



# GEORGIA'S CHARTER SCHOOL PIPELINE

INSIGHTS INTO PROPOSED AND  
APPROVED CHARTER SCHOOLS

SEPTEMBER 2019



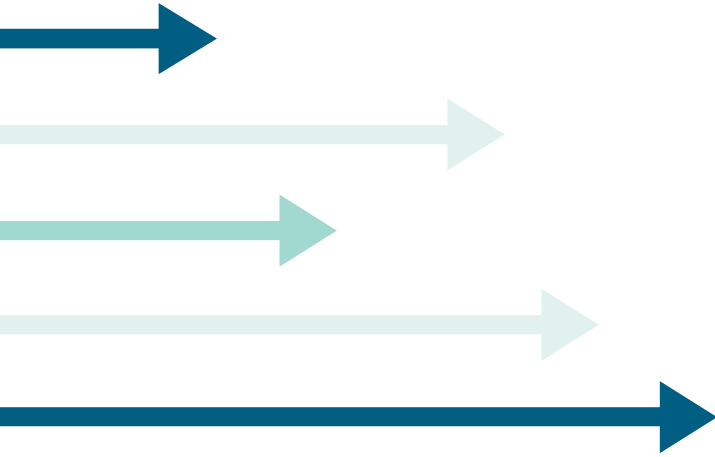
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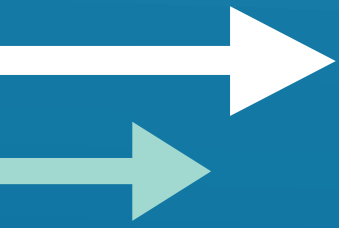


# INTRODUCTION

Charter school authorizers play a crucial role in shaping the quality and availability of charter schools throughout Georgia. In partnership with the State Board of Education, state law allows local school districts and the State Charter Schools Commission to approve and oversee charter schools. Currently, there are 111 charter schools in the state: local school districts authorize 78 schools and the Commission oversees 33 charter schools.

While much is known about existing charter schools in the state, the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) recently conducted a first-ever analysis of the state's charter school pipeline—what schools are being proposed and by whom. Our data highlights the state's varied sector, focused on innovation and a diversity of models and operator types. It also reveals the significant impact the Commission is playing in shaping the state's public education landscape.

The report is the first local analysis of data collected for NACSA's national report, [Reinvigorating the Pipeline: Insights into Proposed and Approved Charter Schools](#). Working with Public Impact, NACSA collected and analyzed nearly 3,000 charter school applications submitted to authorizers between 2013-14 and 2017-18, located in 20 states, that oversee nearly two-thirds of all charter schools nationally.

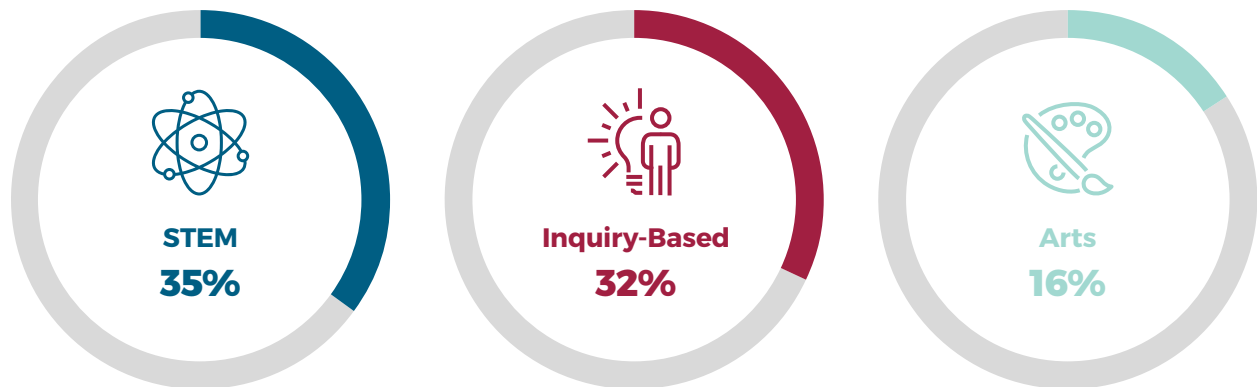


# ANALYSIS

GEORGIA'S UNIQUE CHARTER SECTOR IS RICH WITH A VARIETY OF SCHOOL MODELS AND APPROACHES THAT ARE BEING PROPOSED BY VARIOUS LEADERS AND INDEPENDENT GROUPS.

