



National  
Alliance  
for Public  
**Charter  
Schools**

**2016**

**ANNUAL REPORT**



Watch Angel's speech during the 2016 National Charter Schools Conference



With the help of the charter school that I attend, I now believe that I have a future after high school. **A future that will lead me to great success.** Thanks to STEM Prep High and STEM Prep Academy, my future is in good hands.”

**ANGEL LOPEZ, STUDENT  
STEM PREPARATORY ACADEMY, NASHVILLE, TN**



# 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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# A LETTER FROM NINA REES

PRESIDENT & CEO

## DEAR FRIENDS,

2016 WAS MARKED BY MANY MILESTONES, but we remained focused on our twin strategic goals: increasing the number of high-quality charter schools around the country by securing more federal funds to seed their growth, and shaping state legislation to create climates in which charter schools can grow while protecting our movement from setbacks.

Though the November elections captured most of the news headlines, 2016 also marked the 25th anniversary of the passage of the very first charter school law. We capitalized on this anniversary by calling attention to the way charter schools have changed lives and opened doors to new opportunities for students across America.

While I would love to report that everyone shares our vision of charter schools as a vital part of America's public education landscape, we do still encounter opposition. In 2016, we suffered a setback in Massachusetts, where voters rejected a ballot initiative that would have added 12 new charter schools in the state's neediest districts. While unfortunate, the vote was also a reminder of the importance of having strong messages and messengers to make a compelling case for charter schools that goes beyond the data we tend to lean on. On a positive note, most of our closest legislative allies were victorious at the federal, state, and local levels, putting us in position to protect and expand our progress in states blue and red.

We took other big steps forward this year:

1. To ensure that our movement grows with quality, we released a call to action to better regulate virtual charter schools;
2. To capture the true demand for public school choice, we conducted our first ever national parent survey which showed strong support for expanding access to charter schools;
3. To create a better policy environment for charter schools, we introduced an updated version of our model charter law, and we successfully launched our Charter School Legal Action Fund to strategically invest in cases that will impact the national charter school community; and
4. To show the strength and diversity of our movement, we partnered with the Black Alliance for Educational Options to fight an NAACP proposal calling for a national moratorium on charter school growth and expansion. Together we rallied African-American parents, charter school leaders, and respected voices to tell the real story of charter schools and the positive impact they're having in communities of color.

You'll find details about these achievements throughout this report.

In 2016, we demonstrated that after 25 years, the charter school movement is accelerating progress for students and deepening its commitment to equity, autonomy, and innovation. The National Alliance is honored to help lead this movement into our next quarter century.

Warmly,

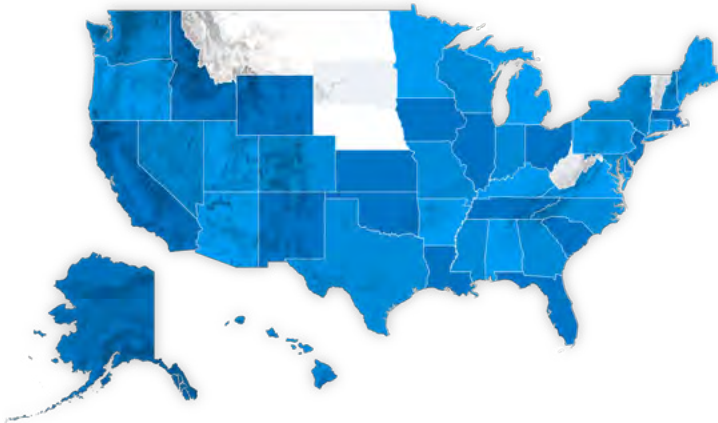


# 25 YEARS OF SUCCESS

The charter school movement reached a major milestone this year—25 years since the first charter school law was passed in Minnesota! Since our inception, we have helped charter public schools open in cities, towns, and rural communities across America, giving millions of students access to a brighter future. We are honored to lead the charter school movement by fostering an environment in which innovative school leaders and teachers help students reach new heights of academic success.



In celebration of the 25th anniversary of the charter school movement our 25th Anniversary Video highlighted the past two and a half decades of success since the very first charter school law passed in Minnesota.



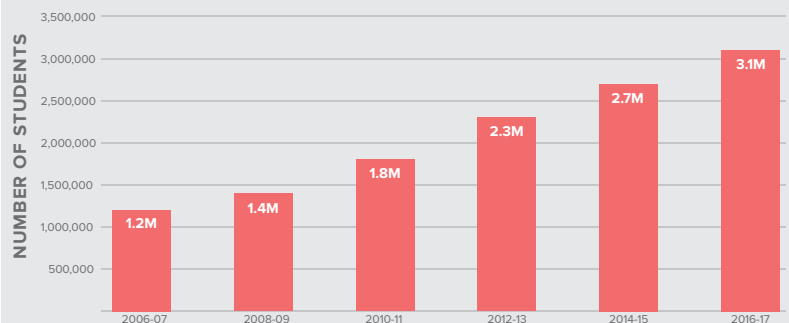
## 44 STATES & WASHINGTON, D.C.

