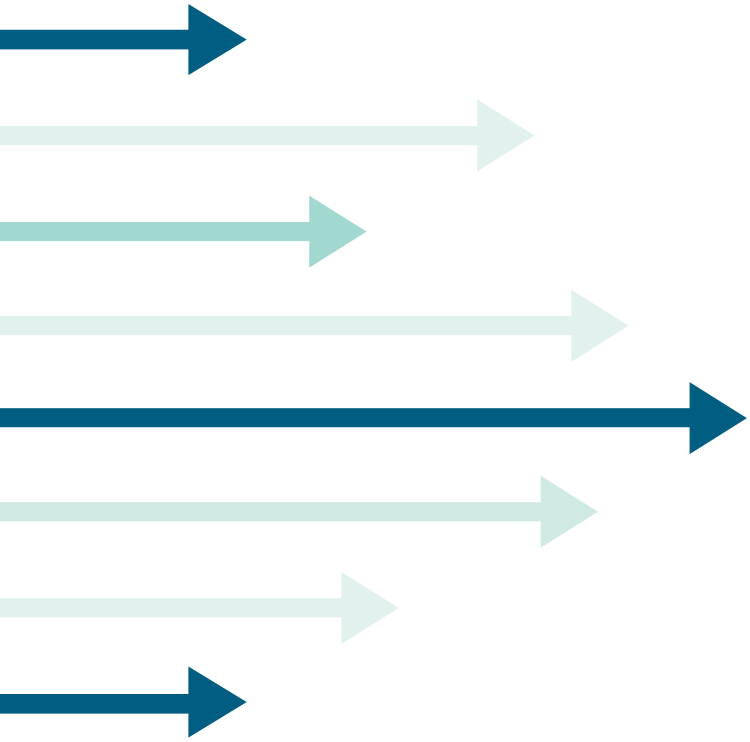
REINVIGORATING THE PIPELINE

INSIGHTS INTO PROPOSED AND APPROVED CHARTER SCHOOLS

MARCH 2019

nacsa

National Association of Charter School Authorizers
qualitycharters.org



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A CALL TO ACTION

FROM GREG RICHMOND, NACSA PRESIDENT & CEO

Judging by performance and scale, charter schools have been the most successful and sustained education improvement strategy of the past quarter century. These public schools deliver better outcomes for families, especially low-income and students of color, and they have steadily grown to serve nearly three million students nationwide.

However, in the last few years, the pace of growth has slowed. School performance remains mixed, despite more closures of the lowest-performing schools.

As we reflect on charter school quality and growth, theories vary widely about causes for these trends. Some say charter networks have become too prevalent and the sector is becoming homogenous, losing its innovative edge. Many believe philanthropy has an outsized role. Others assert that authorizers have become too risk averse. But these beliefs are generally driven by anecdotes, not data. While billions of dollars have been invested in the startup and growth of charter schools, up until now, we knew very little about who and what was being proposed—about the charter school pipeline.

That's why two years ago, NACSA launched a first-of-its-kind research project to analyze this national charter school pipeline. We collected and analyzed nearly 3,000 charter school applications to authorizers in 20 states that oversee nearly two-thirds of all charter schools nationally.

We learned some commonly-held beliefs aren't supported by the data. For one, the charter school pipeline is more diverse—by operator type, by educational model, and from state to state—than most people realize. This diversity of educational approaches may be the biggest surprise, but I encourage you to read on, as there were more surprises related to how much support proposals receive, which models are proposed most frequently, and more.

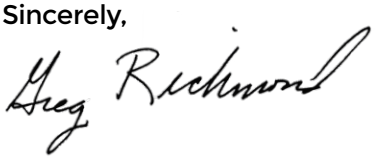
Equipped with facts, not anecdotes, we can do better.

Ultimately, we get the schools that authorizers approve. The data reveals the significant impact authorizers have on shaping educational opportunities, as the schools getting approved do not reflect the full variety being proposed. This is good news if authorizers screen out bad proposals, but a significant problem if authorizers miss opportunities to approve excellent ones.

Equipped with facts, not anecdotes, we can do better. This is our opportunity. Whether you authorize, support, fund, advocate for, or want to start a charter school, we all can learn from these findings. We can challenge ourselves to take new actions that lead to more great schools for children.

NACSA will share more findings in the months ahead. We also have much more to learn. After all, millions of U.S. children still don't have the opportunity to attend a great school. Let's get to work.

Sincerely,



Greg Richmond
President and CEO
National Association of Charter School Authorizers

KEY FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

SCHOOL MODELS

CHARTER SCHOOLS OFFER DIVERSE EDUCATIONAL MODELS, YET APPROVAL RATES FOR EACH MODEL VARY DRAMATICALLY

Data reveals the significant impact authorizers have in shaping the charter school landscape across the country. Over the last five years, a relatively wide range of school models and approaches were proposed and approved for students and communities. Descriptions of each model used for this analysis can be found here.

Authorizers were more likely to approve some proposals, like classical schools, and less likely to approve others, like arts and single-sex schools.

Charter School Proposals by School Model (2013-14 to 2017-18)

School Model (in order of Approval Rate)	Percent of Schools Proposed†	Approval Rate
Diverse by Design	1%	64%
Classical	4%	57%
No Excuses	10%	55%
Vocational	3%	43%
Military	<1%	43%
General	29%	42%
Special Education	2%	42%
Inquiry-Based (e.g., Montessori, Waldorf)	14%	40%
Early College	1%	40%
Other	4%	38%
Policy	<1%	38%
International/Foreign Language	5%	36%
Alternative/Credit Recovery	11%	34%
Blended/Hybrid	16%	34%
Virtual	4%	32%
STEM	12%	31%
Arts	7%	26%
Gifted	<1%	25%
Single Sex	3%	21%

† Total does not equal 100 percent, as a proposal could be coded as more than one model.

NACSA TAKEAWAY:

This data displays the sheer variety of charter school models and approaches available to families, something often overlooked. But it also shows the dramatic range in approval rates from model to model: some models are approved twice as often as others. Although this analysis does not include data on proposal quality or parental demand, the differences in approval rates likely result from authorizers making quality decisions about the merits of each application. However, since there isn't an obvious reason why proposals for classical schools would be, on average, twice as good as proposals for arts or gifted schools, the finding suggests authorizers should review their capacity to evaluate a wider diversity of school models and approaches, especially those they evaluate infrequently or have never evaluated.