Georgia is attracting a diverse pool of charter school applicants, with STEM (35 percent) and inquiry-based (32 percent) models proposed most frequently.

## Most Frequent School Models Proposed (2013-14 to 2017-18)





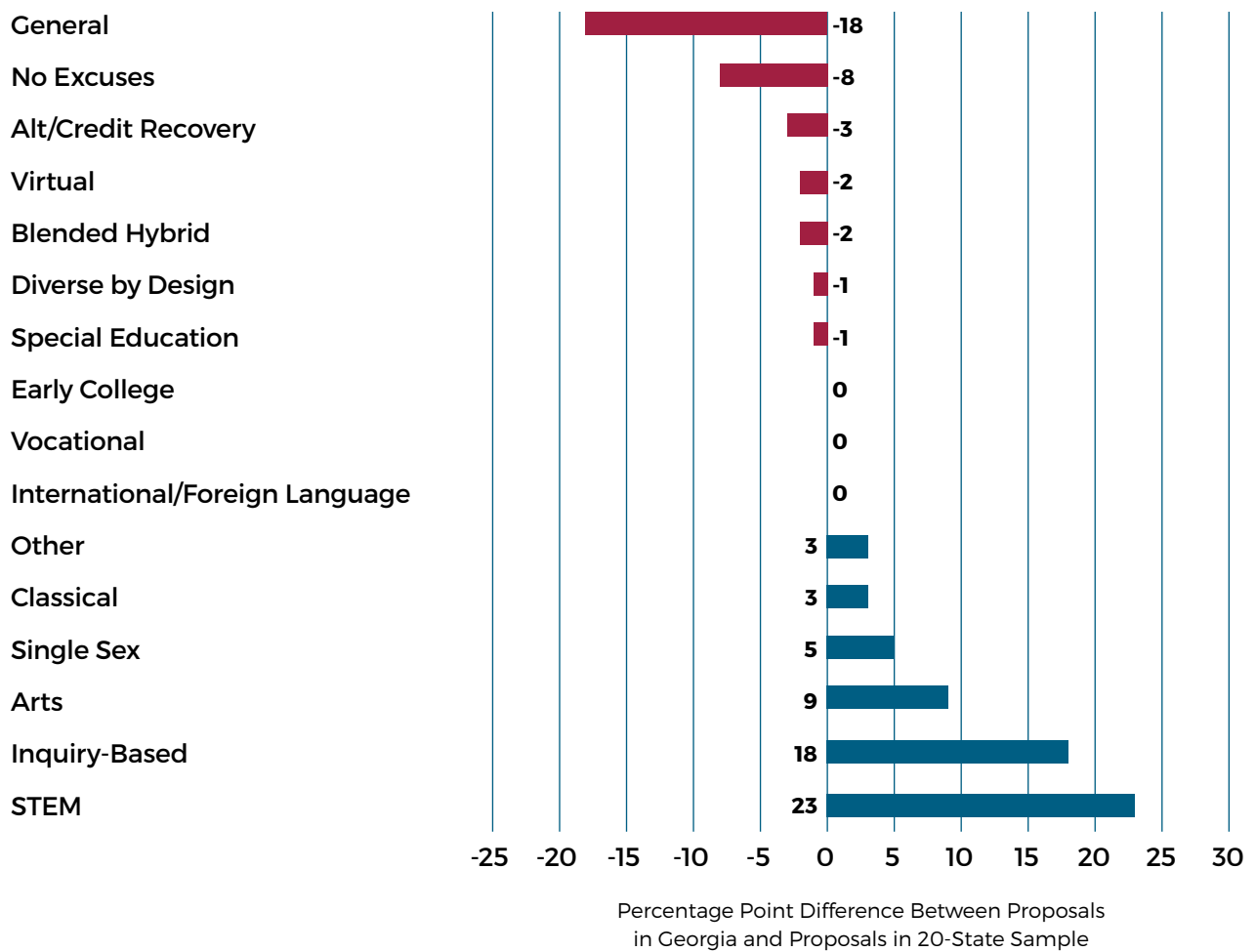
## Charter School Proposals in Georgia by Model (2013-14 to 2017-18)

