traditional and charter schools in our state. We continue to do so in this report—and we'll keep doing it. Just as there are some terrific teachers and leaders in traditional public schools, there are terrific teachers and leaders in charter schools doing the hard work of closing opportunity and achievement gaps. Indeed, we need more high-performing schools in Michigan, regardless of governance.

In this report, ETM proposes Michigan's first performance-based charter authorizer accountability system. We also update our 2015 scorecard for charter authorizers.ⁱⁱⁱ Our analysis includes 16 authorizers, who together represent 95 percent of charter students statewide. Through increased scrutiny of authorizer performance, we seek to inform an honest dialogue about authorizer performance. This updated scorecard follows the same methodology and commitment to transparency as 2015. However, given that Michigan is transitioning to a new assessment system with higher standards, our 2016 authorizer scorecard does not incorporate new state accountability data. Rather, the updated scorecard incorporates recent authorizer decision-making about school openings and closings. Still, there is both good and unpleasant news.

The good news:

- The data suggest efforts to bring greater public scrutiny and transparency to authorizer performance are helping to marginally improve authorizer practices.
- Eastern Michigan University improved its scorecard grade by closing a poor-performing school, moving to a "D" grade from an "F" grade. Oakland University improved its overall score and moved to a "C" grade from a "D" grade when it opened a new school that met our minimum standard.
- In total, six authorizers received "A" grades. Among them, Washtenaw Community College, Washtenaw Intermediate School District and Grand Rapids Public Schools.

- Some of Michigan’s largest public universities and colleges received “B” grades. These “B” authorizers are Lake Superior State University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University and Bay Mills Community College. Additionally, a significant proportion of school openings in 2015-16 were by Grand Valley State University.

The bad news:

- Michigan still has a very serious authorizer performance problem. Four authorizers received a “D” or “F” grade. These authorizers are Detroit Public Schools, Saginaw Valley State University, Eastern Michigan University and Northern Michigan University. More than 20,000 students attend schools overseen by these authorizers. Some of their schools are among the lowest performing schools in the state—with devastatingly low academic outcomes.
- About 20 percent of Michigan charter school openings between fall 2011 and 2015 were by “D” and “F” authorizers.
- While some poor-performing charter schools closed recently, other authorizers’ failing charter schools continue to operate for years. This includes schools like Cesar Chavez Academy Elementary of southwest Detroit. Cesar Chavez Academy Elementary Latino students are performing at lower levels than Latino students in Detroit Public Schools (DPS)—one of the worst performing urban districts nationwide—according to the state’s 2013-14 accountability scorecard for both math and reading. According to the state’s accountability rankings from 2013-14, 98 percent of Michigan public schools ranked above this school.

By committing to strong accountability from the very beginning, Massachusetts ensured only stellar charter schools opened and thrived. Michigan went in the opposite direction on accountability, and **the state has learned a hard lesson: school choice alone does not produce high-achieving public schools.** Twenty years of data has shown that the overall charter sector’s impact on student outcomes too often has fallen far short in high-poverty communities such as Detroit, where charter schools—many of them low-performing—make up a significant portion of the public school infrastructure. **If we are ever to reach the status of a top ten education state like Massachusetts—a state that competes with the highest performing countries across the globe—we need top ten education state policies, including a rigorous accountability system throughout the charter sector.**

In just a few years, we believe this proposed performance-based charter accountability system will dramatically transform the charter sector as we know it—fundamentally shifting authorizing authority from an entitlement to a true privilege. Authorizing should be a privilege of serving Michigan students that should be earned and maintained by demonstrated high achievement and performance.

Moreover, a performance-based accountability system will be of utmost importance for high-poverty and low-achieving communities like Detroit. This critical need for accountability has been highlighted by major business and civic leaders, including those leading the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren.

Specifically, we recommend a statewide charter accountability system incorporating the following principles:

1. Require all existing and new authorizers to complete a rigorous application process prior to becoming—or remaining—a charter authorizer;
2. Set rigorous standards for charter school openings, renewals and expansions;
3. Hold authorizers accountable for their schools’ performance, based on student learning outcomes;
4. Require full transparency for all authorizers, their schools and operators; and
5. Provide special authority for high-challenge jurisdictions.

Though new state policies and laws will be needed to make clear the authority to raise the quality of the charter sector overall, there’s no need for the Michigan Department of Education or Superintendent of Public Instruction to wait for legislation to act. Indeed, the state superintendent can use his authority now to suspend poor-performing authorizers. The state superintendent should act promptly, as students and their families have waited long enough.

Serious charter sector accountability will one day ensure that the original promise of charter schools—to provide the high-quality education which many Michigan students desperately need—is actually fulfilled.

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MICHIGAN CHARTER SCHOOLS: A BROKEN PROMISE



UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY
SCIENCE & MATH HIGH SCHOOL

PHOTO: MARISSA GAWEL

IN THE EARLY 1990s, Michigan charter leaders made a bold promise to Michiganders. In return for greater flexibility and less oversight, they promised their schools would provide better, more innovative, higher-performing schools than what was available in traditional public schools, especially in impoverished communities like Detroit, Flint and Pontiac. In return for such high performance, public tax dollars would be provided to operators—the for-profit or nonprofit entities that run daily school functions—to open charter schools statewide. Thus, the Michigan charter movement was born.

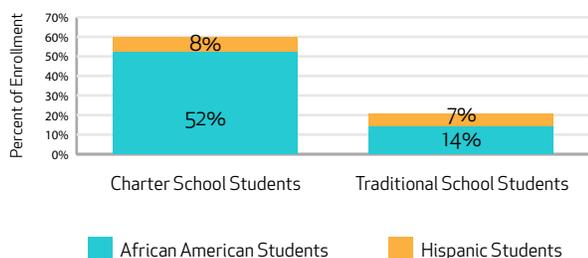
Charter schools are public schools, but they are different in

many ways. Unlike traditional schools, charter schools aren't governed by a district superintendent and elected school board. Also, unlike traditional public schools, charter schools can contract with an operator to run all of their major school functions. Michigan is unusual for its very high percentage of charter schools run by for-profit operators, with about 80 percent of charter schools run by for-profits.^{iv}

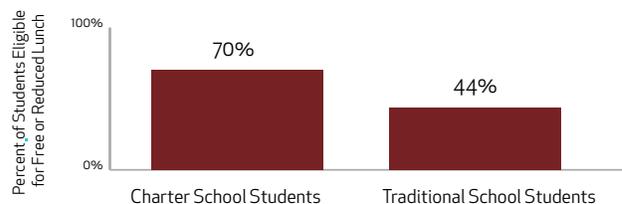
To be clear, The Education Trust-Midwest supports high-performing public schools of all kinds, including charter schools. We believe *all* children deserve and need access to high-quality public schools—regardless of who runs that school.

Comparing Charter and Traditional Schools: Michigan's Charter School Student Population is Predominantly Made Up of Low-Income Students and Students of Color

Most Charter School Students are Students of Color
2014-15



Most Charter School Students are Low-Income
2014-15



Source: CEPI Educational Entity Master (EEM), CEPI Public Head Count

Early proponents were right that charters would serve mostly low-income students and students of color. Today, 70 percent of Michigan's charter students are low-income and about 60 percent are African American or Latino. We've also seen a 75 percent growth in charter enrollment since 2004-05, centered largely in Michigan's impoverished communities.^v

Schools such as Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center and Detroit Merit Charter Academy show that poverty need not determine destiny. These schools are performing at high levels, despite the fact that many of their students come from low-income households. Detroit's University Preparatory Science & Math High School is another case in point: it is a top high school for math improvement statewide. Years of focus on strong instruction and developing the capacity of the school's teachers have paid off for University Preparatory



CAN MICHIGAN HOLD CHARTER AUTHORIZERS ACCOUNTABLE?

MANY WONDER WHAT the exact role and power of the state is when it comes to charter authorizer accountability, for good reason. The state's power is severely restricted, and even its limited authority is contested.

What's clear is this: no one, including the governor and state superintendent, has the authority to *revoke* a chronically low-performing authorizer's ability to open and expand public schools in Michigan, despite the fact that such authorizers receive millions of taxpayers' dollars annually. Michigan lacks a clear regulatory framework or law that outlines performance standards for authorizers and the consequences for not meeting them.

At this time, the state's authority is limited to *suspending* authorizers for not engaging in "appropriate continuing oversight," according to the Michigan Revised School Code. The law goes on to say that any new school contracts issued during a suspension period are void. The state superintendent is responsible for taking action on these suspensions.¹

In 2014 for the first time, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) and state superintendent attempted to use this limited authority to hold authorizers accountable for their performance. The MDE put 11 authorizers on an "at-risk of suspension" list for not engaging in proper transparency, financial or academic practices, and promised to take further action soon.² The MDE's announcement was met with fierce criticism by Michigan charter school organizations.

Some Michigan public universities—which are the most powerful authorizers in the state—argue the MDE's authority and process for suspension are unclear. They also contend they are constitutionally autonomous from state oversight and accountability because the Michigan constitution gives public university boards full authority to supervise their institutions.³

More than a year later, the MDE still has not taken steps to suspend authorizers with troubling performance problems. Meanwhile, a coalition organized by a group of Detroit leaders and institutions has called on the Michigan Legislature and the governor to adopt legislation that would allow Detroit to put into place a city-wide school accountability system, including for charter schools.

Real accountability must address all of the charter sector's actors, from authorizers to operators to schools. We share recommendations for such a framework in the latter portion of this report.

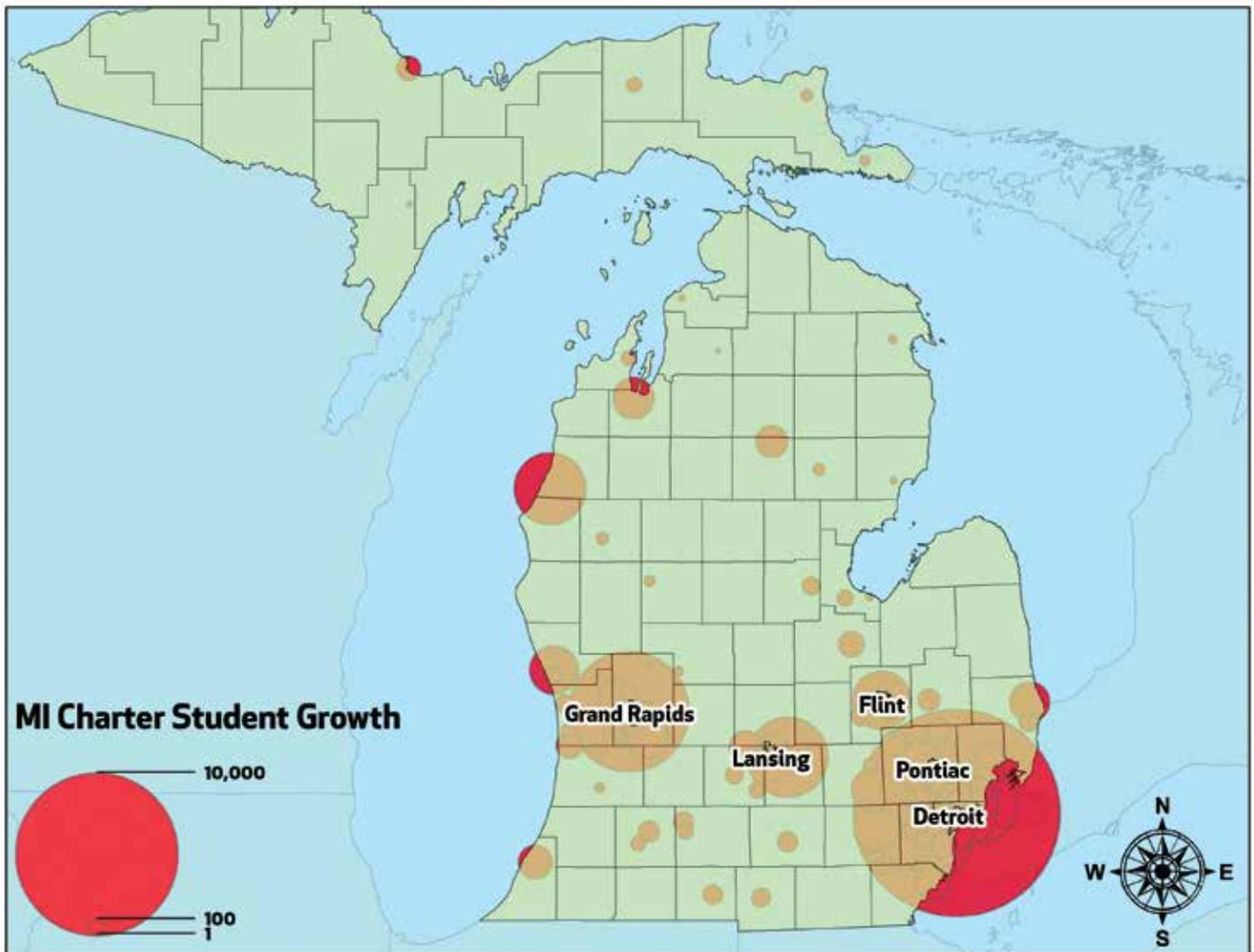
¹ MCL §380.502

² Michigan Department of Education, "11 Authorizers Put 'At Risk of Suspension' to Create Future Charter Schools," August 11, 2014. http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-6530_6526_6551-334791--,00.html