What began as a small movement in a couple of states has grown into a major force in education reform. **Charter school laws in 44 states and Washington, D.C. give families public school options.**

## 3.1M STUDENTS

When given the option, parents increasingly choose to enroll their children in charter schools. **Currently, 3.1 million students attend charter schools.**

### NATIONAL ENROLLMENT IN CHARTER SCHOOLS



## 6,939 SCHOOLS

After 25 years, **6,939 charter schools** are reimagining education to nurture the brilliance within every child.



## \$333,100,000 IN FEDERAL FUNDING

Since 1995, funding for the **Charter Schools Program** has increased from **\$6,000,000** to **\$333,100,000**—vital funding to support the growth and replication of high-performing charter schools across America.

## MORE THAN 129,000 TEACHERS

Today, more than **129,000** teachers help charter school students reach their full potential.



# WHO WE ARE

## OUR ROLE IN THE CHARTER SCHOOL MOVEMENT

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is the leading national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. We work to empower parents to send their children to a school that best fits their needs and help seed the growth of high-quality schools. We also fight for funding equity and aim to protect the autonomy of charter schools while ensuring that we reflect the diversity of our students.



### ADVOCATE

We are the leading force in Washington, D.C., in state legislatures, and in the court of law advocating for the creation, support, and replication of high-quality charter schools.



### PROMOTE

We are a voice for the charter school movement, cultivating a positive image of charter schools and ensuring that all Americans understand what charter public schools are and where charter schools fit within the larger fabric of education.



### EDUCATE

We are a central information source—a clearinghouse of relevant data and research on the movement, giving parents, educators, the media, and policymakers access to essential facts about charter schools.









DEERFIELD

FISK



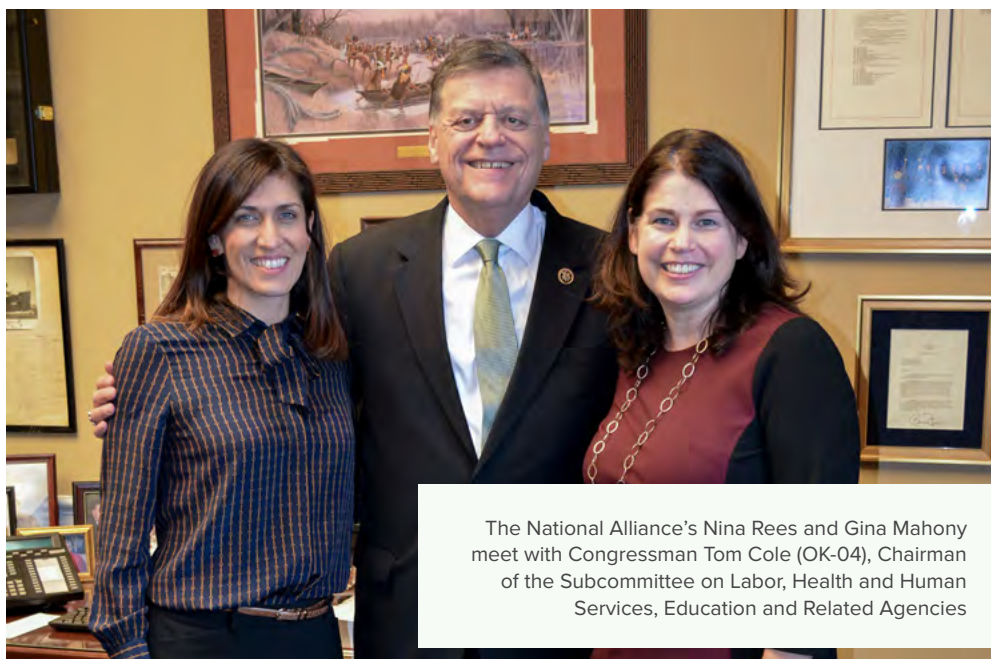
Newbach College Preparatory  
University of the South

# 2016 PROGRESS



## IMPROVING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

One of our key goals is to advocate for resources to launch and expand charter schools and keep erroneous federal rules at bay. After a busy 2015, in which we successfully secured a 32 percent increase in federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) funding and shaped the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to promote the growth and replication of charter schools, the National Alliance built on these victories in 2016. Though the fiscal year 2017 budget has not been approved by Congress yet, we secured a record number of signatures from members of Congress calling for additional funding for the CSP. To improve our case for support, we launched and convened a school leaders of color advocacy cohort from high-performing charter schools across the country to meet with their congressional leaders to share their work and highlight their students' successes. In 2016, we also engaged with charter school stakeholders, the U.S. Department of Education, and key legislators to ensure that our priorities were reflected in new ESSA regulations. As a nonpartisan advocate for all charter schools, we worked throughout the 2016 presidential campaign to lay the groundwork for strong support in the next presidential administration regardless of who prevailed in November.