STEM		35%
Inquiry-Based		32%
Arts		16%
Blended/Hybrid		14%
General		12%
Single Sex		8%
Classical		7%
Other		7%
Alt/Credit Recovery		7%
International/Foreign Language		5%
Vocational		3%
Virtual		2%
No Excuses		2%
Early College		1%
Special Education		1%
Diverse by Design		0%

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

When compared to our previously reported [20-state sample](#), Georgia is attracting many more proposals for STEM (+23 points), Inquiry-based (+18 points) and Arts (+9 points). The state receives fewer General (-18 points) and “No Excuses” (-8 points) than our 20-state sample. For this study, applications that did not fit into any specialized category were coded as “General” (see Glossary of Terms for additional definitions).

### Georgia: Difference in Proposals by Model Compared to 20-State Sample

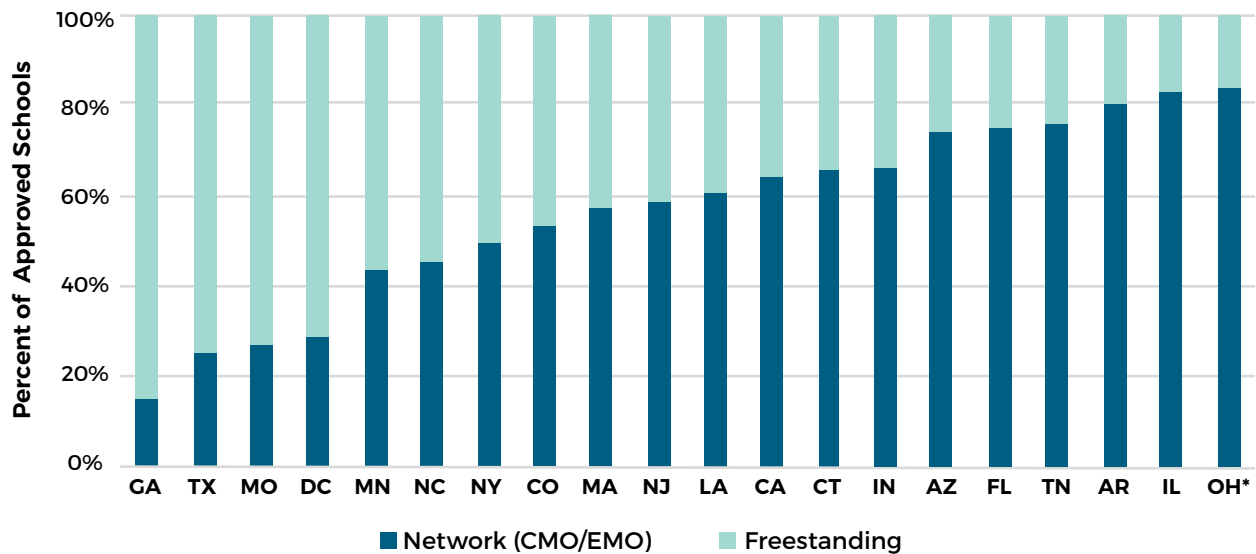


**How to Read This Chart:** Lines to the right illustrate where Georgia received a higher share of proposals for a particular school model compared to our [20-state sample](#), and lines to the left show where Georgia received a lower share of proposals. The magnitude of each line is the percentage point difference between the 20-state sample and the state of Georgia. For example, across the 20-state sample 12 percent of all proposals were coded as STEM schools, compared to 35 percent in Georgia, resulting in a difference of +23 percentage points.



Over the last five years, more than four in five charter approvals (84 percent) in the state were “freestanding,” or unaffiliated with a charter school network—a nonprofit Charter Management Organization (CMO) or a for-profit Education Management Organization (EMO). Georgia had the highest proportion of freestanding approvals of any state in the study.