³ Richard McLellan, "Update Notes on State Superintendent Suspending Power of an Authorizing Body to Issue New Charter School Contracts," August 14, 2014. <http://tinyurl.com/lD3h3gt>

Charter Student Enrollment has Grown by 75% in Last Decade, Particularly in the State's Most Impoverished Communities

Michigan Charter Student Growth 2004-05 to 2014-15



Note: Each colored sphere represents the growth in the number of charter school students between 2004-05 and 2014-15.
Source: CEPI Educational Entity Master (EEM), CEPI Public Head Count, United States Census Bureau TIGER Data

Science & Math High School—and the students that it serves.

Unfortunately for Michigan students and their families, charter leaders largely were wrong when they predicted Michigan charter schools would have better student achievement outcomes. Twenty-plus years of charter schools have not produced the lofty student outcomes promised. In truth, high-performing charter schools such as University Preparatory Science & Math High School are the minority in Michigan.

There are a number of methods and sources to compare the academic outcomes of Michigan students in charter

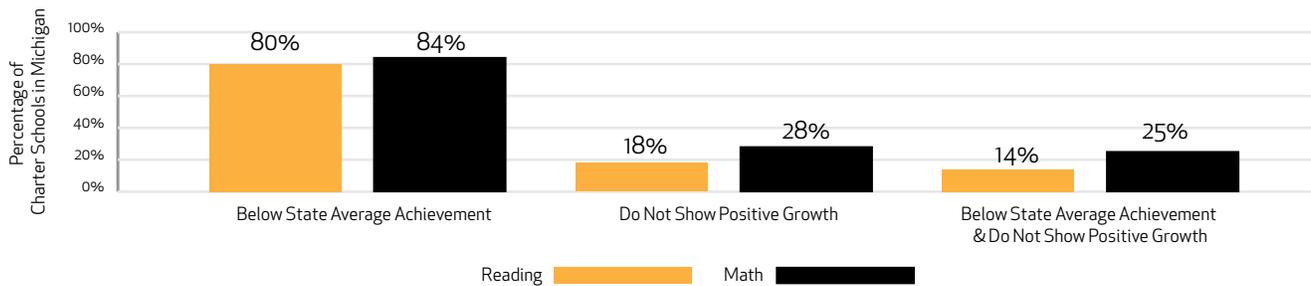
schools with those who attend traditional public schools. We use many of them in this report, including MEAP state assessment data, research conducted by Stanford University and national assessment data.

One way to measure charter academic outcomes is to look at achievement on the state assessment across Michigan districts. Specifically, we look at how charter districts with significant African American populations compare to Detroit Public Schools (DPS).¹ For African American students, according to 2013 state assessment data for eighth grade math, two-thirds of Michigan charter districts perform below even DPS. That is truly devastating, given that DPS is one of

Most Michigan Charters Have Lower Academic Achievement than the State Average

Stanford University CREDO Research Center Reveals the Underperformance of Michigan's Charter Sector:

80% of charters in reading and 84% of charters in math have academic achievement below the state average



Note: The 50th percentile indicates statewide average performance for all public school students (traditional and charter). Growth comparisons are based on students with similar demographic data across charter and traditional public schools (virtual twins). Data is taken from the 2010 and 2011 academic years.

Source: "Charter School Performance in Michigan," Stanford University Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013. https://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/MI_report_2012_FINAL_1_11_2013_no_watermark.pdf

the worst performing urban districts nationwide, according to the national assessment.² Meanwhile, according to state accountability data, for 2013-14, of the charter schools rated by the state, nearly half ranked in the bottom quarter of all schools statewide. This means about 75 percent of *all public schools* (both charter and traditional) performed better.

Another method is to look at students with similar backgrounds. According to the Center for Research on Education Outcomes (CREDO) at Stanford University, roughly 80 percent of charters have academic achievement below the state average in reading and math.^{vi} This is particularly significant given that Michigan overall has seen significant drops in achievement over the last decade, according to the national assessment.^{vii}

Proponents of unrestricted charter school growth in Michigan argue that growth alone—not achievement—should matter when it comes to measuring school performance. They often point to Stanford University research that found only 18 percent of charter schools in Michigan in reading and 28 percent in math do not show positive growth. While growth is important and should be considered, ultimately children are held accountable for their overall achievement in society. College admissions, scholarship committees, employers and others make decisions based on whether a young person performs—not simply if he or she has grown in learning. Achievement matters for students—and it should matter for charter schools, operators and authorizers, too.³

Even the U.S. Department of Education—which has poured tens of millions of dollars into charter schools in recent

years—finds Michigan's charter sector riddled with low performance. A review of Michigan's 2015 federal charter school grant application by expert external reviewers cited an "unreasonably high" representation of Michigan charters among the state's "priority" schools list—a designation for the state's worst performing five percent of public schools. Not only did they find the percentage of "priority" charter schools unusually high, they found it troubling that the number of "priority" charter schools actually doubled between 2010 and 2014. Reviewers also cited very low graduation rates for certain groups of charter students, in particular low-income students, English language learners and students with disabilities.^{viii} This federal grant would have supported the expansion of new charter schools within the state. Needless to say, Michigan did not receive it.

A leading education state like Massachusetts shows that it doesn't have to be this way. When done right, the charter

1 Charter districts in Michigan can either include one charter school or a network of charter schools.

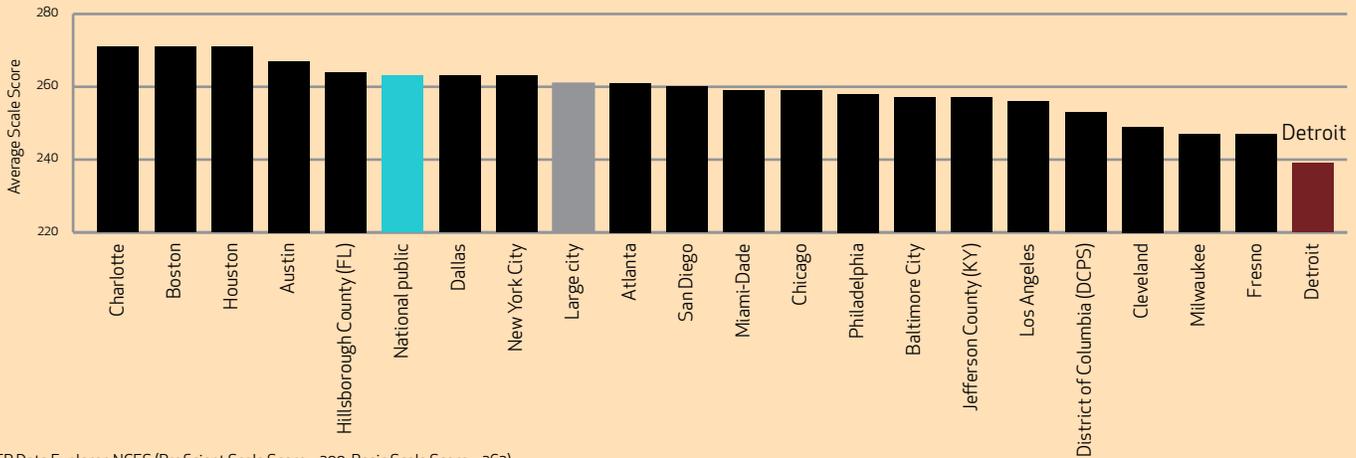
2 The NAEP assessment is the only nationally representative and continuing assessment of student achievement in the country. It is considered the "gold standard" of assessments. National Assessment of Educational Progress, Nation's Report Card, 2015. <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/>

3 Stanford University's 2013 and 2015 CREDO studies found that the majority of Michigan and Detroit charter students have greater learning gains in both math and reading compared to their traditional school counterparts. Digging deeper, CREDO's 2013 study found that the majority of charter schools in Michigan actually perform the same as traditional public schools in reading and math. The 2015 CREDO study found that 51% of Detroit charter schools show greater learning gains than their traditional public school counterparts in reading. What this reveals is that the academic gains from charter schools aren't being shared by all students. Higher performing charter students are concentrated in fewer schools, while most charter schools are not producing strong results. Simply put, the bar of "better than Detroit"—is not something worth celebrating. To learn more, please view our CREDO fact sheet at: edtrustmidwest.org

More than 20 years ago, Michigan's first charter schools opened with the promise of offering a better alternative to traditional school districts. However, many have **FAILED** to live up to this promise...

Consider: Detroit Public Schools Ranks Last in the Nation in 8th Grade Math Scores among African American Students

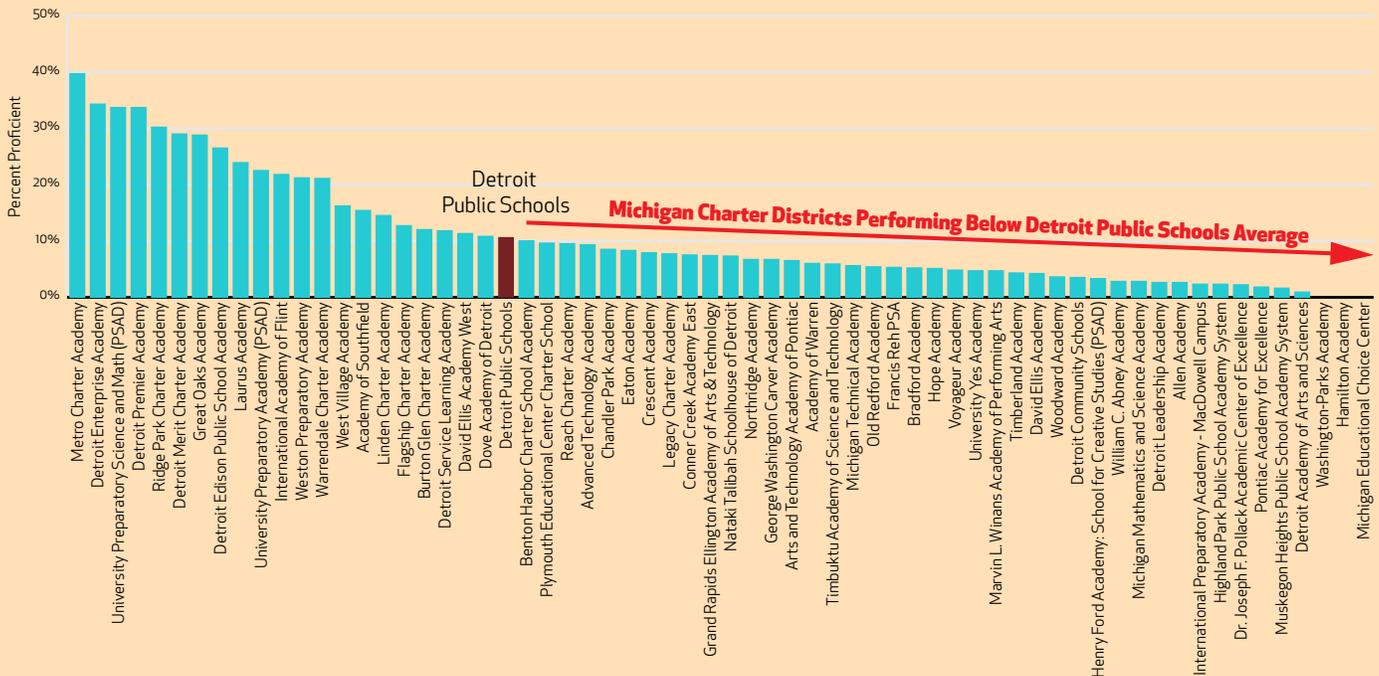
Grade 8 – NAEP Math (2013)
African American Students



Source: NAEP Data Explorer, NCES (Proficient Scale Score = 299; Basic Scale Score = 262)

The Majority of Charter Districts Statewide (67%) Perform **WORSE** than Detroit Public Schools among African American Students in 8th Grade Math

Grade 8 – MEAP Math (2013)
African American Students



Note: Data above represents all charter districts statewide reporting African American proficiency rates in grade 8 MEAP math for 2013. Only charter districts where African American students comprise 50% or more of the total enrollment are included.