EACH STATE'S PIPELINE IS UNIQUE: THE FREQUENCY OF PROPOSALS FOR EACH SCHOOL MODEL VARIES WIDELY FROM STATE TO STATE

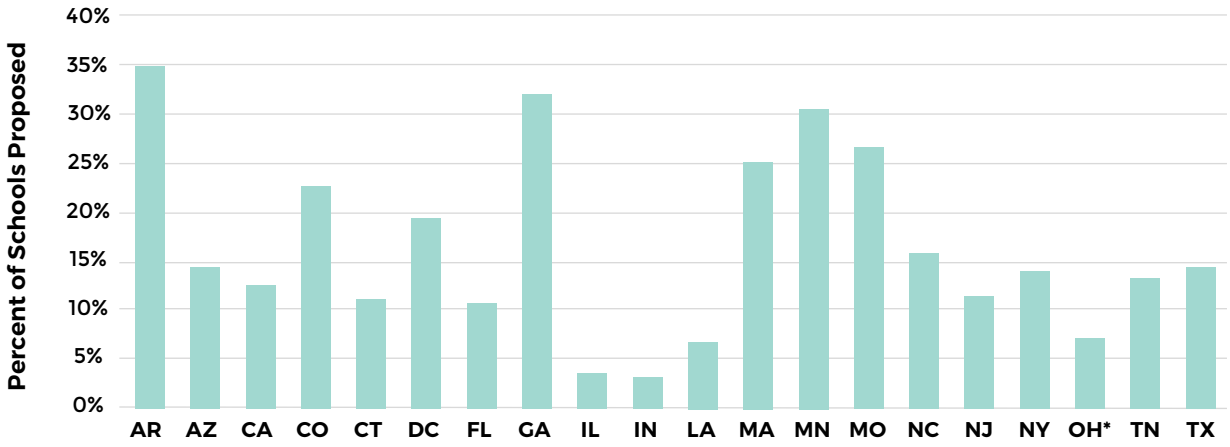
There was significant variation in the frequency of proposals for each school model from state to state. While one in three proposals (33 percent) in Washington, D.C. was for a blended/hybrid model, no blended schools were proposed in Connecticut or Massachusetts during the same period. Likewise, proposals for Inquiry-Based models (e.g., Montessori or Waldorf) ranged from 34 percent in Arizona to just 3 percent in Illinois and Indiana.

Proposals With Blended/Hybrid Model By State (2013-14 to 2017-18)

*Response rates in Ohio were lower than in other states. Please see the Overview of Methods for more information.

More research is needed on what conditions make some models more popular in certain states, while less so in others.

Proposals With Inquiry-Based Models (e.g., Waldorf or Montessori) by State (2013-14 to 2017-18)



*Response rates in Ohio were lower than in other states. Please see the Overview of Methods for more information.

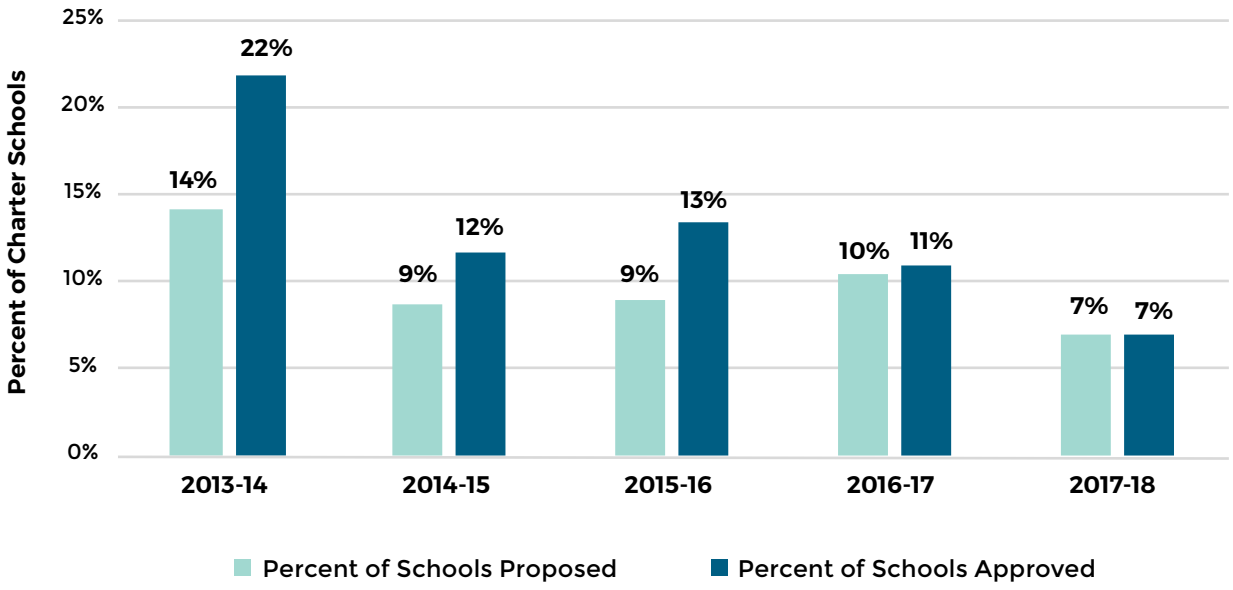
NACSA TAKEAWAY:

The significant state-by-state variability in all of the proposed models calls into question the belief or suggestion that charter schools are relatively homogenous across the nation. More research is needed on what conditions make some models more popular in certain states, while less so in others. This finding also underscores the importance of local data to create strategies to open more good schools.