### Approved Schools by Operator Type (2013-14 to 2017-18)



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



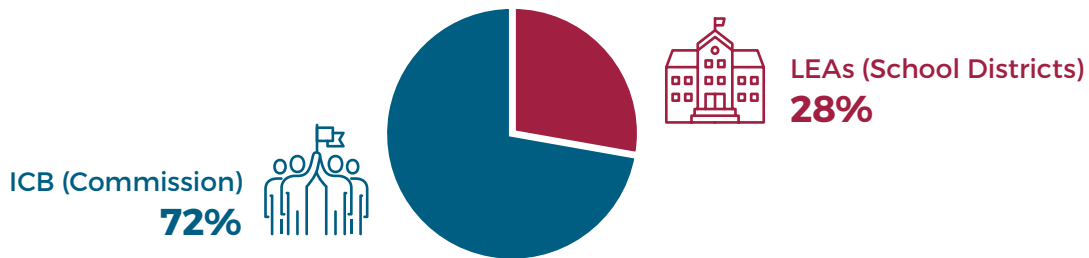
#### NACSA TAKEAWAY:

Charter schools offer Georgia’s families and communities a tremendous variety of charter school models and approaches. Every great charter school network started with the entrepreneurial spirit of a single freestanding school, meaning Georgia’s large percentage of freestanding approvals could eventually launch a wave of innovative, life-changing networks for students.

## GEORGIA'S CHARTER SCHOOL GROWTH IS INCREASINGLY BEING DRIVEN BY ITS INDEPENDENT STATEWIDE AUTHORIZER, NOT BY ITS SCHOOL DISTRICTS.

Over the last five years, three out of every four new charter schools in the state (72 percent) were approved by the State Charter Schools Commission, Georgia's independent chartering board (ICB).

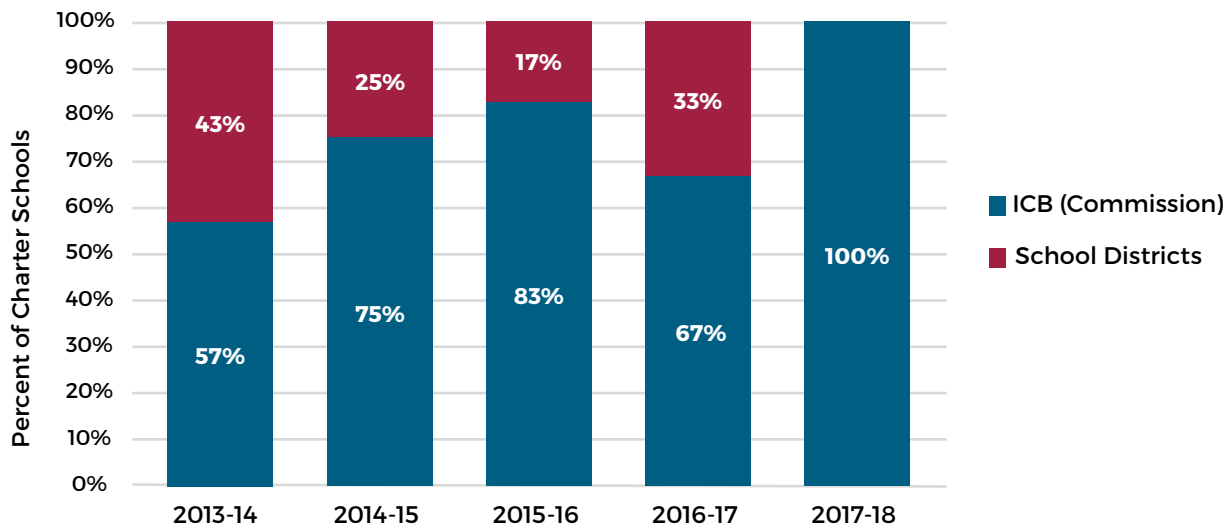
### Proportion of Georgia Charter School Approvals by Authorizer Type (2013-14 to 2017-18)



Note: This does not reflect the approval rate of each authorizer type.