The National Alliance's Nina Rees and Gina Mahony meet with Congressman Tom Cole (OK-04), Chairman of the Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies



At a convening of our communities of practice, members discuss the best ways to build bipartisan legislative and advocacy coalitions in their respective states.



## STRENGTHENING STATE LAWS

In 2016, we worked with eight states to create communities of practice aimed at dramatically improving the overall quality of each state's charter law. Though the fruits of our labor will not come to fruition until 2017, we saw movement in three states.

Our work in **Idaho** helped convince state lawmakers to strengthen the state's charter school law, giving charter school leaders greater flexibility to innovate and more funding for their facilities' costs. In **Colorado**, we successfully worked for changes to the law that resulted in

more money for charter school facilities, fewer bureaucratic requirements on charter school leaders, and stronger accountability for charter school authorizers. With our support, **Michigan** closed the fiscal inequity gap between charter and district public schools by raising per-pupil charter funding. The state also created an A-F accountability system for all public schools in Detroit, enacted automatic closure requirements for chronically low-performing charter schools across the state, and strengthened its authorizer practices.



## PROTECTING AND EXPANDING LEGAL RIGHTS

Over the last year, we took a big step forward in our ability to advocate in courts across America with the launch of the Charter School Legal Action Fund. This vital fund serves as a national watchdog and resource, engaging in the robust, high-quality defense of lawsuits around the country that pose a threat to the existence of charter schools. To date, the Legal Action Fund has already invested in, or committed to investing in, seven lawsuits

designed to support the statutory and regulatory environment for charter schools and students. Furthermore, we held two successful Alliance of Public Charter School Attorneys (APCSA) legal seminars, with over 100 attorneys attending each seminar. The seminars provided an opportunity to explore and address emerging legal issues in the charter school community. The network of charter school attorneys comprising APCSA has now grown to nearly 500 attorneys nationwide.



Pat Hennessy of Conrad O'Brien, Lisa Scruggs of Duane Morris LLP, and Daniel Woodring of Woodring Law Firm present at the 2016 APCSA Fall Seminar.





## LIFTING THE VOICES OF AFRICAN-AMERICAN PARENTS

In many neighborhoods, the opening of a charter school gives parents the opportunity to send their children to a high-quality school. So when charter schools are the victim of misleading attacks designed to limit their growth, the National Alliance responds strongly.

When the NAACP called for a moratorium on the growth of charter schools, we knew it was imperative to raise the voices of families of color whose children attend charter schools and the many more who are waiting for their chance. We joined with allies, including the Black Alliance for Educational Options, to ensure that these voices were heard.

The centerpiece of our effort was the #ChartersWork campaign, launched in September with the release of a letter from 166 African-American leaders to the NAACP board of directors requesting a meeting to discuss the proposed moratorium. Signers included Cheryl Brown Henderson, education activist and daughter of Oliver Brown, the lead plaintiff in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* decision; George Parker, former president of the Washington Teachers' Union; Dr. Michael Lomax, president of the United Negro College Fund; and former U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. Rod Paige.

We also released and promoted a petition written by six parents of students in charter schools or on wait lists. The parent petition drew more than 3,100 signers in a matter of days. The #ChartersWork campaign generated more than 200 media stories across print, radio, online, and television, as well as endorsements from the editorial boards of the country's most influential newspapers, including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. Grammy Award-winning singer John Legend also penned a heartfelt personal essay in *Essence* magazine about his work with charter schools and the importance of giving African American families access to better educational choices.

Although the NAACP board of directors approved the moratorium, as we anticipated, we were successful in making sure that the voices of charter school parents and supporters were heard by the NAACP and in the media. We continue to empower these voices during the seven hearings across America where the NAACP pledged to evaluate its board's decision by hearing from both charter and district public school advocates.



Kara Bobroff, Executive Director of Native American Community Academy, and Alisha Morgan, Executive Director of Ivy Preparatory Academy, address Capitol Hill staff on the importance of giving families high-quality school options.