PROPOSALS FOR "NO EXCUSES" SCHOOLS HAVE BECOME LESS PREVALENT

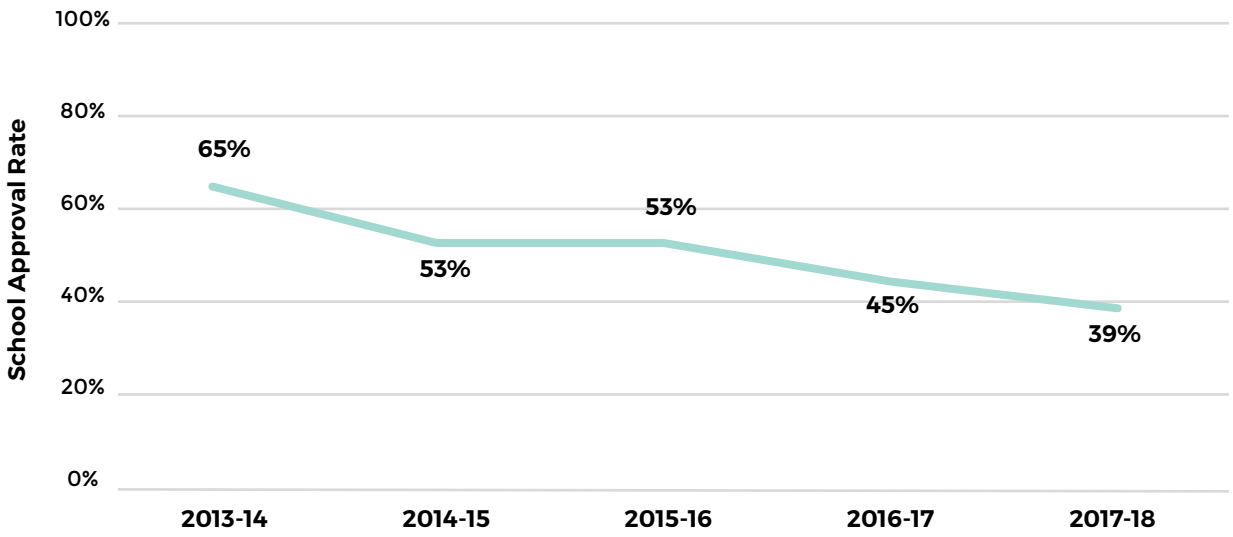
Despite their prominence in the national discourse, proposals to open "No Excuses" schools fell sharply in these 20 states. In 2017-18, they accounted for just 7 percent of all approved proposals, down from 22 percent in 2013-14. Authorizers were also less likely to approve the model in 2017-18 as they were five years earlier, as the approval rate fell by more than 40 percent.

Proposals and Approvals with "No Excuses" Model



In 2017-18, "No Excuses" schools accounted for just **7 percent** of all approved proposals.

Approval Rate of Proposals with "No Excuses" Model



While there is no universal definition of a "No Excuses" school, for the purposes of this analysis, applications that described a culture of high expectations and a goal of 100 percent college attendance were designated as "No Excuses" schools. In addition, these applications proposed an extended day or school year, an increased focus on English Language Arts (ELA) and math instruction, highly structured rules and procedures, and a strict behavioral code including uniforms.

NACSA TAKEAWAY:

There are several ways to interpret the decline in proposals for "No Excuses" schools. It is possible that authorizers, operators, and other stakeholders want to broaden the types of schools available to families after satisfying demand for "No Excuses" models in their communities. Some existing "No Excuses" CMO networks have been profiled for changing their disciplinary approaches, which could be reflected in their applications for new schools. It may also be a response to decreased political will to open these types of schools.

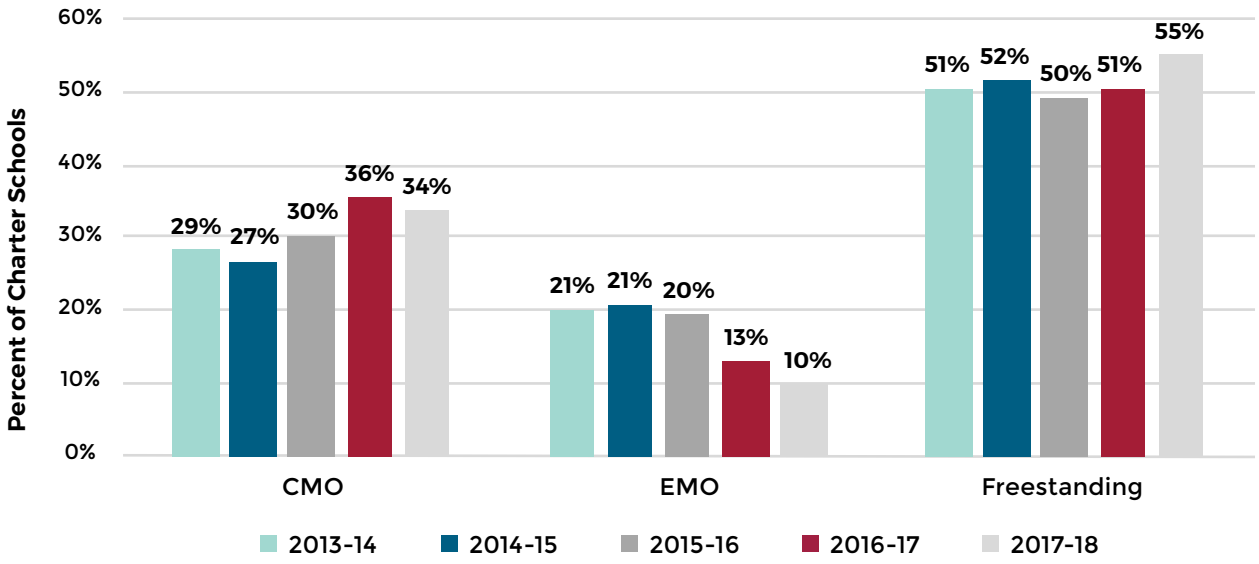
Also, the study's relatively broad definition of a "No Excuses" school makes it likely that some schools included in this category would not label themselves as such. Even when casting a wide net, fewer proposed schools fall within this category.

OPERATORS

THE PROPORTION OF APPLICATIONS FROM FREESTANDING OPERATORS IS AT A FIVE-YEAR HIGH

Over the last five years, the majority of charter school proposals were "freestanding" or unaffiliated with a charter school network—a nonprofit Charter Management Organization (CMO) or a for-profit Education Management Organization (EMO). The share of freestanding proposals has increased, reaching 55 percent in 2017-18. At the same time, the proportion of applications affiliated with a for-profit EMO decreased by half.