Source: MDE MEAP Gap Analysis, CEPI Educational Entity Master (EEM), CEPI Public Head Count

sector can indeed provide students a high-quality education for students who most need it.

Consider, charter academic growth in Massachusetts. When looking just at charter and traditional schools in the city of Boston, Stanford researchers found that more than 90 percent of Boston charters have better learning gains than Boston traditional public schools in math.^{ix}

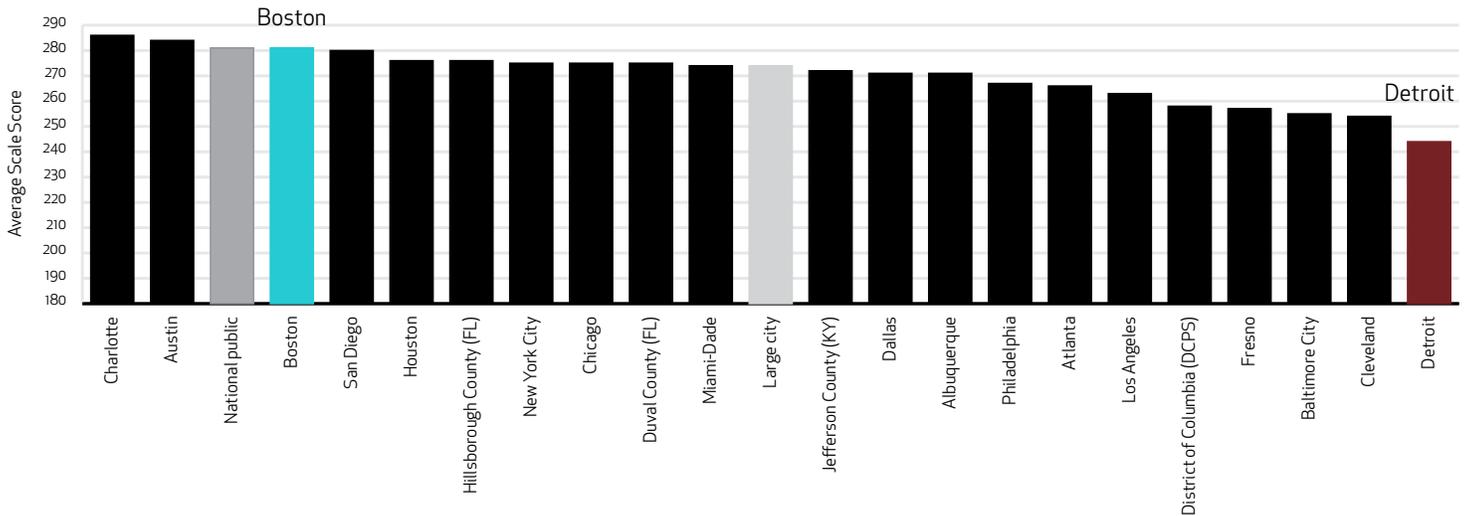
What makes this significant is that Boston's schools rank near the top of the country among urban districts, while

Detroit ranks at the bottom.^x In other words, despite the very high academic bar set in Massachusetts and Boston, their local charter schools are still showing strong gains compared to local traditional schools. In contrast, the Michigan performance bar is nowhere near Massachusetts. And in Detroit, the bar actually can't get much lower.^{xi} The bar of "better than Detroit" is simply not worth celebrating.

The story is clear: far too many charter schools in Michigan are not producing the outcomes Michigan students need and deserve.

Boston Public Schools Far Outperform Detroit Public Schools on the National Assessment

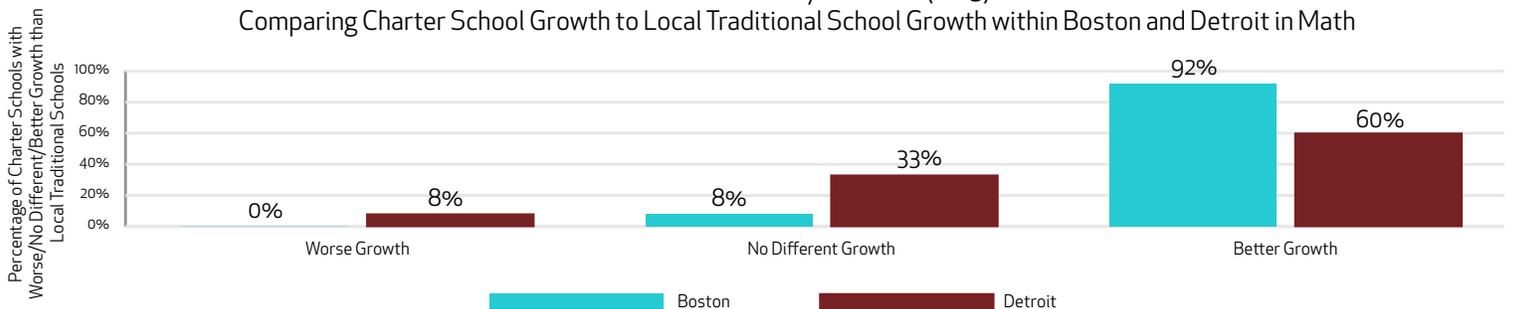
Grade 8 – NAEP Math (2015)
All Students



Source: NAEP Data Explorer, NCES (Proficient Scale Score = 299; Basic Scale Score = 262)

Despite the High Bar, Boston Charters Have Shown Substantial Learning Gains Compared to Boston Traditional Public Schools

Stanford University – CREDO (2015)
Comparing Charter School Growth to Local Traditional School Growth within Boston and Detroit in Math



Note: Total percentages may be greater than 100 due to rounding.

Source: "Urban Charter School Study Report on 41 Regions," Stanford University Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2015. <https://urbancharter.stanford.edu/download/Urban%20Charter%20School%20Study%20Report%20on%2041%20Regions.pdf>

THE NEED FOR REAL CHARTER AUTHORIZER ACCOUNTABILITY



PHOTO: MARISSA GAWEL

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LIKE MICHIGAN, Massachusetts opened its doors to charters in the 1990s. But the two states couldn't be more dissimilar when it comes to academic outcomes. What is behind the differences in performance between Massachusetts and Michigan?

One of the most important factors is state leadership and the role of public policy. Unlike Massachusetts, when Michigan opened its doors to charter schools, the state did not have an unrelenting commitment to accountability—nor the regulatory and legal framework that Massachusetts used to ensure only high-caliber schools opened in its state. Since then, and despite data that has shown the need for change, Michigan leaders have not acted to fix this problem. Rather, they have exacerbated the problem. In 2011, under pressure from state charter organizations—and despite vocal objections from education advocates across the state—the Michigan Legislature voted to lift the cap on the number of charter schools without putting into place performance standards, stronger oversight and other regulations to guide the sector to best serve children.^{xiii}

Michigan's lack of oversight is compounded by differences in its authorizer landscape. Currently, Michigan has about forty charter authorizers in the state—one of the highest numbers in the country—making it much more difficult to regulate for quality. In contrast, in Massachusetts, the state board of education is the sole authorizer.

“CHARTER AUTHORIZERS
ARE THE GATEKEEPERS FOR
NEW SCHOOL OPENINGS.
AUTHORIZERS DECIDE WHICH
SCHOOLS WILL OPEN, WHERE
THEY WILL OPERATE AND FOR
HOW LONG...”

Charter authorizers include public universities and colleges, local school districts and intermediate school districts in Michigan. The state's three largest authorizers—Central Michigan University, Grand Valley State University and Bay Mills Community College—oversee the education of roughly 85,000 of the nearly 145,000 charter students statewide. To put this number in perspective, the state's largest district—Detroit Public Schools—enrolled almost 48,000 students in 2014-15.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CHARTER SCHOOL POLICY IN MICHIGAN

1980s

- Charter public school concept first introduced nationally.



1991

- Minnesota passes first charter school law in nation.



1993

- Michigan passes initial charter school law, with little emphasis on accountability.

1994

- First charter schools open in Michigan.



1997

- Michigan Supreme Court upholds constitutionality of charter schools.



2003

- Bill passes allowing the opening of 15 charter "urban high school academies" in Detroit.



2013

- The Education Trust-Midwest report, "Invest in What Works," reports that 73 percent of charter schools performed below the average public school in 2012, according to state data.
- Stanford University report shows that roughly 80% of Michigan charters in reading and math have academic achievement below the state average.



2012

- Bill passes expanding cyber school enrollment.

2011

- Bill passes removing the total "cap" on university-authorized charter schools, again with little accountability for charter school authorizers. The previous cap was 150 total combined contracts for all public universities.

2010

- Michigan opens first online "cyber" charter school.



2007

- 100,000 students attend Michigan charter schools.



2014

- *Detroit Free Press* releases special report finding a severe lack of accountability and transparency in the charter sector.
- Michigan's state superintendent places 11 authorizers on "at-risk" for suspension list--no further action is taken.
- A group of Detroit leaders form the Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren, aimed at improving Detroit's public education system.



2015

- Nearly 145,000 students attend Michigan charter schools.
- 43 states and District of Columbia have charter school laws.



Charter authorizers have enormous power—and make a huge impact on students. While charter authorizers’ duties don’t include the direct instruction of students, they do have important responsibilities:

- Charter authorizers are the gatekeepers for new school openings. Authorizers decide which charter schools will open, where they will operate and for how long they will operate;
- Authorizers determine academic progress goals for their schools and whether these goals are being met;
- Lastly, authorizers should intervene when their schools do not meet academic goals or expectations, and can close schools that fail to meet expectations.

In total, Michigan taxpayers spend about \$1 billion annually on charter schools. Of that money, charter authorizers receive

about \$30 million annually, regardless of how well their school portfolios perform—or three percent of school aid funding from each charter school that they authorize and oversee.

To learn more about the state’s authority in holding charter authorizers accountable for their work and performance, please see the sidebar on page 7.

The consequences of Michigan’s lack of state charter accountability have a tremendous impact on the future of students, their families and Michigan communities. For instance, if a charter authorizer does not have a rigorous application process for new school openings or lacks a consistent and effective model of oversight, there is nothing preventing a poor-performing school from opening and providing inadequate learning opportunities—for years on end. And with few consequences for poor authorizer decision-making, there is little incentive for authorizers to improve.



PHOTO: AMY SACKA

MICHIGAN'S CHARTER SCHOOL GOVERNANCE SYSTEM

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION (MDE)

While in 2014, the last state superintendent threatened to use his limited authority to try to address problems with authorizers, the superintendent cannot revoke an authorizer's authority entirely (the superintendent's authority is referred to in the Michigan Revised School Code, MCL 380.502-507).



CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

Authorizers have the sole responsibility for approving new charter schools to open in Michigan. They also monitor the performance of schools in their portfolio and are charged with intervening when schools are chronically failing.

There are about **40** active authorizers in Michigan.

Any public higher education institution, traditional public school district or intermediate district can authorize charters in Michigan, though not all of them do.

Michigan currently has **NO MEANINGFUL ACCOUNTABILITY** for authorizers.

The Governor's Office has **NO FORMAL AUTHORITY** to hold charter authorizers accountable.



CHARTER OPERATORS

Charter operators are involved in running the **DAILY OPERATIONS** of charter schools in Michigan, including **HIRING TEACHERS, DETERMINING CURRICULUM** and **PURCHASING MATERIALS**. In order for a charter operator to open a school or expand in Michigan, a charter authorizer must approve it. Operators can be for-profit management companies or nonprofit organizations. In rare cases, charters are "self-managed," which means a school's local board or staff operates the school.

In Michigan, there are roughly **90 OPERATORS**.

It is estimated that 80% of charter schools in Michigan are run by for-profit operators.



CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools are **PUBLIC SCHOOLS** that are free from some of the constraints of traditional public schools. For instance, they typically employ non-unionized teachers.

Charter schools are included in the **STATE SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM**, though authorizers are not.

RATING CHARTER AUTHORIZERS: A FAIR AND TRANSPARENT SCORECARD



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PHOTO: MARISSA GAWEL

In our 2015 report, *Accountability for All: The Need for Real Charter Authorizer Accountability in Michigan*, we developed Michigan’s first scorecard of authorizer performance.^{xiii} A fair and transparent scorecard for rating charter authorizer decision-making, it rated authorizers on whether their decisions were producing better quality schooling than traditional public schools—the original premise under which charters opened in the state. Through increased scrutiny of authorizer performance, we also wanted to help inform an honest dialogue on charter data statewide. This updated scorecard follows the same methodology and commitment to transparency. However, given that Michigan is transitioning to a new state assessment system with higher standards, our 2016 authorizer scorecard does not incorporate new state accountability data.

To learn more about our 2016 scorecard methodology, please see the sidebar on page 17.

In rating authorizers on our scorecard, we focus on three primary areas of charter authorizer decision-making:

1. **Authorizer decisions regarding opening of new schools:** *Is the authorizer approving high-performing charter operator openings?*
2. **Authorizer decisions regarding the schools it currently authorizes:** *Is the authorizer overseeing a portfolio of schools that is **as good as, or better than**, other school options available to parents?*

3. **Authorizer decisions regarding improvement of their worst performing schools:** *Is the authorizer improving its chronically failing schools?*

To help answer these three questions for each authorizer, we apply a two-step “as good or better” test to each authorizer’s schools, using the most recent years of available state academic accountability data (2011-12 through 2013-14). This is a simple test of academic performance:

1. Does the charter authorizer’s school have academic **improvement** in math and reading **as good as, or better than**, the state and the local district where most students reside?

OR

1. Does the charter authorizer’s school perform in the **top half of the state overall?**

If a school is able to meet **either** of these requirements, the charter authorizer’s school meets our “as good or better” test. If a school fails both of these requirements for **three consecutive academic years**, we consider this school unacceptable—or failing our minimum quality standard. Only schools that fail the “as good or better” test for **three consecutive academic years** are considered failing the scorecard’s minimum quality standard.

Charter school authorizers then earn an “A to F” ranking,

based on the three main questions posed. Grades are determined using the following scale:

- “A” charter authorizers are making good authorizing decisions at least 90 percent of the time.
- “B” charter authorizers are making good decisions at least 80 percent of the time.
- “C” charter authorizers are making good decisions at least 70 percent of the time.
- “D” charter authorizers are making good decisions at least 50 percent of the time.
- “F” charter authorizers are making good decisions less than 50 percent of the time.

This is a fair and transparent methodology in several ways:

- First, it only judges authorizers on these three criteria—the main decisions authorizers are responsible for making.
- Second, given that charter school students primarily draw from our highest-poverty communities, where academic achievement is generally lower, **we prioritize academic improvement** instead of focusing solely on achievement.
- Finally, we **exclude** schools that recently converted from

UPDATES TO 2016 AUTHORIZER SCORECARD METHODOLOGY

OUR 2016 SCORECARD methodology remains largely the same as 2015. However, there are some updates worth noting. First, because Michigan transitioned from the old MEAP state assessment to a new assessment based on career- and college-ready standards, the M-STEP, Michigan did not release new state accountability data for 2014-15. **Therefore, our 2016 authorizer scorecard does not incorporate new state accountability data and we do not report M-STEP results.**

Instead, the scorecard incorporates recent authorizer decision-making related to new school openings and closings as of fall 2015. Understanding authorizers’ recent decisions can help us determine whether or not these decisions were made in the best interest of students.

traditional public, along with schools that serve atypical populations like strict discipline academies. Schools that lack sufficient data are also excluded.

To get an in-depth understanding of our methodology, including our technical appendix and the 2015 scorecard results, please visit: edtrustmidwest.org



GRAND RAPIDS CHILD DISCOVERY CENTER

PHOTO: ERIK HOLLADAY

UPDATED SCORECARD RESULTS: SOME GREAT, MANY LOW-PERFORMING AUTHORIZERS



UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY
SCIENCE & MATH HIGH SCHOOL

PHOTO: MARISSA GAWEL

THE FINDINGS from our updated charter authorizer scorecard are sobering. We see a small number of top-performers, several in the middle and some authorizers that are outright pitiful. In total, 16 Michigan authorizers had sufficient data to be included in the scorecard. These 16 authorizers represent 95 percent of the roughly 145,000 charter students statewide.

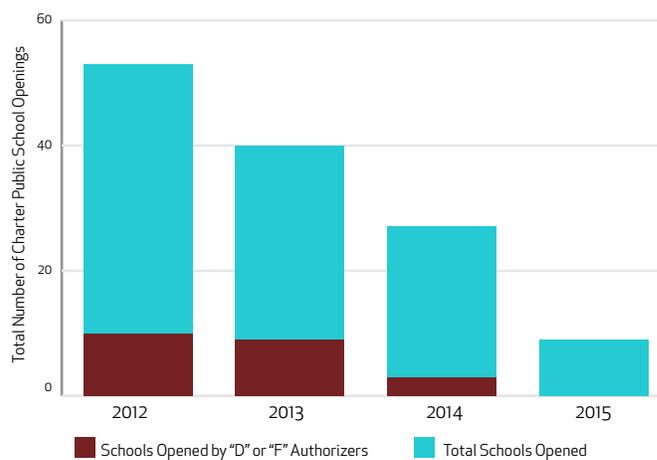
We did find, however, that for 2015-16, charter school authorizers opened the fewest new schools since the 2011 lift in the charter cap. In fact, fewer than 10 new charter schools opened in fall 2015, or about twenty fewer than 2014. Moreover, a significant proportion of school openings in 2015-16 were by a single “B” authorizer, Grand Valley State University (GVSU). The data suggest that efforts to bring greater public scrutiny and transparency to authorizer performance are helping to marginally improve student outcomes and authorizer practices, at least in the short-term.

Nevertheless, it is still true that roughly 20 percent of Michigan charter school openings between fall 2011 and fall 2015 were by “D” and “F” authorizers. This includes several state public universities: Saginaw Valley State University, Eastern Michigan University and Northern Michigan University. There is no justification for authorizers to open or expand new charters when their current school portfolio is in need of dramatic improvement.

And while it is true that some poor-performing schools closed recently, several others still continue to operate.

Charter School Openings by “D” and “F” Authorizers

Fall 2012-15 Charter School Openings



Source: CEPI Educational Entity Master (EEM), CEPI Non-Resident Student, MDE Top-to-Bottom, MDE Public School Academy (PSA) Updates

OUR UPDATED FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- Eastern Michigan University **IMPROVED ITS SCORECARD GRADE** by closing a poor-performing school. Oakland University improved its overall score when it opened a new school with an operator that met our minimum standard—New Paradigm for Education.
- **SIX AUTHORIZERS** received an “A” grade. While this number of authorizers may seem large, it actually

represents only two percent of all charter students statewide.

- **FOUR AUTHORIZERS** received a “B” grade. “B” authorizers represent roughly half of all charter students statewide.
- The remaining **SIX AUTHORIZERS** received a “C” or below.
- In total, **16 PERCENT** of charter students attend schools overseen by “D” and “F” authorizers. This accounts for more than 20,000 students. To put that into perspective, if we were to combine all of the students overseen by “D” and “F” charter authorizers into a single school district, that district would be the third largest in the state. Undoubtedly, the impact of such poor authorizing decision-making has a huge impact for students, particularly our most vulnerable students.

To provide further context around each authorizer’s score, below we highlight the findings by authorizer.

TOP-PERFORMING “A” & “B” AUTHORIZERS

- **Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD)** received an “A” grade on our 2016 scorecard. WISD is unusual in that it only has one school, which it opened in 1995. According to its leaders, WISD has turned away countless charter school applicants rather than lowering their academic bar. Its only school, Honey Creek Community School of Ann Arbor, consistently ranks near the top of all public schools statewide. According to the 2013-14 accountability scorecard, 96 percent of Honey Creek students were proficient in reading.
- Another “A” authorizer, **Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS)**, has a similar approach, authorizing only one school—Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center. Just a few years ago, Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center was one of the worst performing schools statewide, but has since seen some of the largest learning gains of any public school statewide. Without a doubt, some of these gains can be attributed to the strong support services like professional development and evaluations provided directly by its authorizer. This also shows the potential of strong authorizers, not only in opening great schools, but improving those that need attention.
- Some of our state’s largest authorizers received a “B” grade overall. Among them: **Lake Superior State**

University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University and Bay Mills Community College.

As one of the largest authorizers in the state, Grand Valley State University’s schools include a number run by the high-performing operator Detroit 90/90. This includes University Preparatory Science & Math High School of Detroit, one of the top high schools for academic improvement in math statewide in 2013-14. Another top performer in Grand Valley State University’s portfolio is Detroit Merit Charter Academy.^{xiv} At this K-8 school in Detroit—which is almost exclusively composed of low-income students—88 percent of students read at grade level or above in 2013-14. Both schools were also named “reward” schools in 2013-14 by the state, which distinguishes them as the top public schools in Michigan. Finally, although charter school openings in general were significantly lower in fall 2015 than previous years, it is also good news that the single authorizer with the most openings was **Grand Valley State University**.

To learn more about University Preparatory Science & Math High School, please see the sidebar on page 26.

- A word of caution: even our “B” authorizers have room for improvement. An example of this is Joy Preparatory Academy (Grades 3-8) and Allen Academy, both in Detroit, and both authorized by **Ferris State University**. Opened over a decade ago, these schools ranked slightly above the bottom 10 percent of schools statewide in 2013-14, while also failing our minimum quality standard over three academic years. This indicates that even our best authorizers need to be held accountable for their schools’ performance.

MEDIOCRE “C” AUTHORIZERS

- Enrolling about 30,000 students or roughly one out of every five charter students statewide, **Central Michigan University’s (CMU)** decision making is of immense significance for students. CMU is unique in that it has authorized some of Michigan’s top public schools—and some of the very worst. Take, for example, Morey Montessori Public School Academy in tiny Shepherd, Michigan, just south of Mt. Pleasant. The school has a large low-income population, yet ranked well above the state average in both 2013 and 2014, including significantly higher reading improvement than the state in 2014. Another high-performer is Canton Charter Academy located in Canton, Michigan, where roughly 90 percent of students are proficient in math, according to the 2013-14 state accountability scorecard.