### BRINGING PARENT OPINION TO LIGHT

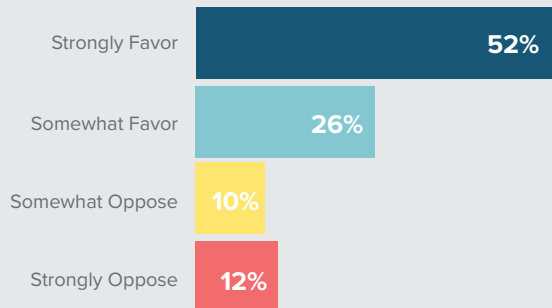
The voices and views of parents are vital to charter schools, and in 2016, the National Alliance released our first parent poll to coincide with National Charter Schools Week. Now more than ever, parents across the nation want to be able to choose the best public school for their child, and the results from this survey reinforce the demand for more high-quality charter schools.



### PROMOTING QUALITY IN VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

Just as important as promoting charter school funding equity, autonomy, and innovation is ensuring that charter schools provide every student with a high-quality education. When we see standards slipping, it's incumbent on us to call for improvement. In June 2016, the National Alliance, the 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now (50CAN), and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) released "A Call to Action to Improve the Quality of Full-Time Virtual Charter Public Schools." The report provides specific policy recommendations to help states hold full-time virtual charter schools accountable for student results.

#### WOULD YOU FAVOR OR OPPOSE A CHARTER SCHOOL OPENING IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD?



Source: Braun Research Incorporated (BRI)

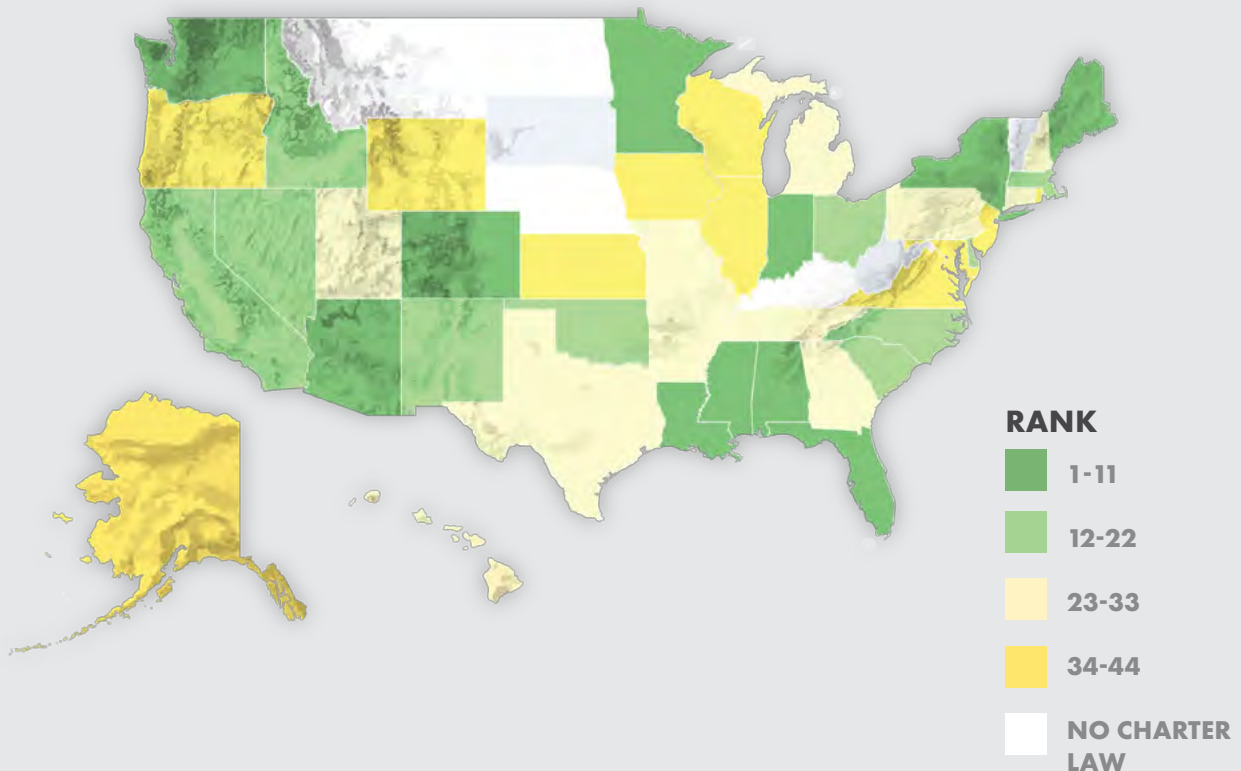


# A NEW MODEL LAW TO GUIDE STATE POLICY

State policymakers across the country look to the National Alliance's model law for guidance on how to improve their own laws. In 2016, we issued the first update to the law, reflecting what we've learned since the model law was first released in 2009. This revised version draws on best practices in state policy that have led to the growth of high-quality charter schools, while also addressing weaknesses that, in some cases, have allowed underperforming charter schools

and ineffective authorizers to avoid accountability. The revised model law encourages states to provide more equitable support to charter school students, give charter schools more flexibility, and strengthen accountability for charter schools and their authorizers. Specific revisions to the model law include policy updates on full-time virtual charter schools, funding, authorizers, facilities, flexibility, and discipline.