New School Proposals by Operator Type



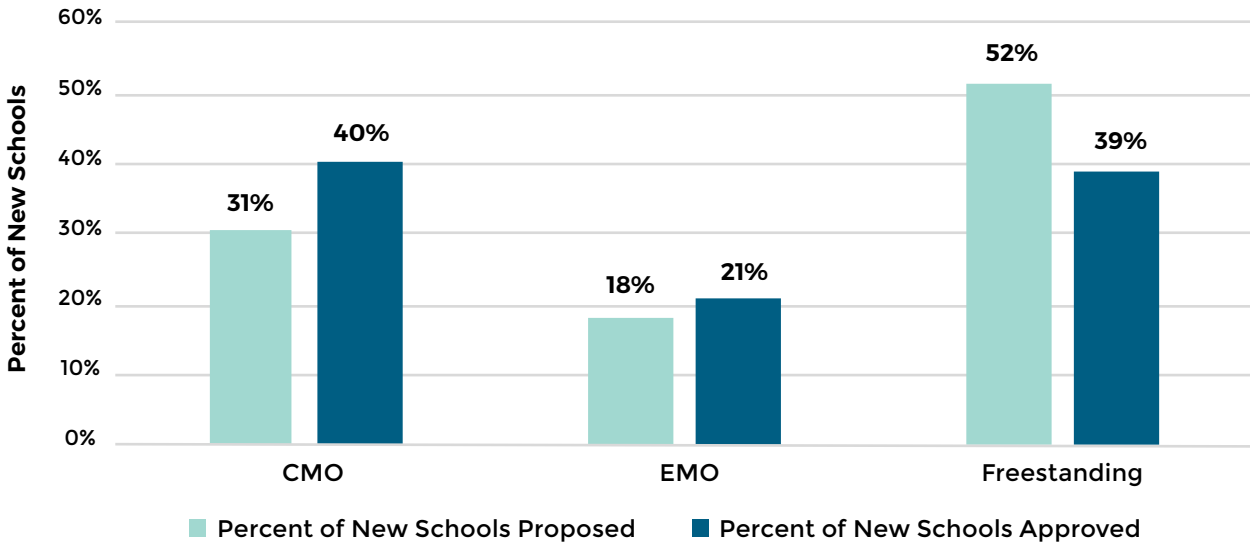
NACSA TAKEAWAY:

Every great charter school and network started with the entrepreneurial spirit of a single freestanding school. Although applications are declining overall, it is encouraging that most proposals are still coming from freestanding applicants. Many educators and community organizations continue to see chartering as a way to better serve children in their communities. Most importantly, these applicants may be launching the next innovative, life-changing opportunity for students.

AUTHORIZERS ARE MORE LIKELY TO APPROVE PROPOSALS FROM NETWORKS

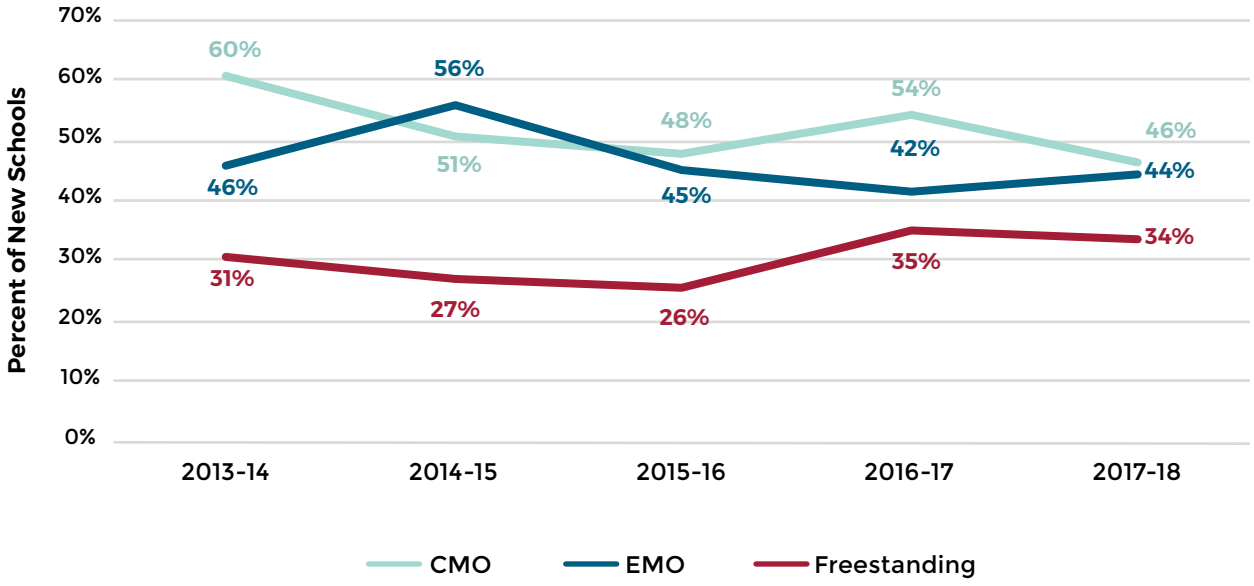
Although most proposals were unaffiliated with a network, the majority of schools approved (61 percent) were affiliated with either a nonprofit CMO or for-profit EMO network. Proposals affiliated with a network of any kind were much more likely to be given the green light. In addition, approval rates held relatively steady across all types of operators during the five years studied.

New Schools, Proposals and Approvals (2013-14 to 2017-18)



Proposals affiliated with a network of any kind were much more likely to be given the green light.

Approval Rate by Operator Type



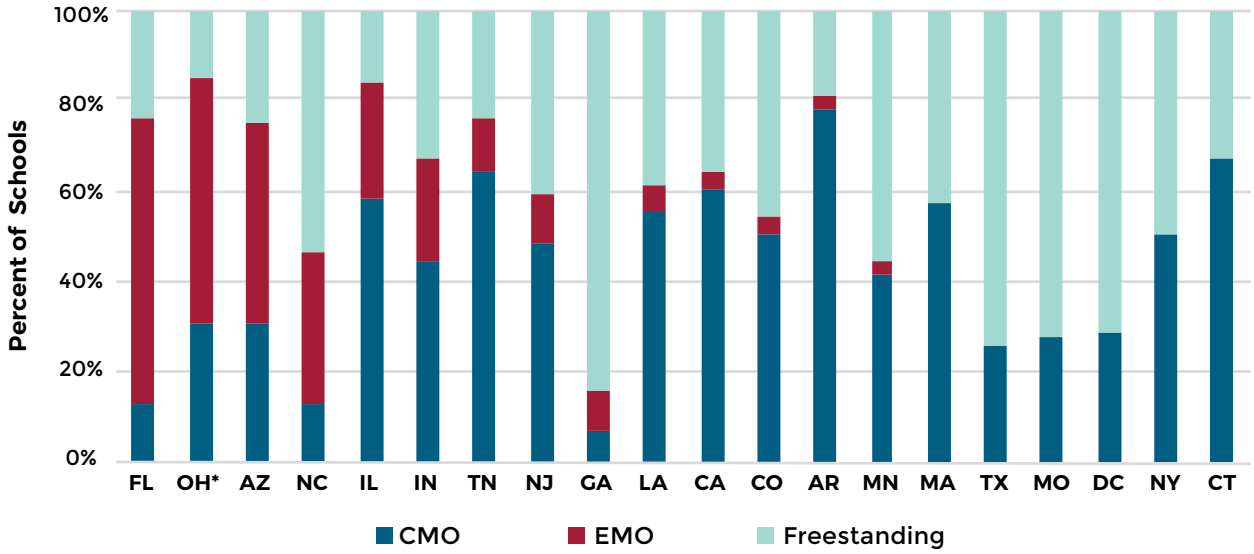
NACSA TAKEAWAY:

More research is needed about the quality of each application before reaching firm conclusions about this data. The disparity between approval rates likely reflects quality decisions by authorizers about the strengths of each individual application. It is also likely that some authorizers view proposals from proven operators as a safer bet as they face limited resources and other factors that decrease local political will to open new charter schools. If true, this would support anecdotal claims that authorizers are becoming more hesitant to take risks on qualified applications from unproven applicants.

PROPOSALS FROM FOR-PROFIT OPERATORS HAVE DECLINED SHARPLY

Although for-profit operators (EMOs) in the sector receive much attention, the proportion of proposals to open EMO-affiliated schools fell by 50 percent since 2013-14. In addition, they represent a significant proportion of approved schools in only four of the states studied: Florida, Ohio, Arizona, and North Carolina.

Approved New Schools by Operator Type



*Response rates in Ohio were lower than in other states. Please see the Overview of Methods for more information.

NACSA TAKEAWAY:

Together, these trends demonstrate that for-profit providers are not as prevalent—and likely becoming less prevalent—than the common narrative suggests. In half of the states studied, for-profit operators represented less than 10 percent of all approved new school proposals. In some states, there were none. The vast majority—78 percent—of schools approved to open over the last five years are not run by for-profit operators. Again, there is tremendous variation among charter schools from state to state, countering the idea that charter schooling is relatively homogenous across the nation.