2016 ETM CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER RESULTS

Letter Grade ¹	Charter School Authorizer ²	Is the authorizer approving high-performing charter operator openings? ³	Is the authorizer overseeing a portfolio of schools that is as good as, or better than, other school options available to parents? ⁴	Is the authorizer improving its chronically failing schools? ⁵	Average Score ⁶
A	Washtenaw Community College Total Schools: 17	-	100.0	100.0	100.0
A	Washtenaw ISD Total Schools: 1	-	100.0	100.0	100.0
A	Grand Rapids Public Schools Total Schools: 1	-	100.0	100.0	100.0
A	Wayne RESA Total Schools: 7	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
A	Hillsdale ISD Total Schools: 2	-	100.0	100.0	100.0
A	Macomb ISD Total Schools: 1	-	100.0	100.0	100.0
B	Lake Superior State University Total Schools: 30	88.5	71.4	100.0	86.6
B	Ferris State University Total Schools: 30	100.0	56.3	100.0	85.4
B	Grand Valley State University Total Schools: 67	86.2	63.9	100.0	83.4
B	Bay Mills Community College Total Schools: 47	80.0	75.0	85.7	80.2
C	Central Michigan University Total Schools: 72	90.0	68.8	60.0	72.9
C	Oakland University Total Schools: 11	66.7	50.0	100.0	72.2
D	Detroit Public Schools Total Schools: 14	83.3	50.0	50.0	61.1
D	Saginaw Valley State University Total Schools: 31	50.0	40.0	66.7	52.2
D	Eastern Michigan University Total Schools: 11	66.7	12.5	75.0	51.4
F	Northern Michigan University Total Schools: 10	60.0	14.3	0.0	24.8

¹Letter grades are as follows: A: 90-100, B: 80-89, C: 70-79, D: 50-69, F: 0-49.

²Charter school authorizers are the only entities in the state responsible for opening and overseeing charter public schools in Michigan.

³This score represents the percentage of schools the authorizer opened from fall 2011 to fall 2015 that were managed by operators that met a statewide minimum quality standard over three years (between 2011-12 and 2013-14). An operator did not meet our statewide minimum quality standard if more than half of its schools failed a statewide minimum quality standard for three consecutive academic years.

⁴This score represents the percentage of an authorizer's current schools that met a statewide minimum quality standard over three consecutive academic years, 2011-12 through 2013-14.

⁵This score represents the percentage of an authorizer's schools that were among the state's bottom five percent of lowest-performing schools for two consecutive academic years (any two consecutive years between

2016 ETM CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZER RESULTS

A Look Behind the Grades

Washtenaw Community College's only authorized school in our analysis, **Washtenaw Technical Middle College** of Ann Arbor, performed exceptionally well, ranking in the 99th percentile of all Michigan public schools in 2012-13 and 2013-14. Nearly 100 percent of students were proficient in reading, according to the 2013-14 state accountability scorecard.

Honey Creek Community School of Ann Arbor, Washtenaw Intermediate School District's only authorized school in our analysis, consistently ranks among the top 20 percent of schools each academic year.

The **Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center**, Grand Rapids Public School's only authorized school in our analysis, saw large school-wide improvement between 2010-11 and 2013-14, jumping from the seventh percentile to the 44th percentile on the state's accountability ranking. This big change shows that turnaround is possible in just a few academic years.

Creative Montessori Academy of Southgate, one of two schools authorized by Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA) in our analysis, had 96 percent of its Hispanic students proficient in reading on the 2013-14 state accountability scorecard.

In 2011-12, **Hillsdale Preparatory School**, one of two schools authorized by Hillsdale Intermediate School District in our analysis, was ranked among the top 20 percent of schools statewide. This school had over 80 percent of its low-income students proficient in reading in 2013-14.

In 2010-11, Macomb Intermediate School District's only authorized school in our analysis, **Arts Academy in the Woods** of Fraser, was among the top 15 percent of all schools statewide. And roughly 90 percent of its students were proficient in reading in 2013-14.

Lake Superior State University (LSSU) had some weak spots amid overall good academic performance. LSSU-authorized schools like **Detroit Service Learning Academy**, dropped from the 51st to 11th percentile from 2010-11 to 2013-14. On the other hand, **Concord Academy - Petoskey** had school-wide improvement above the state in both math and reading over multiple academic years, while also ranking among the top half of all schools statewide.

Ferris State University schools had some strong academics, but were not without weaknesses. At **New Bedford Academy** of Lambertville, just north of Toledo, for example, 90 percent of students were proficient in reading for 2013-14. On the other hand, **Voyageur Academy** of Detroit had fewer than half (44%) of its African American students proficient in math for 2013-14.

Grand Valley State University (GVSU) authorizes many charters that are performing very well, but still has room for improvement. **University Preparatory Science & Math High School** of Detroit ranked among the top schools for high school math improvement statewide in 2013-14. At the same time, GVSU continues to operate **Lincoln-King Academy** of Detroit, which ranked in the bottom five percent of all schools in 2013-14 and has ranked among the bottom 15 percent of schools since 2011-12.

Bay Mills Community College (BMCC) authorizes some high-performers, but the authorizer has also recently made questionable authorizing decisions. **Hamtramck Academy**, with almost 100 percent low-income students, ranked near the top 20 percent of all schools in 2013-14. Unfortunately, BMCC recently authorized **Detroit Community Schools – Elementary**, among the worst charters in Michigan. This school had previously received its charter contract through Saginaw Valley State University, but later transferred to BMCC. This was despite the school being ranked in the seventh percentile statewide for 2012-13.

Central Michigan University's (CMU) schools are a mix of extremes—the top performing schools in the state mixed with the worst performing. Both **Canton Charter Academy** of Canton and **South Arbor Charter Academy** of Ypsilanti are ranked among the top schools statewide. At the same time, **Mid-Michigan Leadership Academy** of Lansing and **Michigan Technical Academy Elementary** of Detroit, were both ranked in the bottom five percent of schools over multiple years. CMU did close **Plymouth Educational Center Preparatory High School** of Detroit and **Academy of Southfield**—among the worst ranking schools in the state in 2013-14.

While Oakland University (OU) improved its score with a good school opening, it still has struggling schools. OU authorizes **Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences Middle School**, which had improvement in the bottom 20 percent of all schools in both math and reading for 2013-14. The school also ranked near the bottom 10 percent of all schools statewide. Similarly, just 11 percent of **Dove Academy of Detroit** students were proficient in science in 2013-14.

Detroit Public Schools' charter portfolio is made up almost exclusively by very low-performing schools. Numerous schools, including **GEE White Academy**, ranked in the bottom five percent of all schools for one or more academic years.

Saginaw Valley State University authorizes multiple schools with extremely poor performance. **Pontiac Academy for Excellence – Elementary** appeared in the bottom five percent for two consecutive years, ranking in the first percentile in both 2012-13 and 2013-14. This is just one of several schools with very poor performance, including others that rank in the zeroth, first and second percentile—the worst of the worst. This translates to just 11 percent of African American students proficient in science in 2013-14 at **Saginaw Preparatory Academy**, slightly lower than African American students at Detroit Public Schools in science.

Eastern Michigan University (EMU) did make a good decision recently when it closed **Gaudior Academy** of Inkster—improving its overall grade. The school ranked in the zeroth percentile for 2013-14. While this was a good decision on EMU's part, the authorizer still has far too many schools with very poor performance. Of the schools currently authorized, EMU's very best school ranked in the bottom third statewide in 2013-14. In fact, even at EMU's very best school, **Academy for Business and Technology Elementary** of Dearborn, roughly half of African American students were not proficient in math in 2013-14.

Northern Michigan University's portfolio is almost exclusively filled with underperforming schools. This includes **Nah Tah Wahsh Public School Academy** of Wilson—located in the Upper Peninsula—which ranked in the bottom 10 percent in 2013-14. This small American Indian-centered school had roughly 40 percent of its American Indian students proficient in math in 2013-14. At this school, American Indian students are being outperformed by American Indian students from the local traditional school district in both math and reading.

2011-12 and 2013-14), remain open and did not demonstrate above state average improvement in the second year, out of the authorizer's schools that were among the bottom five percent for the first time between 2010-11 and 2012-13.

⁶ This score represents the average between all three categories. The overall score for authorizers without scores in the "Is the authorizer approving high-performing charter operator openings?" receive an average of the remaining two categories. To receive a final score, the authorizer must have at least one eligible school in the "Is the authorizer overseeing a portfolio of schools that is as good as, or better than, other school options available to parents?" category.

⁷ Represents all open-active Public School Academies (PSA Schools) as of January 4, 2016.

Note: All proficiency rates described in this table are derived from the MDE accountability scorecard, which takes into account full academic year (FAY) students who were educated in the school when they learned the tested content. School rankings refer to the MDE Top-to-Bottom accountability rankings. Unless otherwise noted, data is taken from the 2013-14 academic year.

Despite these high performers, **CMU** also has several schools that are severely underperforming. This includes Michigan Technical Academy Elementary of Detroit, which has been open since 2002. The school ranked in the third percentile in 2013 and the first percentile in 2014, with improvement well below the state in both years. Or take Eaton Academy of Eastpointe, which opened in 1996. Just two percent of low-income students were proficient in science and the school ranked in the sixth percentile in 2014. Another is Woodland Park Academy in Grand Blanc, a school that draws heavily on students from Flint. This school had just seven percent of its African American students proficient in science on the state's 2013-14 accountability scorecard.

At the same time, **CMU** did see a slight improvement in its score, due to the fact that it closed two of its lower-performing schools. According to state data from 2013-14, both Plymouth Educational Center Preparatory High School of Detroit and Academy of Southfield were ranked among the worst schools in the state.

- **Oakland University (OU)** was one of two authorizers, along with Eastern Michigan University, that improved its letter grade, moving from a “D” to a “C.” **OU** added one new school in fall 2015, Detroit Edison Public School Academy—High School, operated by New Paradigm for Education. Because OU added a new school run by an operator that met our minimum operator performance standard, the authorizer improved its overall score in this updated scorecard.

However, **OU** still has several schools that are seriously struggling, including Detroit Academy of Arts and Sciences Middle School. Since 2011, this school has consistently ranked near or below the bottom 10 percent of schools statewide. For a school that focuses on the sciences, it had just six percent of its low-income students proficient in science on the 2013-14 state accountability scorecard. Far more work must be done by **OU** to ensure its schools are better serving students.

FAILING “D” AND “F” AUTHORIZERS

- **Eastern Michigan University (EMU)** also improved its scorecard grade, moving from an “F” to a “D.” It did so by closing a poor-performing school, Gaudior Academy of Inkster. Gaudior had previously appeared in the bottom five percent of schools in both 2012-13 and 2013-14. Closing the chronic low-performer boosted EMU's overall score by just over five points. This was the right move,

ensuring that a chronically poor-performer does not continue to inadequately serve its students.

However, **EMU** still has a very poor portfolio overall and has made some poor choices in the recent past. For example, in 2013, EMU decided to open Detroit Public Safety Academy, a school operated by the Leona Group. Research shows that Leona has some of the state's worst schools, despite running schools for 20 years.^{xv} Another is Hope Academy of Detroit, a school that ranked in the fourth percentile on the state accountability rankings and had just over three percent of African American students proficient in science in 2013-14.

To learn more about Leona Group's performance, please see the sidebar on page 32.

- **Detroit Public Schools (DPS)**—a “D” authorizer—has several schools in Detroit with very low academic results. In fact, all but one school was ranked in the bottom quarter of public schools statewide in 2013-14. This includes schools like Timbuktu Academy of Science and Technology, founded in 1997. According to the school's website, the school was founded to provide an African-centered education to children on Detroit's east side. Sadly, for a school dedicated to improving outcomes for African American students, just five percent of its African American students were proficient in science, according to the 2013-14 accountability scorecard. This places the school below the Detroit Public Schools' average among African Americans in science.
- One of the poor decisions made by **Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU)** involved the opening of Oakland International Academy—High School of Hamtramck in 2013, an expansion of the Oakland International district. Charter school districts in Michigan often begin with one school, and later expand to new sites or new grade levels—sometimes fairly quickly. The Oakland International Academy already had three schools within the district before it decided to expand. What is significant is that none of Oakland's three schools met our minimum quality standard over three consecutive years, yet Saginaw Valley approved expansion anyway.