## 2016 STATE MODEL LAW RANKINGS





John Bailey, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative and Walton Family Foundation; Chester Finn Jr., Thomas B. Fordham Institute; Nina Rees, National Alliance; Matt Ladner, Charles Koch Institute; and National Alliance Board Member Deb McGriff speak at the Foundation for Excellence in Education's 2016 National Summit.

# EMPOWERING VOICES

Throughout 2016, the National Alliance waged an aggressive effort to spotlight the charter school movement's successes, draw attention to major events, and push back against the false narratives of charter school opponents. By using both traditional and social media to amplify our message around several pivotal moments, we kept up a steady drumbeat of charter school news and views. The National Alliance earned more than 800 mentions in the press, including a tenfold increase in placement in minority media outlets, largely driven by coverage of our campaign to raise the voices of African-American charter school students, parents, and school leaders. We published more than two dozen opinion pieces throughout the year, and President and CEO Nina Rees appeared at nearly 20 conferences and panels, from the Brookings Institution to the Philanthropy Roundtable.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

May 1, 2016

## *The Union War on Charter-School Philanthropists*

By Nina Rees

“

Charter schools put high-quality education within reach of students without regard for family incomes. Policy makers and philanthropists should pay close attention to how these schools are revamping communities and attracting philanthropic investment to some of the neediest neighborhoods.

**Charters have the potential to revolutionize American education—but they will need support to do so.**

”



Early in 2016, we launched the **Open the Doors Campaign** to increase funding for the federal Charter Schools Program. Thousands of advocates sent emails to members of Congress and contacted the Clinton and Trump campaigns via Twitter during the National Charter Schools Conference.



Nina Rees, president and CEO of the National Alliance; Kevin Hall, president and CEO of the Charter School Growth Fund, and; Neerav Kingsland, senior education fellow at the Laura and John Arnold Foundation and CEO of the Hastings Fund discuss the charter school movement after 25 years during The Philanthropy Roundtable's 2016 National Forum on K-12 Philanthropy.

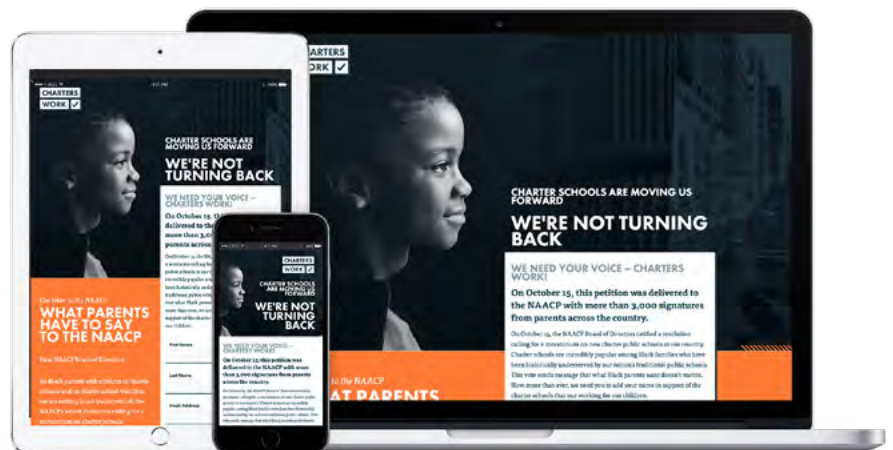
**MEDIA MENTIONS**

**USA TODAY THE WALL STREET JOURNAL THE NEW YORK TIMES LOS ANGELES TIMES CHICAGO TRIBUNE THE WASHINGTON POST STAR TRIBUNE THE INQUIRER THE ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER DAILY NEWS TAMPA BAY TIMES THE PLAIN DEALER THE COLUMBUS DISPATCH AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN THE KANSAS CITY STAR COURIER-JOURNAL PITTSBURGH TRIBUNE-REVIEW THE TENNESSEAN THE CINCINNATI ENQUIRER DAYTON DAILY NEWS**



## CHARTERS WORK ✓

In response to the NAACP's call for a national moratorium on new charter schools, the National Alliance launched the **#ChartersWork** campaign, which generated 15,000 social media mentions.