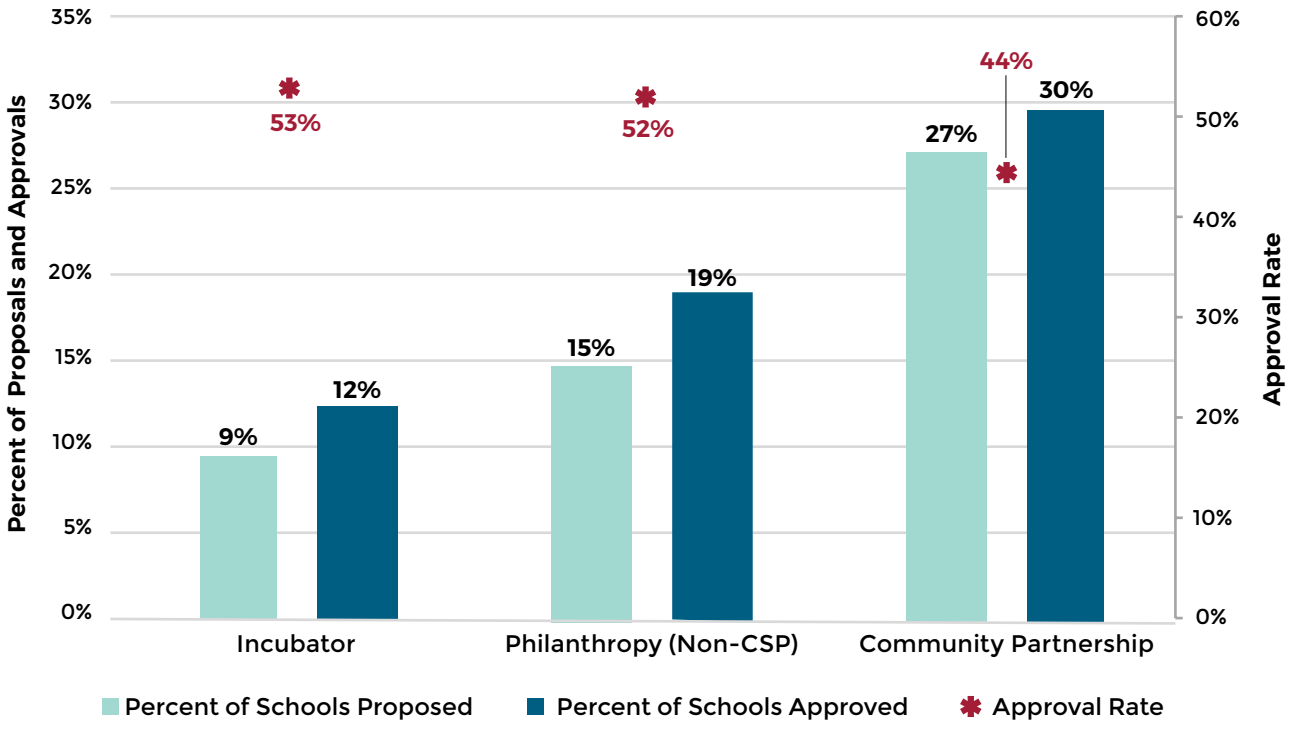
EXTERNAL SUPPORT

FEW APPLICATIONS SPECIFY SUPPORT, BUT THOSE THAT DO HAVE HIGH APPROVAL RATES

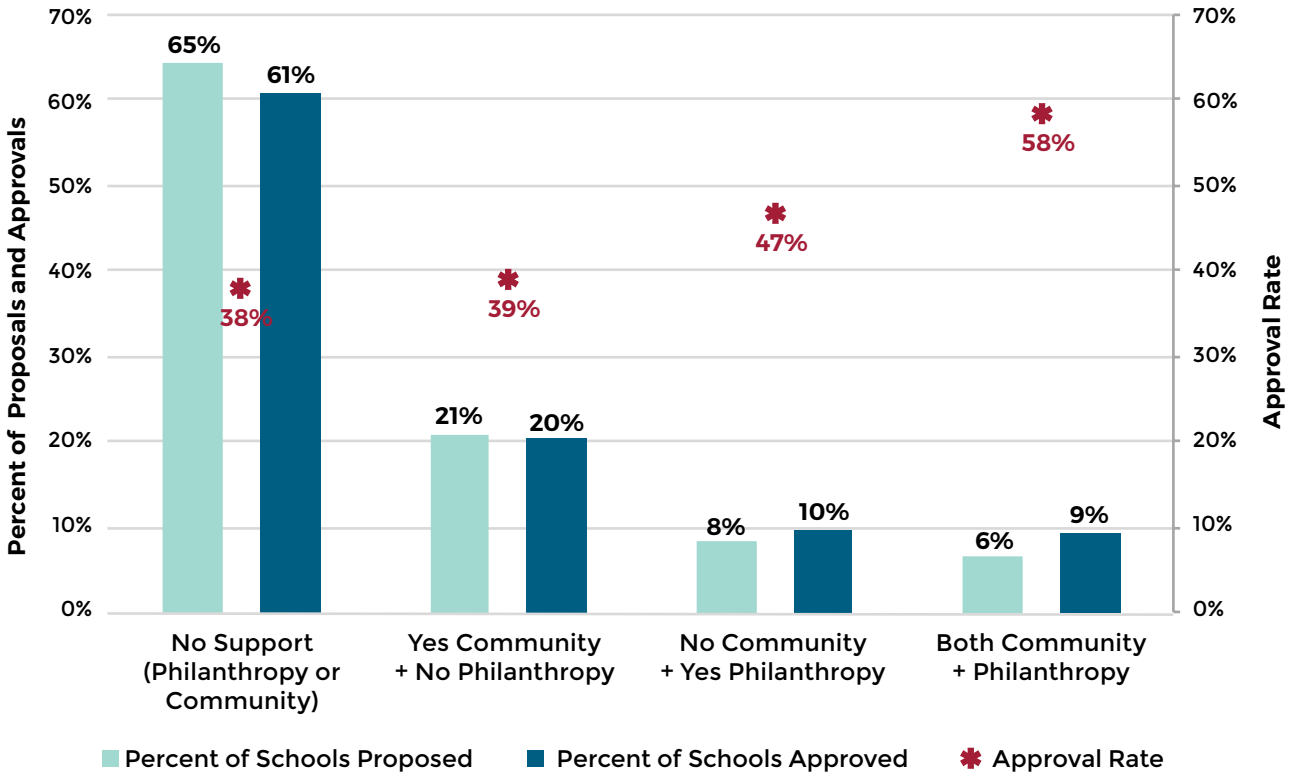
The vast majority of charter school proposals did not identify support from an incubator, philanthropy, or community partnership; however, those that did were more likely to be approved.

Only 15 percent of proposals described outside philanthropic support (defined as a commitment of at least $50,000; excludes federal Charter Schools Program support), yet authorizers were much more likely to approve proposals that had secured these commitments. Similarly, even fewer proposals described support from a charter school incubator (9 percent), but those that did had a very high approval rate (53 percent). A combination of external supports (e.g., philanthropy and community) made it even more likely an application would be approved.

Proposed, Approved, and Approval Rates for Applicant Support Variables



Philanthropy and Community Support Combination (2013-14 to 2017-18)



NACSA TAKEAWAY:

This data underscores the need for ecosystems where authorizers, operators, incubators, philanthropists, and community leaders work together to identify and address the needs of students and families. It is these ecosystems that help create more good charter schools.

But these ecosystems don't yet exist in many locales, and not all applicants have equitable access to funding and philanthropy. That's why it is critical to learn more about why proposals with external support get approved at higher rates. While those applicants with external support may simply create stronger applications, some authorizers may be more likely to approve a proposal because it was validated by a third party's resources, rather than on the application's merits. Both are cause for concern and merit the sector's attention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR AUTHORIZING

Authorizing shapes the quality and availability of schools in communities and this new data reveals a much more diverse school pipeline than the charter sector is often credited for.

But given that charter school waitlists continue to grow, and many children still lack access to good school options, the findings underscore the need for more charter school applicants, the need for better prepared applicants, and the need for smarter evaluation of applications.

To best respond to these research findings and the needs they underscore, authorizers will have to do more than just build a stronger set of technical skills among their staff. Authorizers will have to step up and demonstrate leadership in their communities—acting as catalysts, rather than passive recipients and evaluators of proposals. Our north star must always be creating more great schools for children.

Authorizers should identify community needs and actively cultivate a pipeline of potential schools that respond to those needs.

This starts with authorizers assessing application data through a lens of what will provide better schools for children, and constantly revaluating through this lens. Does a comparison of proposed schools versus approved schools reveal any surprising trends? Are the proposals and approvals seeking to serve neighborhoods and students most in need? If not, why not? What can be done about that?

Our north star must always be creating more great schools for children.

As part of this assessment, authorizers must engage with their communities, especially parents and families. What do parents and other stakeholders value and need? What types of schools are they seeking? How does this align with other data and evidence?

It's important for authorizers to signal that meeting local needs is a critical strategy to increase, not restrict, opportunities for students and communities. This could mean asking applicants to describe the specific need they are addressing and processes they went through to identify it. It could mean authorizers issuing a call for proposals that outlines priorities for the coming application cycle, among other strategies. How can authorizers signal an eagerness for more and different kinds of school proposals? How can authorizers help applicants work with their communities to develop proposals, not just check boxes? Authorizers must also stand up to charter school critics that seek to give the false impression that there is not community need for more good schools.

Authorizers should collaborate with partners to increase the pipeline of strong applications.

Community leaders, advocates, incubators, and philanthropists all have a role in creating an ecosystem of quality schools for all students, with a healthy pipeline of qualified, diverse school proposals. Authorizers can use their unique perspectives to identify additional factors that communities need to increase the number of strong applications, and who else is needed to fill the gaps. For instance, what if a city lacks an incubator? What can partners do to fill that gap?

Additionally, authorizers must recognize and address inequitable access to the resources and support it takes to craft school proposals. A group of local teachers or community members with a great idea for a new school does not have the same access to resources and support as a large management organization. Authorizers should take a leadership role, working with partners to identify and target support to promising yet under-resourced potential applicants.

How can authorizing processes change to evaluate these proposals so the next great school isn't missed?

Authorizers must be ready and able to evaluate a wide range of proposals while maintaining high standards.

The differences between the percentage of applications proposed and approved in this report are likely the result of authorizers screening applications for quality and denying deficient proposals. It's also likely that some authorizers are missing opportunities to open more schools that would benefit students, especially when evaluating certain models, freestanding proposals, or those that lack external support.