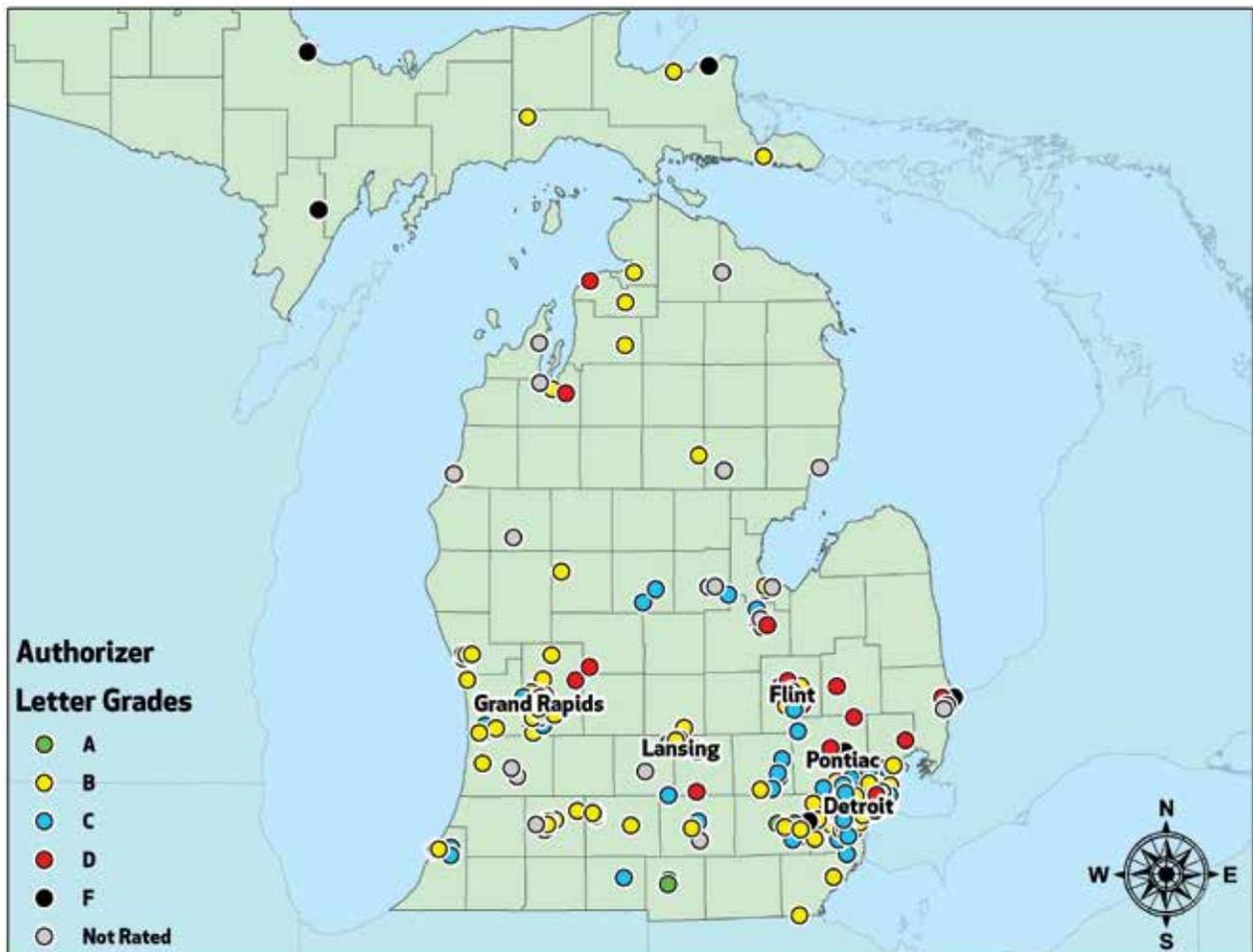
In 2012-13 and 2013-14, the district's middle school ranked below the 10th percentile. The remaining schools ranked below the 20th percentile both academic years. It is puzzling that this district would be allowed to expand without first dramatically improving the poor performance of its current schools.

- Northern Michigan University (NMU)**—an “F” authorizer—was the worst performing authorizer on the scorecard. All but one of its schools failed the ETM minimum quality standard. Not only that, six of its seven schools actually failed the “as good or better” test for three consecutive years. Unlike other authorizers who at least made some good decisions recently, **NMU’s** failure to act has meant that students continue to attend chronically low-performing schools. Among its low-performers is Nah Tah Wahsh Public School Academy in the Upper Peninsula. This small northern Michigan school had about 40 percent of its American Indian students proficient in math in 2013-14. The school also ranked in the bottom five percent of schools for three years straight, from 2010-11 to 2012-13. This is significant given that few schools rank among the worst schools statewide for multiple years, let alone three years in a row.

NMU’s schools’ academic performance is as distressing

as its recent decision-making. **NMU** engaged in two instances of approving a school that previously received its authorization and contract from another authorizer, despite the schools’ previous poor academic performance. This practice—authorizer shopping—is a strategy often used by low-performing schools or operators to find an authorizer with the lowest academic requirements, mainly to avoid closure. Both schools, George Crockett Academy of Detroit and Francis Reh Public School Academy of Saginaw, were formerly authorized by Ferris State University. Instead of just closing, these schools simply received new contracts from **NMU**, which the data suggest clearly has a much lower bar for academic performance than Ferris State University. To provide some perspective, just 16 percent of Hispanic students were proficient in math at Francis Reh Public School Academy in 2013-14. Both ranked near the bottom quarter of all public schools on the state’s accountability rankings for 2013-14 as well.

2016 ETM Charter Authorizer Scorecard Letter Grades: Michigan Charter Schools and their Authorizers’ Letter Grades



Note: Each colored dot represents the cumulative authorizer letter grade of each charter school’s authorizer. Colored dots are not representative of individual school ratings. Authorizers without ratings lacked sufficient data to be considered in ETM’s scorecard.

Source: CEPI Educational Entity Master (EEM), CEPI Non-Resident Student, United States Census Bureau TIGER Data, MDE Top-to-Bottom, MDE Public School Academy (PSA) Updates

MICHIGAN CHARTER SUCCESS STORIES

While far too many Michigan authorizers and their charter schools have failed to live up to the promise of providing high-achieving public schools, there are still charter schools worth celebrating. Below we profile three of these schools: Detroit Merit Charter Academy, Honey Creek Community School of Ann Arbor and Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center.

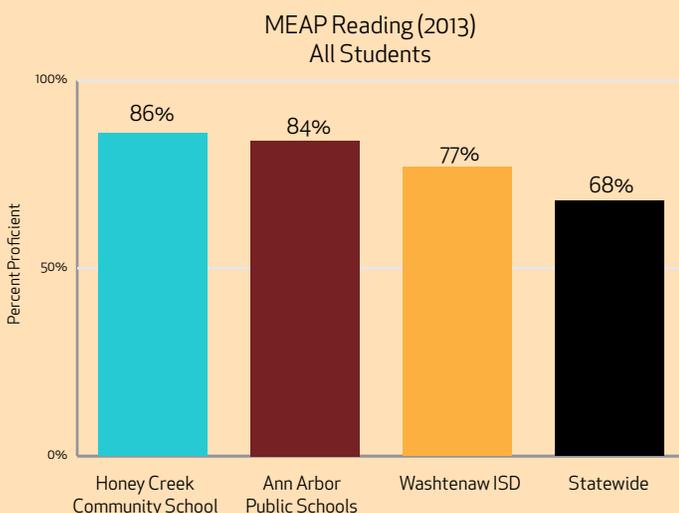
HONEY CREEK COMMUNITY SCHOOL ANN ARBOR, MICHIGAN

AUTHORIZER: WASHTENAW INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD) first authorized Honey Creek Community School of Ann Arbor in 1995. From the beginning, WISD was attracted to charters' increased flexibility to provide innovative models for learning. Naomi Norman, executive director of achievement initiatives at WISD, says they were unwilling to compromise on high standards for this increased flexibility. "WISD was able to set really high standards for any school that we would consider authorizing," Norman told ETM. "We wouldn't even consider authorizing a school unless it met a really high bar."

After receiving countless proposals for potential new schools, only one school, Honey Creek, has met the authorizer's high bar for opening in the past twenty years. Norman said that the school was "started by parents," some of whom were "former teachers or early childhood educators, so they knew how to manage money and run programs." In addition, Norman said that, when the school started, it was using "all of the best practices they knew of at the time: multiage classrooms, lots of project-based learning, huge curriculum fair and the teachers looped with the kids for three years."

Honey Creek Community School Students Outperform the Local District, ISD and State in Reading



Source: MDE MEAP Gap Analysis

DETROIT MERIT
CHARTER ACADEMY

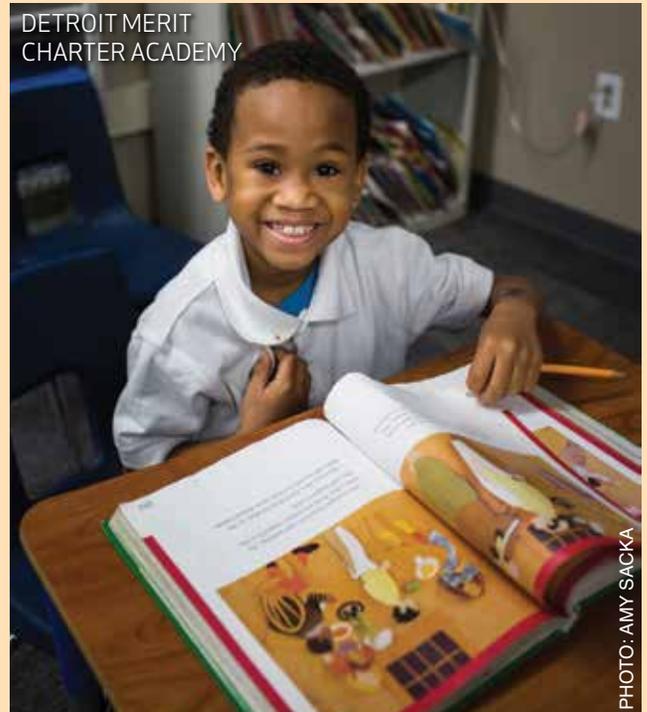


PHOTO: AMY SACKA

DETROIT MERIT CHARTER ACADEMY DETROIT, MICHIGAN

AUTHORIZER: GRAND VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY

Detroit Merit Charter Academy is a K-8 charter school authorized by Grand Valley State University. More than 90 percent of Merit's students are low-income, 98 percent are African American and about 10 percent have disabilities. Despite what many might think when looking at these numbers, Merit students are beating their peers across the state no matter their income-level or race.

Close to 70 percent of Merit's students are proficient in math. In reading, the school does even better—88 percent of students at Merit can read on grade level or above, according to the 2013-14 accountability scorecard. In writing, too, the school is defying the odds, with 83 percent of students writing on grade level or above.

When asked what makes Detroit Merit so successful, Principal Sandra Terry-Martin says, "It's not rocket science."

"We have really high expectations. We believe all students can attend and graduate from college. We make sure students know exactly where they are as far as performance. All students know whether they are ahead or behind and how much they need to grow to get where they need to be."