School district authorizers are increasingly approving a smaller share of new charter schools across the state. In 2013-14, 43 percent of all new charter schools were approved by school districts, but by 2017-18 no new charter schools were approved by school districts.<sup>1</sup>

### Charter School Approvals in Georgia By Authorizer Type (Broken Down By Year)



Note: This does not reflect the approval rate of each authorizer type.

<sup>1</sup> All approved charter schools must be jointly agreed to with the State Board of Education.





### NACSA TAKEAWAY:

Good authorizers make it their mission to give more students access to great schools. Doing authorizing well requires an institutional commitment to the work, adequate funding and staffing, and strong leadership. There are likely many reasons school districts in Georgia are not approving charter schools as they once were. These reasons should be explored and discussed.

Since its creation in 2012, the Commission has become Georgia's primary driver of charter school growth. This momentum, combined with 2018 legislation that increases funding for state charter schools, means it is likely the Commission will continue to see an uptick in the number of charter school proposals it receives each year.

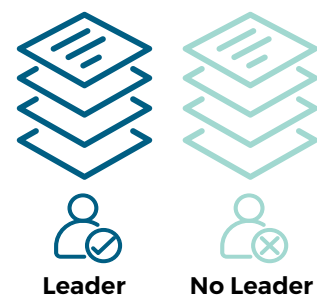
### APPLICATIONS THAT IDENTIFY A LEADER ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO BE APPROVED.

Having a school leader identified in the application was the strongest predictor of approval in Georgia. Applications that identified a school leader were seven times more likely to be approved than those that did not. Nationally, whether a school leader was identified or not had no effect on an application's likelihood of approval.

#### Likelihood of Approval (Georgia): 7x More Likely



#### Likelihood of Approval (Nationally): No Effect



### NACSA TAKEAWAY:

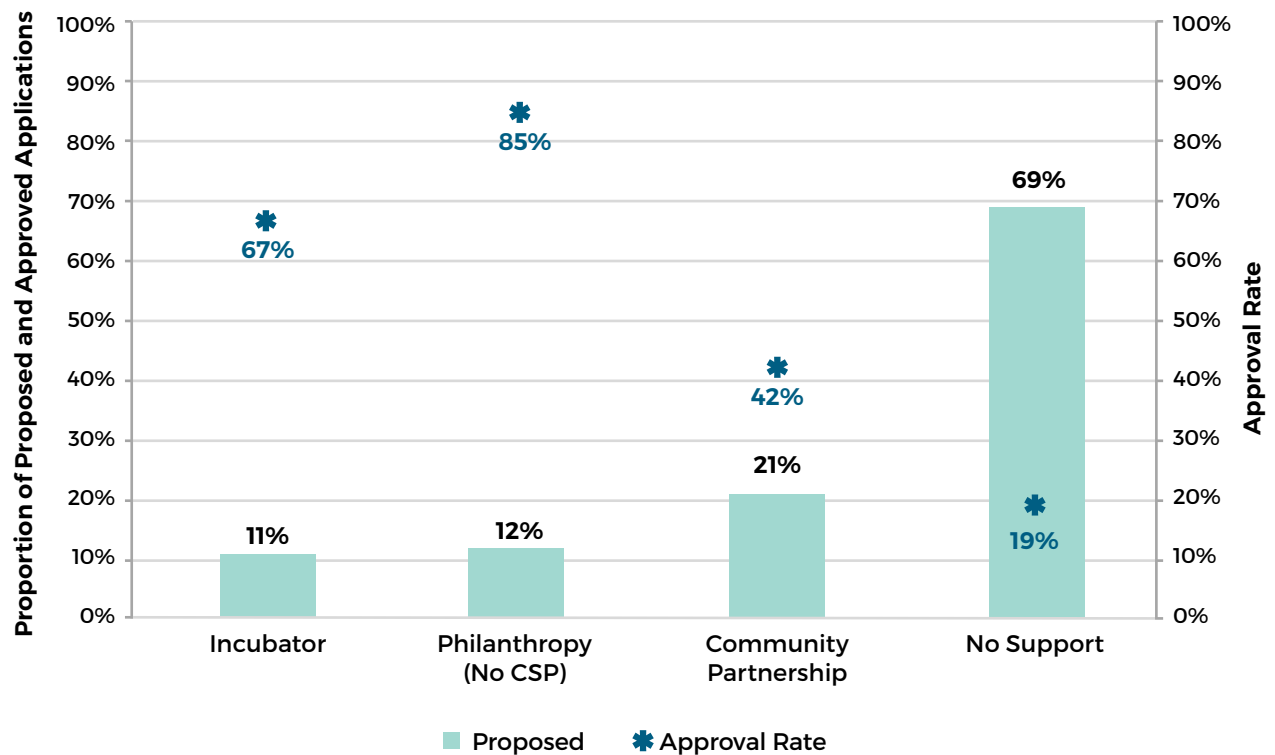
Our findings suggest Georgia's authorizers see an identified school leader as a signal that the applicant group is likely to successfully open and run its program. Those providing external support to applicants can maximize their work by encouraging applicants to come to the table with an identified school leader, increasing their odds of success.