With a healthy, reinvigorated pipeline, all authorizers will at some point receive a proposal they have never or rarely seen, one that may have only an indirect evidence base, or an application that looks great but lacks the backing of a management organization or philanthropy. How can authorizing processes change to evaluate these proposals so the next great school isn't missed? How can authorizers focus on evaluating the school leadership team's ability to run a successful school, not its ability to craft an application that checks all the boxes?

As we continue to analyze the charter school pipeline, there is much to learn, especially at the local level. We look forward to continuing the conversation about what authorizing leadership looks like and how we can together create more great schools for millions more children.

WHAT'S NEXT

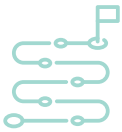
We anticipate this analysis will launch a broad conversation about how to reinvigorate the charter school pipeline. There is much more to learn before we can definitively say whether communities are getting the schools they want and need. In order to inform future solutions in authorizing practice and policy, NACSA has identified areas for action and further research:

Support data-driven change at the local level. While understanding national trends is important, the real power of this data is how it can be used to make change at the state and city levels. NACSA will work with authorizers and advocacy partners to identify local pipeline trends and create policy recommendations, improvements in authorizing practices, and advocacy strategies based on what is needed in their communities. The work of reinvigorating the pipeline requires authorizers to authentically engage their communities to produce meaningful change. NACSA is committed to advancing community engagement, working in partnership with authorizers.

Strengthen authorizing practices through the development of new tools, resources, and best practices. Good authorizing is a catalyst for charter school growth and innovation. To help authorizers assess community needs and evaluate diverse proposals, NACSA will be updating our model resources and providing new kinds of support to practitioners. As a first step, we'll be working to improve our capacity interview guidance, a critical step in the application process. Not all authorizers have adequate resources and staffing to do this work well, so we are creating more tools specifically for smaller authorizers as part of NACSA's work under a new federal grant.

Conduct deeper analysis that explores the following:

The relationship between proposals and eventual school quality. We must learn more about the eventual quality of the schools proposed to make clear recommendations for the field. We want to return to the data and examine the relationship between each application and the school's performance, as well as explore whether there are application components that predict a strong start in the first years after opening.



The policy and ecosystem drivers of the pipeline. To increase the number of promising school proposals, we must understand the causes of the quality and quantity of applications and approvals. Is it driven by a state's policy conditions (e.g., types of authorizers allowed, per-pupil funding allocation, position on performance frameworks)? Is it the availability of talent and facilities? The presence of an incubator? Authorizing practices? Or some combination of multiple factors?

Equity and access issues. While we know a bit about who is proposing new schools, we need to know more about the race, ethnicity, and backgrounds of school applicants, proposed board members, and leaders. We must also examine student demographics. Are applicants serving the students they intended to serve? Are schools locating in the areas of most need? Do applicants have equitable access to resources? More knowledge will position us to work with authorizers to identify and address blind spots on equity and access issues in their authorizing processes.

Ultimately, we hope the findings will challenge everyone to question assumptions and take new actions that will lead to more great schools for children. Our work is stronger together: join us for this important work.

OVERVIEW OF METHODS AND SAMPLE

NACSA collected and analyzed charter school applications—both approved and not approved—from 19 states and the District of Columbia (hereafter referred to as 20 states) over a five-year period (Fall 2013 to Spring 2018) in order to describe trends and types of applications being proposed, approved, withdrawn, and denied.

Data Acquisition

Research teams from NACSA and Public Impact collected charter school applications from two primary sources: direct submissions from charter school authorizers and downloads from authorizer or state department of education websites. All types of applications were collected (e.g., initial applications, appeals, replications). Authorizers also provided or confirmed the status of each application (e.g., approved, not-approved, pending). The project has received 2,943 applications to date.

Application Coding

A team of trained researchers and analysts coded each application across more than 50 domains comprising over 180 variables. Variables include the application's proposed school models/features, information about the applicant, and many other application characteristics. Project leadership agreed to definitions for each variable. Industry-standard methods and targets were used to establish a high rate of coder agreement throughout the coding process.

Sample

Authorizers participating in the study oversaw 81 percent of charter schools in the 20 states included in this study. To maximize the resources available for the study and the comprehensiveness of the findings, those 20 states were chosen because of (a) their relative charter sector size, (b) authorizer willingness to provide data to researchers, and (c) the availability of data.

The research team attempted to acquire applications from every current authorizer in those 20 states (i.e., those that oversaw at least one charter school across the five-year study period). Researchers followed up with non-responding authorizers, prioritizing authorizers with many charter schools in their portfolio. In all states except one, the research team received applications from authorizers overseeing two-thirds or more of charter schools in that state.

[1] The 20 jurisdictions are Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Missouri, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, and Texas.

[2] Public Impact's mission is to improve education dramatically for all students, especially low-income students, students of color, and other students whose needs historically have not been well met. They are a team of professionals from many backgrounds, including former teachers. They are researchers, thought leaders, tool-builders, and on-the-ground consultants who work with leading education reformers. For more on Public Impact, please visit www.publicimpact.com. Public Impact provided critical thought leadership to the project and led the application coding process. The authors are extremely grateful for their competence, diligence, partnership, and thoughtfulness in this project.

[3] This count includes applications appealed to an appellate body with the authority to authorize directly. Specifically, in California, county and state agencies are empowered to directly authorize appealed applications. The count also includes multi-campus applications (i.e., a single application for five schools was counted as five applications). For most analyses, applications to an appellate authorizer are removed, but multi-campus applications are included.

[4] The full list of variables is available upon request.

[5] Please see the Glossary of Terms for variable descriptions.

[6] The research team did not request applications from all "potential authorizers," entities that state law empowers to be authorizers but have not yet approved a charter school. In a handful of instances, the research team did request applications from "potential authorizers" known to have received an application during the study period.

[7] Participating Ohio authorizers only oversaw approximately 35 percent of existing charter schools in the state. Consequently, we have less confidence the state-level data in Ohio is an accurate depiction of application activity and it should be interpreted with caution.

[8] The research team used the percent of charter schools overseen by participating authorizers in each state as a proxy for where applications are likely submitted. This information is available upon request.