Tom Torkelson of IDEA Public Schools accepts the Broad Prize Award for Public Charter Schools for the most outstanding charter management organization in America.

# THE 2016 NATIONAL CHARTER SCHOOLS CONFERENCE

The 2016 National Charter Schools Conference in Nashville, Tennessee, celebrated the 25th anniversary of the charter school movement and gave educators from across the country the opportunity to hear from inspiring speakers and expert practitioners. Organized under the theme “Big Ideas for a Brighter Future,” the conference highlighted how charter schools are using their autonomy to take bold educational steps to help students raise their expectations and realize their aspirations.

 [Watch speeches and highlights from the 2016 National Charter Schools Conference on publiccharters.org](http://publiccharters.org)



U.S. Secretary of Education  
Dr. John King

NewsOne Now's Roland Martin and National Alliance's board member and former U.S. Senator Mary Landrieu emceed the event.

Keynote speakers included Yale research scientist Dr. Marc Brackett; Governor of Tennessee Bill Haslam; former National Alliance board chair Dr. Howard Fuller; tennis legend and charter school founder Andre Agassi; and U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. John King.



Sen. Mary Landrieu



NewsOne Now's Roland Martin



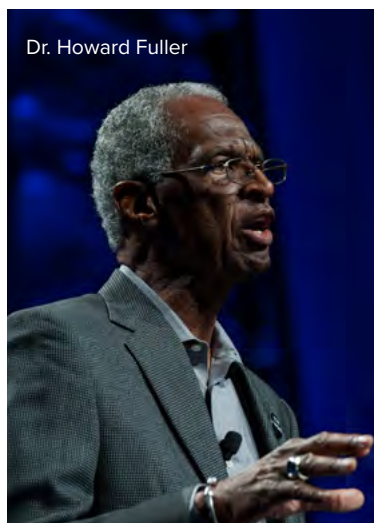
Colorado League of Charter Schools team



Dr. Marc Brackett



Andre Agassi



Dr. Howard Fuller



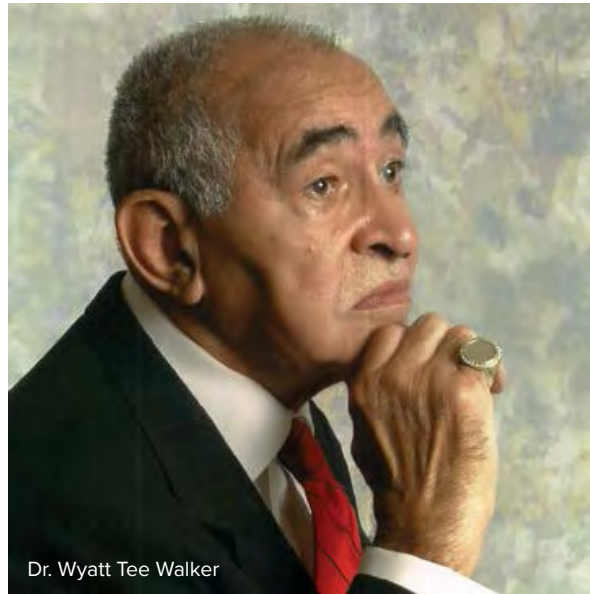
Gov. Bill Haslam

# HONORING CHARTER SCHOOL LEADERS

Each year, the National Alliance is proud to honor individuals who have pioneered the advancement of charter schools, as well as those who continue to strengthen the environment for charter schools and students around the country.

At the 2016 National Charter Schools Conference, we inducted three new members into the National Charter Schools Hall of Fame: Bill Kurtz, CEO of DSST Public Schools; Dr. Rod Paige, former U.S. secretary of education; and Kim Smith, founder of NewSchools Venture Fund and the Pahara Institute.

Hall of Fame Inductee  
Kim Smith



Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker

We were especially thrilled to honor the work of civil rights pioneer Dr. Wyatt Tee Walker with our Lifetime Achievement Award—just the second time we’ve ever bestowed such recognition. Following his early fight to integrate schools in Virginia, Dr. Walker served as a local NAACP president and later became chief of staff to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who called Dr. Walker “one of the keenest minds of the nonviolent revolution.” While serving as pastor of Canaan Baptist Church in Harlem, Dr. Walker advocated for New York to pass a charter school law, later co-founding the state’s first charter school, the Sisulu-Walker Charter School of Harlem.



Nina Rees honors Hall of Fame inductee Bill Kurtz.



