

**STATEMENT BY TODD ZIEBARTH, SENIOR POLICY ANALYST, NATIONAL  
ALLIANCE FOR PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS TO WISCONSIN  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON CHARTER SCHOOLS**

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**National Alliance for Public Charter Schools**

- The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools is the national nonprofit committed to advancing the charter school movement.
- The National Alliance's ultimate goal is to increase the number of high-quality charter schools available to all families, particularly low-income and minority families who currently don't have access to quality public schools.
- The National Alliance's three primary functions are: (1) to advocate for improved federal and state policies for charter schools; (2) to build the capacity of state charter associations and resource centers; and (3) to spread the word about charter schools through communications and public relations efforts.

**Basic Facts About Charter Schools**

- 40 states and DC have enacted charter school laws.
- There are nearly 4,000 charter schools open, serving approximately 1.15 million students.
- In six communities, charter schools serve at least 20% of the public school students. In 19 communities, they serve at least 13%. Milwaukee is one of those communities, where charters serve 16% of the community's public school students.

## **National Trends in Charter School Law**

- There are three major trends in charter school law changes: (1) creating non-district authorizers; (2) lifting state caps; and (3) erasing funding inequities between charters and non-charters.

### *Creating Non-District Authorizers*

- Authorizers are the entities that approve charter applications and monitor charter school performance.
- In addition to allowing local school districts to serve as charter authorizers, an increasing number of states are allowing non-district entities (such as universities, colleges, and independent state chartering boards) to serve as charter authorizers for several reasons:
  - They believe that charter applicants should have a choice of authorizers (i.e., their local school district or the non-district entity), particularly in districts that are skeptical – if not downright hostile – toward charters. In addition to providing charter applicants multiple avenues toward authorization, allowing non-district entities to become authorizers forces districts to take their authorizing roles seriously. If they don't, charter applicants will go to the non-district entity.
  - They have found that charter authorizing is a tough fit with existing district practices. Many districts are consumed in their own improvement efforts, which are typically more top-down in nature. Charter authorizing is one more responsibility for already overburdened district staff, plus it cuts against the grain of district's existing top-down approaches.
  - They want to allow for different approaches to the relatively new concept of charter authorizing. While much has been learned about how to approve and monitor public charter schools based on performance not compliance, charter authorizers are still refining the best ways to implement their responsibilities. Recognizing this need, Colorado created a statewide charter authorizer to model best authorizing practices and make those available to districts.
  - They wish to involve existing and new entities in innovative ways in public education. These entities often offer fresh perspectives, long-standing credibility, and strong connections to their missions.

- There are six types of non-district authorizers:
  - Regional educational entities (such as intermediate school districts): 7 states.
  - Nonprofit organizations: 2 states (Minnesota and Ohio).
  - Cities: 3 states (Florida; Indianapolis, Indiana; Milwaukee, Wisconsin).
  - Existing State Boards, Commissioners, and Departments: 13 states (most recently, New Mexico).
  - Universities and Colleges: 9 states.
  - New, Independent State Chartering Boards: 7 states (Arizona in 1994; DC in 1996; Colorado, Idaho, and Utah in 2004; Florida and South Carolina in 2006). In new twist, the new, independent state chartering board in Florida will authorize both charter schools and co-authorizers (municipalities, regional educational entities, and universities and colleges).

### *Lifting State Caps*

- 25 states and DC have imposed caps on charter schools. In 10 of these states, these caps are currently constraining charter school growth.
- The initial rationale of caps made sense at the time. Charter schools were a new policy idea, and policymakers wanted to take a cautious approach to them. Now that they've proving themselves as an effective policy innovation in an increasing number of communities, the initial rationale doesn't make sense.
- Some states are entirely eliminating caps, such as Colorado and Minnesota.
- Other states are partially lifting caps, such as Arkansas and Connecticut.
- They realize that caps have nothing to do with quality charter schools. Instead, they are focusing on the things that do matter, such as high-quality charter authorizing through rigorous application processes, firm but fair oversight mechanisms, and transparent renewal decisions.

### *Erasing Funding Inequities Between Charters and Non-Charterers*

- An August 2005 study of 16 states and DC by the Fordham Foundation found that public charters receive 78 cents for every dollar that goes to non-charter public schools.
- The two main reasons for this discrepancy were charters' lack of access to locally generated property tax dollars and charters' lack of access to facilities funds.
- Over the past couple of years, states have made more movement in addressing the facilities shortfalls than in dealing with the lack of local property tax dollars:
  - Colorado increased the appropriation for its per-pupil charter facilities funding program from \$5 million to \$7.8 million, and increased the amount of debt that can be issued and backed by the state's moral obligation from \$200 million to \$400 million.
  - Florida has doubled its commitment to its per-pupil charter facilities funding program from \$27 million to \$54 million.
  - Georgia has appropriated \$950,000 for its per-pupil, needs-based charter capital program.
  - New Mexico has increased its charter school facilities allotment to \$7.5 million or \$600 per pupil.

### **Recommendations for Changes to Wisconsin's Charter School Law**

- Revisit the autonomy-accountability bargain at the heart of the charter concept (i.e., more autonomy in exchange for greater accountability):
  - Require all charters to form independent governing boards.
  - Require authorizers to contract with a charter school's independent governing board.
  - Specify that state and district regulations do not apply to charters, including collective bargaining agreements. The exceptions should be health, safety, civil rights, and state testing and accountability policies.
  - Establish a value-added component within the state's accountability system for all public schools, including public charter schools.

- Allow authorizers to implement a progressive range of sanctions against low-performing charter schools (such as probation), ultimately including closure.
- Eliminate the cap on the University of Wisconsin-Parkside (one school) and its school (480 students in grades K-8).
- Allow non-district entities to authorize charter schools throughout the state:
  - Allow public and private colleges and universities to serve as authorizers
  - Create a new, independent chartering board to serve as an authorizer
- Address inequities in funding:
  - Facilities
  - Transportation
  - Independent charters
  - Eligibility for retirement systems