[9] The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (Alliance) included 13 "specialized" models in its 2016 Health of the Charter Public School Movement report, building on the charter school taxonomy developed by Michael Q. McShane and Jenn Hatfield at the American Enterprise Institute. This report builds on the Alliance's model, adding Early College, Gifted and Special Education models to the list and separating the Virtual model from the Blended/Hybrid model. Reports describing the taxonomy and use of the models can be found here:

[10] National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. (March 2016). The Health of the Charter Public School Movement: A State by State Analysis, Second Edition. Retrieved from https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/032316-Health-of-the-Movement_13_final.pdf

[11] McShane, M., Hatfield, J. (July 2015). Measuring Diversity in Charter School Offerings. American Enterprise Institute. Retrieved from http://www.aei.org/publication/measuring-diversity-in-charter-school-offerings/

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SCHOOL MODELS

Note: This is not a comprehensive list of all models coded. It only includes models included in the report.

In general, a school's model was classified using the taxonomy created by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and used by the National Alliance of Public Charter Schools. In some instances, schools received multiple model codes only if each was central to the school's educational plan.

General: A "general" school does not fit into any specialized coded category.

Alternative/Credit Recovery: An "alternative" or "credit recovery" school serves students who are not well-served in traditional school settings. Often, these student populations need to regain credits to graduate on time or at all.

Arts: An "arts" school has a school-wide focus on the arts (e.g., fine arts, drama, dance, music). Arts are a central focus of the school; not just a range of extra-curricular options. Includes STEAM schools which offer a combined Arts and STEM focus.

Blended/Hybrid: A "blended" or "hybrid" school employs a combination of online and classroom learning. Students spend part of the day in class receiving direct instruction from a teacher and part of the day engaged in online learning. A blended school must have a brick-and-mortar facility. Online learning needs to be a significant part of the model; use of the terms "personalized learning" or "blended learning" alone are not sufficient.

Classical: A "classical" school is rooted in the teachings of Plato, Socrates, and other thinkers of western civilization. The curriculum is grounded in the liberal arts (e.g., logic, rhetoric), and often includes the study of Latin or Greek.

Diverse by Design: A school that is "diverse by design" purposely promotes equity by ensuring that the school is racially, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse. There must be a sense of intentionality: the school makes a conscious effort to improve diversity through recruitment, school design, etc.

Early College: In an "early college" high school, students take both high school and college classes, earning an associate's degree or multiple years of college credit in addition to a high school diploma.

Gifted: A "gifted" school is one designed for academically gifted and talented students. The school may have an accelerated curriculum.

Inquiry-Based: An "inquiry-based" school has a firm commitment to inquiry-based or project-based learning models (sometimes referred to as "progressive" or "child-centered"). Its entire academic program is based on learning by doing. Many schools may use project-based learning in a limited way, but an "inquiry-based" school revolves around this type of approach. Approaches such as project-based learning, student-centered learning, inquiry-based learning and/or expeditionary learning are central to the academic program; includes Montessori, Waldorf, Steiner, and Expeditionary Learning models.

International/Foreign Language: An "international" or "foreign language" school has a focus on global culture, but above all the school includes a foreign language component at the center of its mission.

Military: In a "military" school, all or most students are involved in military training for part of the school day (beyond ROTC extra-curricular). Students often wear uniforms, but uniforms alone are not sufficient for a "military" school classification.

No Excuses: A "no excuses" school has high expectations for all students and a goal of 100 percent college attendance. There is usually an extended day and/or school year and an increased focus on English Language Arts (ELA) and math instruction. The school often has a strict behavioral code with uniforms and highly structured rules and procedures. There may also be a focus on a strong school culture, with reference to core values ("grit," "persistence"), parent/student/teacher contracts, and respect.

Public Policy: A "public policy" school has a central focus on social justice, public policy, citizenship, civics, law, or social justice.

Single Sex: A "single sex" school is intentionally organized by sex, either across the school or in part of the school, to facilitate learning. This might apply to one group within a school (e.g., the middle school is single sex, but the high school is co-ed).

Special Education: A "special education" school is designed with supports for students with intellectual disabilities and/or special instructional needs.

STEM: A "STEM" school has a school-wide focus on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. STEM is a central focus of the school; the school doesn't just offer STEM-focused extra-curricular options. Includes STEAM schools that offer a combined STEM and Arts focus.

Virtual: A "virtual" school delivers its curriculum entirely or almost entirely online; in-person interaction between students and teachers does not occur. The school may have a "learning center" where students may visit infrequently to complete their work; however, all work is student-led and any teachers or facilitators at the facility do not provide instruction.

Vocational: A "vocational" school has a clear focus on providing students with practical, career-related skills that will help them transition from school to work, and often the opportunity to earn an industry credential along with a high school diploma. Other schools may mention workforce readiness or CTE, but a vocational school actively trains students for certain trades and professions through apprenticeships, hands-on training, work study programs, etc.

CHARTER OPERATOR TYPE

Education Management Organization (EMO): The application is affiliated with a for-profit organization that manages charter schools. The applicant is often a nonprofit entity (that may or may not already operate schools) that contracts with a for-profit organization.

Charter Management Organization (CMO): The application is affiliated with a nonprofit management organization. This includes applicants affiliated with an existing nonprofit management organization, applicants already operating at least one school at the time of submitting the application (either in or out of the state where they are applying), and applicants currently operating one school that describe a plan to create a management organization if approved.

Freestanding School: The applicant is a new operator at the time of submitting the application and does not describe a plan to contract with a management organization.

SUPPORT

Community Partnership: This term applies where the application includes evidence (beyond a general letter of support) demonstrating that the school is affiliated with, or plans to partner with, any local, community-based organizations. A donation (either in-kind or monetary) may constitute a partnership. The community-based organization may help with the ongoing implementation of a program or service. This does not include colleges and universities associated with dual enrollment.

Philanthropic Support: This term applies where the applicant has received or is slated to receive private donations or philanthropy of at least $50,000. Charter schools are eligible to receive federal funding (e.g., Title I funds, Title II funds, IDEA funds). For the purposes of the analyses presented, philanthropic support does not include federal dollars, nor does it include federal grants from the Charter School Program. In general, it also does not include resources provided by a management organization (CMO or EMO).

Incubator: An "incubator" or "supply builder" refers to a nonprofit organization (e.g., the Fisher Fellowship, Building Excellent Schools, other local incubators) that trains school leaders to design, found, and lead high-performing charter schools. School leaders often receive this training as part of a fellowship.

National Association of Charter School Authorizers
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