Hall of Fame Inductee  
Dr. Rod Paige



National Alliance's Nina Rees, Rebecca David, and Ron Rice with Charter Champ Sen. Roy Blunt

## CHAMPIONS FOR CHARTERS

During National Charter Schools Week, we honored 10 federal, state, and local lawmakers as Champions for Charters, recognizing their work to improve funding equity, protect autonomy, and advance quality and innovation in charter schools.

**U.S. Senator Roy Blunt, Missouri**

**U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, California**

**Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker**

**Dallas Mayor Michael Rawlings**

**Indiana State Senator Dennis Kruse**

**Indiana State Representative Bob Behning**


**Ohio State Senator Peggy Lehner**

**Ohio State Auditor Dave Yost**

**Washington State Senator Steve Litzow**

**Washington State Representative Larry Springer**



 [Click here to browse and read all of our publications on publiccharters.org](http://publiccharters.org)

# PUBLICATIONS

In 2016, we produced a variety publications, shedding light on some of the key issues affecting charter schools.

**This year's top publications:**

1. A Growing Movement: America's Largest Charter Public School Communities and Their Impact on Student Outcomes, November 2016
2. Charter Accountability For District-Run Schools: Using ESSA to Create Contract-Based Accountability for Urban Public Education, October 2016
3. A New Model Law for Supporting High-Quality Charter Public Schools: Second Edition, October 2016
4. Charter Public Schools Serving Hispanic Communities, September 2016
5. A Call to Action to Improve the Quality of Full-Time Virtual Charter Public Schools, June 2016
6. Demanding a Chance: Parents' Demand for Charter Schools Continues to Grow, April 2016
7. How to Recruit High-Performing Charter Management Organizations to a New Region: Results from the 2015 CMO Survey, March 2016
8. The Health of the Charter Public School Movement: A State-by-State Analysis, March 2016
9. A Closer Look at the Charter School Movement: Schools, Students, and Management Organizations, 2015- 16, February 2016
10. Measuring Up to the Model: A Ranking of State Charter School Laws, January 2016





# EXPANDING OUR FOOTPRINT

WE WERE INSPIRED by the growth and progress of the charter school movement in 2016, our 25th anniversary year. As we look ahead to 2017, the National Alliance is engaged in exciting projects to support and advance opportunities for the movement.

As we prepare to update our strategic plan, we hope to help better brand, communicate, and promote charter schools in ways that resonate most effectively with parents, policymakers, and the public while fighting our opponents.

With a new administration and Congress in Washington, D.C., the National Alliance will continue our work to dramatically increase funding for the Charter Schools Program and other federal funding streams that support charter schools in the implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act implementation.

The first ranking of charter school laws using our newly updated model law will provide guidance to state policymakers looking to improve their charter law or enact one for the first time. The

National Alliance will continue to offer guidance to supportive legislators throughout the states.

Our research team will release the first findings from a major analysis of retirement benefit offerings for charter school teachers. With many state teacher pension plans in dire financial straits, our research can assist charter schools that want to explore alternatives, as well as generate understanding around how benefits decisions affect teacher recruitment and retention. In addition, we will release the first findings from a pilot authorizer scoring project. The study will look at 55 authorizers with at least 10 schools in their portfolio to measure which authorizers are achieving high success within their school portfolios.

Throughout 2017, look for the Charter School Legal Action Fund to continue ramping up its investments in cases where we can have a major impact on behalf of charter schools and students across America.

# THANK YOU TO OUR MAJOR SUPPORTERS

Our success is built on the shoulders of our loyal supporters. Thank you for helping us lead public education to unprecedented levels of academic achievement for all students.