GRAND RAPIDS CHILD DISCOVERY CENTER

PHOTO: ERIK HOLLADAY

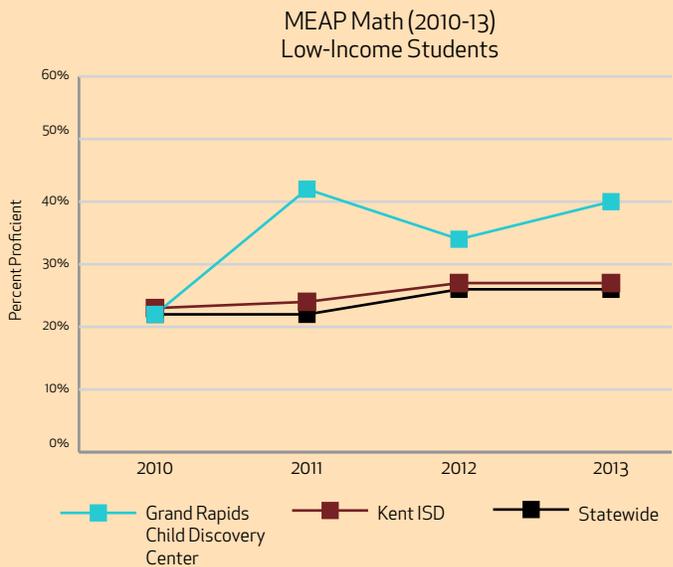
GRAND RAPIDS CHILD DISCOVERY CENTER GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

AUTHORIZER: GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Grand Rapids Public Schools (GRPS) considers its one charter, Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center, as “part of the district’s portfolio of school choices,” Mary Jo Kuhlman, assistant superintendent of organizational learning at GRPS, said. “GRPS is working with Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center to explore more ways to connect the school and district to leverage central office support services such as professional development, evaluations, information technology services and more.” Like Honey Creek, Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center is the only school authorized by the charter authorizer.

And while the school has struggled in the past, it has made some major strides in recent years. For example, between 2010 and 2013, low-income student proficiency rates on the math state assessment has nearly doubled. To put this in perspective, low-income students far out-pace low-income students in Kent Intermediate School District and the state overall. Undoubtedly, the strong relationship between the charter school and their authorizer helped facilitate such significant improvement.

Low Income Students at Grand Rapids Child Discovery Center Have Made Major Strides in Math since 2010



Source: MDE MEAP Gap Analysis

DETROIT'S HIGH-PERFORMING UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY SCIENCE & MATH HIGH SCHOOL

BY SUNEET BEDI

REFLECT, RESET AND GROWTH are the tenets echoed when discussing the accomplishments of University Preparatory Science & Math (UPSM) High School, a high-performing Detroit charter school authorized by Grand Valley State University (GVSU). From the operator—Detroit 90/90—to its administrators and teachers, this reflective mindset permeates the charter school.

"A personal goal of mine is making academics urgent," says Interim Principal Zetia Hogan. That goal-setting is felt throughout the classrooms; an engaged and focused atmosphere fills the school.

Hogan's primary method of achieving this goal is by supporting teachers to take ownership of their impact on student achievement. She strongly believes that when teachers are supported, they can better serve their students. So UPSM school leaders frequently observe teachers and provide helpful, high-caliber feedback.

"Every two weeks school administrators are in and out of each classroom—recording, informally observing and debriefing with teachers on their practice," Hogan says. "That is all done in an effort to produce the reflection, resetting and growth mindset across the building."

Hogan also has implemented a video system that helps teachers review their own work in the classroom. Not only do these tools provide teachers with opportunities to reflect on their practice, they also allow administrators to reflect on the needs of their instructors.

Detroit 90/90—the school's operator—is no stranger to the growth mindset. Its primary goal is to improve and sustain the academic successes of UPSM. Referred to as "home office" by faculty and staff at UPSM, the operator provides consistent support to the school.

"Home office gives principals a lot of training to help support teachers," Hogan said.

The operator has provided administrators with rigorous, high-quality professional development that allows the administrators to learn new strategies to benefit the school. Hogan recently implemented a professional development work plan which she believes will hold her more accountable in supporting her staff.

This concerted and deliberate effort of supporting teachers and administrators has, in turn, produced higher quality instruction for students. In 2013-14, Michigan named UPSM a top-performing "reward" school, with 80 percent of all students achieving proficiency in reading.

In addition, GVSU—the school's authorizer—sets rigorous academic benchmarks. GVSU staff also provide teachers with professional development opportunities and convene administrators across the schools that they authorize to collaborate and share successful initiatives.

UPSM ultimately prides itself on being driven, first and foremost, by its accountability to students and their families.

ZETIA HOGAN, INTERIM PRINCIPAL AT UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY SCIENCE & MATH HIGH SCHOOL



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A PERFORMANCE-BASED CHARTER ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM FOR MICHIGAN STUDENTS

PHOTO: MARISSA GAWEL

UNIVERSITY PREPARATORY
SCIENCE & MATH HIGH SCHOOL

IF MICHIGAN IS TO BECOME A TOP TEN STATE for education, it needs a high-performing charter sector. The charter sector is far too important for all students—particularly for African American and low-income students—to not address the lack of charter sector accountability.

We recommend a new approach to charter school authorizing in Michigan, one that makes authorizing a privilege that must be earned and maintained through consistent high performance with a focus on student outcomes. Student learning matters in the lives of children; student learning outcomes need to matter for Michigan school authorizers, too.

The recommendations outlined below would provide a comprehensive framework for charter sector accountability—and over time, dramatically higher-achieving charter schools—that many Michigan students desperately need and surely deserve.

There's no need for Michigan to wait for legislation to act on some of the levers outlined below, though new policies and laws will be needed to make clear the state has the authority to raise the quality of the charter sector overall, including closing chronically low-performing authorizers. Today, the state superintendent can use his existing authority to suspend authorizers that do not meet the following performance standards—and he should act swiftly on behalf of Michigan students and families.¹

1. AUTHORIZER RESET: REQUIRE ALL EXISTING AND NEW AUTHORIZERS TO COMPLETE A RIGOROUS APPLICATION PROCESS PRIOR TO BECOMING—OR REMAINING—AN AUTHORIZER

Currently, Michigan public universities, colleges and school districts can automatically become authorizers—with no criteria determining whether or not a potential authorizer has the capacity, expertise or experience to take on this responsibility. And once an institution becomes an authorizer, the state superintendent and governor are unable to revoke this authority, according to interpretations of current state law.^{xvi} This explains, in part, why Michigan currently has roughly forty authorizers, with the potential for new authorizers every year. There's also no formal evaluation of authorizers, nor even a requirement that authorizers issue an annual report of their schools' performance in Michigan.^{xvii} Unfortunately, this approach has come at the detriment of the state's most impoverished students—the ones most in need of high-quality schools.

We propose a process where all new and current authorizers would need to apply to the state superintendent in order to gain or retain full authorizing authority. This would replicate a similar strategy used in Minnesota. After becoming the

¹ The passage of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015 establishes a new framework for school and district accountability nationwide. In the future, we recommend incorporating the additional accountability requirements of ESSA into Michigan's performance-based charter accountability system. For more information on ESSA, please visit: edtrust.org/the-every-student-succeeds-act-of-2015/

1. Require all existing and new authorizers to complete a rigorous application process prior to becoming—or remaining—a charter authorizer

2. Set rigorous standards for charter school openings, renewals and expansions

**A
PERFORMANCE-
BASED CHARTER
ACCOUNTABILITY
SYSTEM**

3. Hold authorizers accountable for their schools' performance, based on student learning outcomes

4. Require full transparency for all authorizers, including their schools and operators

5. Provide special authority for high-challenge jurisdictions

first state nationwide to allow charter schools, Minnesota found that some authorizers simply lacked the capacity to adequately fulfill their responsibilities. The state decided to hit the “reset” button, requiring all current and potential new authorizers to complete a formal application to gain or retain authorizing authority. This rigorous authorizer application process was so stringent, many existing authorizers simply did not apply.

We recommend Michigan adopt a similar strategy. Specific elements of the authorizer application should include:

- Documented evidence of an authorizer’s experience and their schools’ academic performance (as applicable), including the schools that have met or missed academic performance standards and goals.
- The authorizer’s capacity to oversee and open high-performing charter schools. This includes charter authorizer office personnel qualifications and responsibilities, with documentation of financial resources dedicated to supporting strong authorizing practices.
- A description of the authorizer’s process and decision-making for granting new charter school contracts, including performance standards that meet or exceed state minimum standards.
- The authorizer’s model for providing support and oversight to each charter school, and enumerated consequences and intervention procedures for schools that fail to meet academic expectations.
- A comprehensive process for charter school contract renewal and termination decisions, based on academic and financial expectations, goals and state minimum quality standards.
- A commitment to not engage in “authorizer shopping.” Authorizer shopping is when a charter school “shops” between authorizers, normally to find the authorizer with the lowest academic requirements to open a charter school.

2. SET RIGOROUS STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL OPENINGS, RENEWALS AND EXPANSIONS

In Massachusetts, all potential charter schools undergo a rigorous application process, covering everything from instructional models and teacher qualifications to student

retention plans and parent involvement strategies.^{xviii}

In contrast, Michigan charter contracts have very few consistent requirements, including no minimum academic performance bar for openings, renewals or expansions of schools. Indeed, Michigan is out of step with many states in terms of its authorizer practices. According to research conducted by the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), several states require minimum performance frameworks prior to opening—ensuring quality outcomes for students. States with such policies include: Indiana, Ohio, Massachusetts and several others.^{xix}

In determining this minimum quality bar for opening, expanding or renewing a charter school contract, we must begin with charter school operators—the very entities responsible for running charter schools.

Before any operator can open a charter school in Michigan, we propose that they undergo a check for academic quality. In doing so, operators with clear records of underperformance are prevented from opening or expanding. The Michigan Department of Education would be responsible for maintaining a list of operators that meet minimum quality standards. Current operators that demonstrate evidence of failure should no longer operate in Michigan, and should be phased out and replaced by high-performing operators over time.

To allow for innovation, new operators with no track record would need to meet a different standard, at least temporarily. Likewise, operators seeking to open their first schools nationwide would still have the ability to do so in Michigan. That is, they would not need to meet minimum quality standards until sufficient data exists for their schools. However, these operators must still provide evidence that they have the capacity, resources and tools to successfully run charter schools in Michigan.

In addition to minimum academic standards for operators and to ensure all new charter schools in the state are of the highest caliber, we recommend the following be included in the application forms for *all new charter school openings*:

- A detailed curriculum and commitment to high standards;
- Specific course offerings and descriptions;
- Proposed instructional models, including research supporting effectiveness of such models;

PERFORMANCE-BASED AUTHORIZER ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR MICHIGAN

Letter Grade	Proposed Incentives and Consequences for Authorizer Performance
<p style="font-size: 2em; color: green; text-align: center;">A</p>	<p>Current "A" Authorizers: Washtenaw Community College, Washtenaw ISD, Grand Rapids Public Schools, Wayne RESA, Hillsdale ISD and Macomb ISD.</p> <p>"A" CHARTER AUTHORIZERS ARE MAKING GOOD AUTHORIZING DECISIONS AT LEAST 90 PERCENT OF THE TIME.</p> <p>An "A" authorizer is making good decisions and, on the whole, is providing high-achieving educational opportunities. These authorizers should be rewarded for their good work through an additional 0.5 percent in school aid funding, ensuring that more students have access to similar high-performing schools.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; color: orange; text-align: center;">B</p>	<p>Current "B" Authorizers: Lake Superior State University, Ferris State University, Grand Valley State University and Bay Mills Community College.</p> <p>"B" CHARTER AUTHORIZERS ARE MAKING GOOD DECISIONS AT LEAST 80 PERCENT OF THE TIME.</p> <p>The state's "B" authorizers would be able to expand like "A" authorizers in the state. The main difference, however, is that these authorizers would not receive any additional public dollars to encourage them to raise their portfolio's performance to an "A" level. "B" authorizers also may only expand schools with operators that would meet the minimum performance standard.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; color: orange; text-align: center;">C</p>	<p>Current "C" Authorizers: Central Michigan University and Oakland University.</p> <p>"C" CHARTER AUTHORIZERS ARE MAKING GOOD DECISIONS AT LEAST 70 PERCENT OF THE TIME.</p> <p>Remembering that charter schools are meant to provide better learning opportunities for students than traditional public schools offer, "C," "D" and "F" authorizers must first improve their existing portfolio's academic performance before opening new schools or expanding existing ones. "C" authorizers would need to improve their academic performance to at least "B" level status within three years of their designation as a "C" authorizer. If unable to do so, the state superintendent or governor could suspend or revoke the authorizer's authority.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; color: red; text-align: center;">D</p>	<p>Current "D" Authorizers: Detroit Public Schools, Saginaw Valley State University and Eastern Michigan University.</p> <p>"D" CHARTER AUTHORIZERS ARE MAKING GOOD DECISIONS AT LEAST 50 PERCENT OF THE TIME.</p> <p>The state's "D" authorizers would have two years to reach "C" level status, or face potential suspension or revocation by the state superintendent or governor. Authorizers able to reach "C" status within two years would have another two years to reach "B" level status. "D" authorizers that do not reach these performance standards also would be prohibited from opening, expanding or renewing schools.</p>
<p style="font-size: 2em; color: red; text-align: center;">F</p>	<p>Current "F" Authorizer: Northern Michigan University.</p> <p>"F" CHARTER AUTHORIZERS ARE MAKING GOOD DECISIONS LESS THAN 50 PERCENT OF THE TIME.</p> <p>"F" authorizers would have one year to improve to a "D" grade and one more year to improve to a "C" grade or face immediate suspension or revocation by the state superintendent or governor. Also, like "D" authorizers, they would not be able open or expand any schools until they reach the "B" grade level.</p>

- Qualifications for all school leaders and teachers;
- The strategy for teacher professional development, evaluation and professional learning; and
- The strategy for parent outreach and engagement.