**ONLY ONE IN TEN APPLICATIONS DESCRIBE SUPPORT FROM AN INCUBATOR OR PHILANTHROPY, BUT THOSE THAT DID WERE APPROVED AT HIGHER RATES.**

The vast majority of Georgia’s charter school proposals did not identify support from an incubator, philanthropy, or community partnership; however those that did were approved at higher rates.

For instance, while only 11 percent of Georgia’s submitted proposals documented the support of an incubator, those that did had a very high approval rate (67 percent).

**Proposed Charter Schools in Georgia by Applicant Support Variable (2013-14 to 2017-18)**



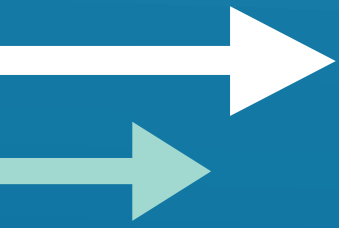


### **NACSA TAKEAWAY:**

The data underscores the need for ecosystems where authorizers, school leaders, community leaders, incubators, and philanthropists work together to identify and address the needs of students.

Our findings suggest Georgia's authorizers see an identified school leader as a signal that the applicant group is likely to successfully open and run its program. Those providing external support to applicants can maximize their work by encouraging applicants to come to the table with an identified school leader, increasing their odds of success.

The state's authorizers are also approving applicants with external support at higher rates than those without. Since not all applicants have equitable access to funding and philanthropy, this is worth a closer look. While there are many reasons these applicants are being approved at higher rates, more could be done to provide more applicants with access to external support.



# 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<sup>2</sup> (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<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>3</sup> 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](http://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.

<sup>4</sup> 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.



## 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.<sup>5</sup> Project leadership agreed to definitions for each variable.<sup>6</sup> 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).<sup>7</sup> Researchers followed up with non-responding authorizers, prioritizing authorizers with many charter schools in their portfolio. In all states except one,<sup>8</sup> the research team received applications from authorizers overseeing two-thirds or more of charter schools in that state.<sup>9</sup>

Data included for the Georgia analysis were primarily collected from three sources: The Georgia Department of Education (GA DOE), the State Charter Schools Commission of Georgia, and school district websites. Generally, districts submit charter applications and recommended approvals to the GA DOE for final approval. A relatively small number of applications may be missing from the analysis that local districts denied and did not send to the GA DOE or post on their websites, especially during the early years of the study. Thus, data on proposals should be interpreted with some caution. Data do not include applications for charter systems (i.e., districts that have a performance-based agreement with the GA DOE).

<sup>5</sup> The full list of variables is available upon request.

<sup>6</sup> Please see the Glossary of Terms for variable descriptions.

<sup>7</sup> 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.

<sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> 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.



# 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.<sup>10</sup> 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., national incubators such as the Fisher Fellowship and Building Excellent Schools, and local incubators such as the Georgia Charter Schools Association’s New Schools For Georgia) that trains school leaders to design, found, and lead high-performing charter schools. School leaders often receive this training as part of a fellowship.

<sup>10</sup> 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:

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](https://www.publiccharters.org/sites/default/files/migrated/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/032316-Health-of-the-Movement_13_final.pdf)

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/>







National Association of Charter School Authorizers  
[qualitycharters.org](http://qualitycharters.org)