DORIS & DONALD FISHER FUND

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FOUNDATION

ARTHUR ROCK &  
TONI REMBE

CHARLES AND HELEN  
SCHWAB *foundation*

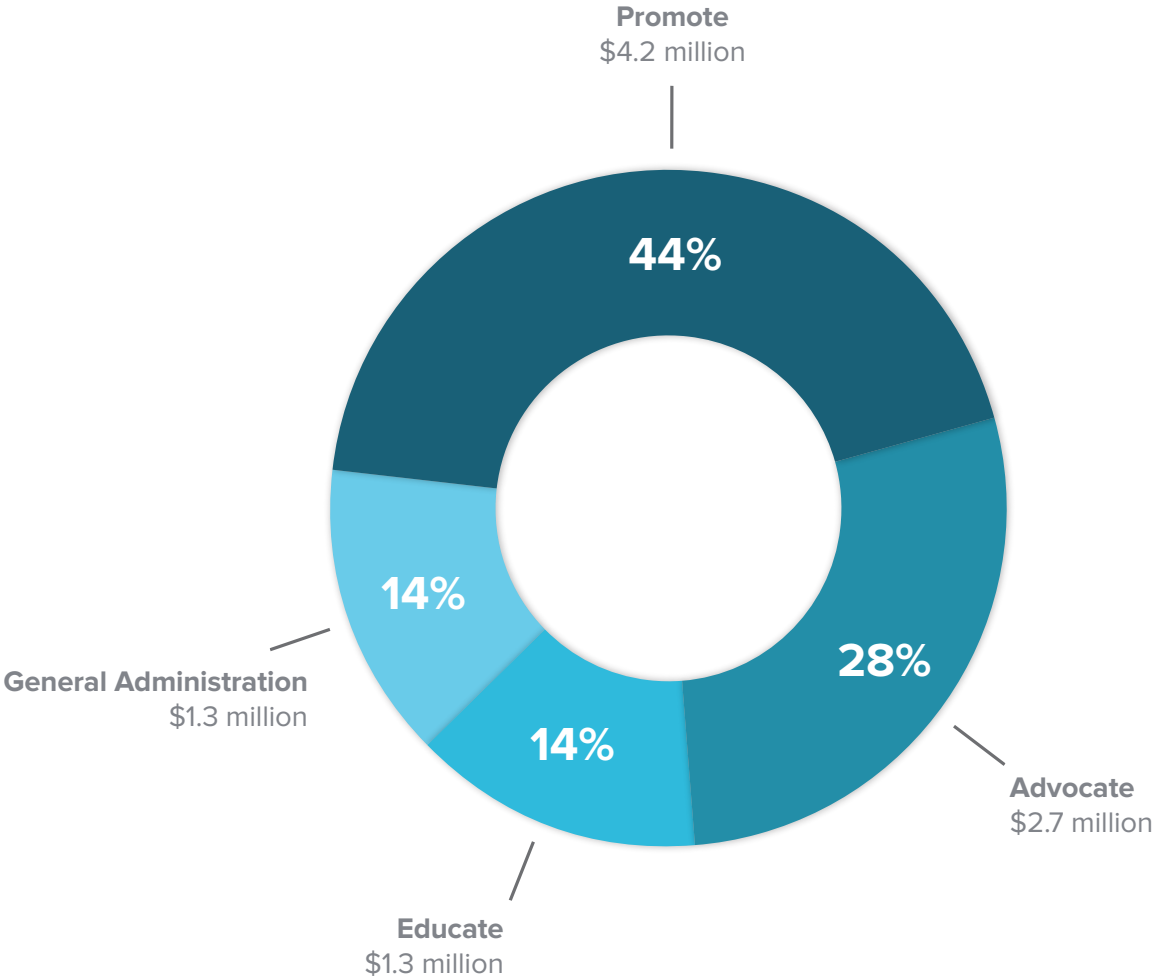


*The*  
WALTON FAMILY  
FOUNDATION



# FINANCIALS IN BRIEF

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is a 501(c)(3) public charity funded through four principal revenue streams: foundations, individuals, partner organizations, and the National Charter Schools Conference. In 2016, we invested \$9.5 million to execute our agenda to advocate, educate, and promote strong policy environments for charter schools.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS



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EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT



Christy Wolfe  
SENIOR POLICY ADVISER



## MISSION

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is the leading national nonprofit organization committed to advancing the charter school movement. Our mission is to lead public education to unprecedented levels of academic achievement by fostering a strong charter movement.

## VISION

Today, there are 6,939 charter schools in 43 states and Washington, D.C., educating 3.1 million students across America. However, in most communities the demand for charter schools far outpaces the supply. The execution of our new strategic plan will play a vital role in expanding the number of charter schools over the next three years. By 2020, we expect to have 10,000 charter schools serve over 4 million students.

## VALUES

When given the option, parents increasingly are choosing to enroll their children in charter schools and providing families with high-quality educational options for their children is the fuel that drives our work. To support the growth of high-performing charter schools, we work to:

- Increase public funding for charter schools;
- Create a climate in which charter schools can grow; and
- Improve the overall health of the movement.

Through our advocacy efforts at the federal and state levels, our legal activities, and our national communications work, we ensure lawmakers, the media, opinion-shapers, charter school leaders, thought leaders, and the general public understand what charter schools are, the promise they hold for our children, and how best to promote the growth of high-quality schools nationwide.



As a parent of a charter school student, **I know firsthand that having the opportunity to send my son to a charter school** that fit his needs allowed him to raise his own expectations and accomplish his full potential.”

**SHIRLINE WILSON**  
RAINER PREP CHARTER SCHOOL, SEATTLE, WA

**National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**

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