We also propose that initial charter school contracts be no longer than three years, not 10 years like some Michigan charters.^{xx} Ten years is simply too long for a school to underperform. However, schools able to meet minimum quality standards in the first couple of years may receive an extension for one to two years.

Charter authorizers must require the following for *all charter school renewals or expansions*:

- Contract renewals can be up to five years, as long as the charter school is performing in the top half of the state’s accountability system at the time of renewal.
- Charter districts seeking to expand to new grade levels or buildings must apply the same standards as for new schools. For example, a district with only a charter middle school seeking to open a high school must demonstrate it has the capacity and resources to open a new school within the district.

3. HOLD AUTHORIZERS ACCOUNTABLE FOR THEIR SCHOOLS’ PERFORMANCE, BASED ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Authorizers are the gatekeepers of charter schools in Michigan. Any real system of accountability for the sector must include them. We recommend a performance-based system that would reward high-performing authorizers for their strong performance, while chronically low-performing authorizers would face consequences if they did not improve their portfolio’s student outcomes. While scrutiny around poor decision-making is an important deterrent, authorizers also should have incentives for making good decisions.

The authority to authorize would be earned and maintained annually based on performance for student learning, rated by letter grades. Authorizers with grades of “C” or below would need to eventually improve to at least a “B,” or face suspension or revocation of their authority.

To understand our performance framework, we provide definitions for specific rewards and consequences:

Authorizer Additional Funding: Charter authorizers would receive 0.5 percent in additional school aid funding. These dollars would only be allowed for educator professional development or for facilities expansion for operators meeting the minimum performance standard. The additional 0.5 percent of state dollars would serve to reward top-performing authorizers, while also incentivizing lower-performing authorizers to improve. To note, additional funding would only apply to “A” authorizers.

Authorizer Suspension: Under suspension, authorizers would be prohibited from opening any new schools, but may continue to oversee their current portfolio of schools. The only exception would be for expanding grade levels or locations for charter schools already ranked in the top half of the state’s accountability system.

Authorizer Revocation: Revocation would dissolve an authorizer’s authority to open or oversee current or future schools. Charter schools previously under a revoked authorizer would be overseen by the state superintendent or governor, where it would have one year to transfer to an “A” or “B” authorizer. Charter schools unable to find a new authorizer after this period would be subject to closure, per the state superintendent or governor’s discretion.

Please refer to page 30 for our full performance-based authorizer accountability framework.

4. REQUIRE FULL TRANSPARENCY FOR ALL AUTHORIZERS, INCLUDING THEIR SCHOOLS AND OPERATORS

Transparency is key to holding public charter schools, authorizers and operators accountable. This will ensure that taxpayer dollars are being spent in ways that best benefit students. Michigan has unique challenges to transparency, as our state leads the country in for-profit operators—some of which don’t always provide the public with transparent or accessible information. In other words, at times it is unclear whether public taxpayer dollars are going toward buying new school books, paying teacher salaries or paying operator CEO salaries.^{xxi}

In contrast, Massachusetts requires reporting on expenditures and revenues for each school, including whether or not these sources were private or public. The state also requires reporting on how surplus dollars are spent in subsequent years.^{xxii} We recommend the following to better inform the public on

THE NEED FOR MINIMUM OPERATOR PERFORMANCE STANDARDS: WHY THE LEONA GROUP FLOURISHES IN MICHIGAN

ONE OF THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL decisions a charter authorizer can make is which schools to open. The distinguishing factor between charter public schools and traditional public schools is that charter schools are able to contract with an operator to run their schools—with diverging track records of performance. While some charter schools are self-managed—meaning they do not work with an operator—the vast majority of Michigan charters are run by operators.

Understanding that the lowest performing districts are in the most need of quality schools, Massachusetts prohibits operators from opening in these already vulnerable communities unless they have a proven track record of academic success.¹ Unlike Massachusetts, Michigan operators have more or less had free rein to open and manage schools, including some of the worst performing operators nationwide. One of these poor-performing operators is the Leona Group, LLC.

The Leona Group has roughly 70 schools enrolling about 20,000 students across five states. It opened its first school in Michigan in the predominately Latino community of southwest Detroit in 1996—Cesar Chavez Academy Elementary.² Today, the for-profit operator manages roughly 20 schools in Michigan, enrolling more than 7,000 students. To provide some context on Leona's student enrollment, if it were its own school district, it would be in the top quarter for enrollment statewide. Leona schools serve large populations of African American and Latino students, with schools located in some of the state's most impoverished communities, including Flint, Detroit, Saginaw and Benton Harbor.

Leona has continued to expand its school reach in Michigan, despite remarkably troubling academic performance.

Consider:

- According to a national study conducted by Stanford University, Leona students across the country showed less academic growth than similar students in traditional public schools.³
- Michigan data also reveal serious performance problems at Leona schools. Four of Leona Group's eligible schools in 2013-14 were labeled "priority" schools, meaning they were in the bottom five percent of all public schools statewide.
- Almost all of Leona Group's schools ranked in the bottom third of Michigan schools in 2013-14. For example, Cesar Chavez

Academy Elementary is a Leona school in Detroit where over 90 percent of students are Latino. Only two percent of schools in Michigan performed worse in 2013-14. Cesar Chavez Academy Elementary Latino students are performing at lower levels than Latino students in Detroit Public Schools according to the state's 2013-14 accountability scorecard for both math and reading.

Despite the overwhelming evidence of Leona's shortfalls both locally and nationally, a lack of accountability and state operator performance standards has allowed Leona to flourish in Michigan. A lack of accountability also means that operators like Leona can consistently underserve generations of students—particularly our most impoverished—with little consequence.

“...MASSACHUSETTS PROHIBITS OPERATORS FROM OPENING IN... VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES UNLESS THEY HAVE A PROVEN TRACK RECORD OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS.”

¹ 603 CMR 1.00

² Katie Ash, “For-Profit Experiment Plays Out in Two Mich. Districts,” *Education Week*, 2013. http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/05/01/30charters_ep.h32.html

³ James L. Woodworth and Margaret E. Raymond, “Charter School Growth and Replication: Vol. II,” Stanford University Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013. <https://credo.stanford.edu/pdfs/CGAR%20Growth%20Volume%20II.pdf>

how public dollars are being spent. Information must also be accessible and consistent across authorizers, including:

- All records relating to charter school authorization, including financial agreements and academic performance.
- Actual charter contracts and materials shared between charter school authorizers and their schools, their timeline and guidelines for charter school approvals, and the list of charter schools and their operators seeking authorization or reauthorization. This should include both schools that have been approved to open and those that were denied, including the reasons for denial.
- All records related to real estate transactions and property. According to an investigation by the *Detroit Free Press* in 2014, lease agreements between charter operators and their schools have become a growing source of profit for some operators.^{xxiii}
- The profit status of each operator including profit margins based on revenues and expenses. This should include salary and other relevant financial information. There should also be a common definition of “profit” throughout the state for all public schools and a requirement that all operators report this information annually. Potential conflicts of interest with authorizers or school board members must also be documented.
- Authorizers must post notice of a new charter school opening or expansion at least three months before approving the new school or expansion. This should include the school’s location, grade levels, other school sites in Michigan and operator.

5. SPECIAL AUTHORITY FOR HIGH-CHALLENGE JURISDICTIONS

The statewide system we propose would greatly improve the quality of the charter sector in the state. But in certain communities in our state, this system may simply not suffice where children are especially vulnerable, school systems are especially weak and the uncoordinated marketplace of many low-performing charters threatens the quality of both traditional schools and high-performing charters—not to mention the future of children themselves. Given these unique circumstances, we call for an additional complementary lever of accountability, where a local authority can provide for greater coordination and oversight based on local neighborhoods’ needs.

Detroit is a case in point. Detroit’s traditional school system is already severely underperforming, while many of its charter schools are performing about the same or even worse than the district. Its need for high-quality schools is dire. In communities like Detroit, a local body should have additional authority and responsibilities. The Coalition for the Future of Detroit Schoolchildren has also highlighted the need for such an oversight body:^{xxiv}

- Overseeing the openings, closings and expansions of schools in the community (both charter and traditional) to ensure all students have access to quality educational opportunities.
- Coordinating data, enrollment, transportation and other services throughout the community’s educational system.
- Enforcing minimum quality standards for charter school operators. Given the need for quality schools in these communities, this may go above and beyond the minimum operator standards of the state. School operators would need to be approved by the local body before going to a charter authorizer to apply to open or expand in such communities.
- Only “A” or “B” authorizers could open new schools, to ensure state and local accountability systems would be coordinated and coherent.

Only communities that meet specific criteria would fall under these provisions. Criteria could include high-poverty communities where a very large percentage of the school-age population attends charter schools. For example, according to research from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, both Detroit and Flint in 2013-14 are near the top of the country for their share of charter student enrollment, and Grand Rapids rounds out the top 10.^{xxv}

“THE CHARTER SECTOR IS FAR TOO IMPORTANT FOR ALL STUDENTS— PARTICULARLY FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN AND LOW-INCOME STUDENTS— TO NOT ADDRESS THE LACK OF CHARTER SECTOR ACCOUNTABILITY.”

CONCLUSION: HOLDING THE MICHIGAN CHARTER SECTOR ACCOUNTABLE



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PHOTO: MARISSA GAWEL

FOR FAR TOO LONG, Michigan’s public education system has been in free fall. Between 2003 and 2015, Michigan’s ranking on the national assessment in fourth-grade reading has dropped from 28th to 41st. Our African American students rank at the very bottom for both fourth-grade reading and math. If we don’t take the necessary steps today to reverse this trajectory, Michigan will continue on this slide, eventually ranking below the nation’s lowest-performing states.^{xxvi}

One of the most important changes that Michigan can make to become a top ten education state—particularly for African American students and impoverished communities like Detroit—is to implement a comprehensive performance-based system of charter accountability. In Massachusetts, a strict adherence to accountability and quality has helped facilitate the growth of a high-quality charter sector. A lack of charter accountability has meant the opposite in Michigan.

Michigan needs to fundamentally shift its stance on authorizing to one where authorizing authority is a serious duty and privilege. Authorizing power should no longer be treated as an entitlement, but must be earned and maintained through sustained results.

Addressing charter accountability is just one step, but an important step—particularly for our most impoverished children—in making sure all students have access to a high-quality education. It is high time the state, from the state superintendent to the Michigan Legislature, take action to hold the charter sector accountable.

“AUTHORIZING POWER
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