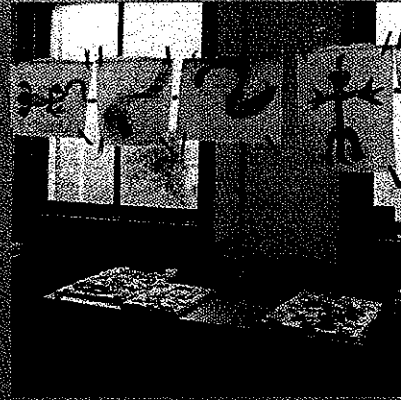


# Principles & Standards

2009 | revised edition

Principles & Standards



*for quality charter school authorizing*



**nacsa**  
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF  
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers received invaluable insight and expertise from authorizers and leaders in the charter school community during the development of the *Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing*.

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**Dear Colleague:**

The agencies that authorize charter schools play an essential role ensuring quality within the public charter school sector. That role includes establishing and maintaining high standards for schools, ensuring that schools have the autonomy to which they are entitled, and safeguarding the interests of students and the public. No other player in the charter school sector performs these functions in the same way.

From these core functions, NACSA has identified a set of *Principles and Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing* that should guide the work of authorizers. First developed and approved by NACSA in 2004, these *Principles and Standards* were updated in 2007 and now again in 2009. Over the years they have been used by many audiences, including state legislators, auditors, researchers, foundations, consultants and, of course, authorizers.

Experience has shown that authorizers who implement practices that meet these standards are more likely to have quality charter schools, where more students stay in school and graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed later in life. Indeed, the success of students is the ultimate measure of the success of authorizers. As the opening principle of this document declares, “The purpose of charter school authorizing is to improve student achievement.”

Therefore, NACSA puts forward these 2009 *Principles and Standards* for that purpose: to set forth the professional practices for authorizers to work with charter schools that improve student achievement. Please continue to use this resource as a guide as you work to improve your practices and your impact on our nation’s students.

Sincerely,



Greg Richmond  
President & CEO

# Principles for Quality Charter School Authorizing

The purpose of charter school authorizing is to improve student achievement. A quality authorizer engages in responsible oversight of charter schools by ensuring that schools have both the autonomy to which they are entitled and the public accountability for which they are responsible.

In furtherance of this end, quality authorizers should:

- approach authorizing deliberately and thoughtfully with the intent to improve the quality of public school options;
- support and advance the purposes of charter school law;
- be a catalyst for charter school development to satisfy unmet educational needs;
- strive for clarity, consistency, and transparency in developing and implementing authorizing policies and procedures;
- be a source of accurate, intelligible, performance-based information about the schools that they oversee;
- be responsible not for the success or failure of individual schools, but for holding schools accountable for their performance;
- use objective and verifiable measures of student achievement as the primary measure of school quality;
- support parents and students in making decisions and staying informed about the quality of education provided in charter schools; and,
- make the well-being of students the fundamental value informing all decision-making and actions.

The Principles for Quality Charter School Authorizing provide the foundation for the following Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing that link belief to practice.

# Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing

## Agency Capacity

A quality authorizer creates organizational structures and commits human and financial resources necessary for conducting its authorizing duties effectively and efficiently.

### A quality authorizer:

<b>Organizational Structures</b>	<p>Defines external relationships and lines of authority to protect its authorizing functions from conflicts of interest and political influence.</p> <p>Implements plans, policies, and processes that streamline and systematize its work.</p> <p>Is lead by an engaged and knowledgeable governing board with clear lines of authority over key authorizing decisions.</p> <p>Evaluates its work against national standards of quality authorizing.</p>
<b>Human Resources</b>	<p>Enlists competent leadership and content knowledge including education leadership, curriculum and instruction, data analysis, finance, law and non-profit governance and management, through staff, contractual relationships, and/or intra-inter-agency collaborations..</p>
<b>Financial Resources</b>	<p>Determines the financial needs of the office and secures sufficient financial resources to fulfill its authorizing responsibilities adequately.</p> <p>Deploys funds effectively and efficiently.</p>

## Application Process

A quality authorizer implements a comprehensive application process that follows fair procedures and rigorous criteria and grants charters only to those developers who demonstrate strong capacity for establishing and operating a quality charter school.

<b>A quality authorizer:</b>	
<b>Rigorous Criteria</b>	<p>Requires the applicant to provide a clear and compelling mission, a quality educational program, a solid business plan, effective governance and management structures, and evidence of the applicant's capacity to carry out its plan.</p> <p>Is open to considering innovative educational philosophies and approaches.</p> <p>Implements practices that promote growth, expansion and replication of charter schools with demonstrated success.</p>
<b>Charter Decisions</b>	<p>Grants charters only to applicants that have demonstrated the capacity to succeed in all aspects of the school.</p> <p>Documents the factors that determined its decisions about each application.</p> <p>Conducts a thorough evaluation of charter school applications using reviewers with educational, organizational, legal and financial expertise.</p> <p>Makes a separate decision, after the granting of a charter, about a school's readiness to open.</p>
<b>Fair Procedures</b>	<p>Implements a charter application process characterized by realistic and clear timelines, requirements and criteria for content and format ensuring sufficient time for new schools to open.</p> <p>Explains how each stage of the application process is evaluated</p> <p>Communicates chartering opportunities, processes and decisions openly to the public</p> <p>Provides prompt notification of decisions and informs applicants of their rights and responsibilities.</p>

## Performance Contracting

A quality authorizer negotiates contracts with charter schools that clearly articulate the rights and responsibilities of each party regarding school autonomy, expected outcomes, measures for evaluating success or failure, performance consequences and other material terms.

### A quality authorizer:

#### Rights and Responsibilities

Executes contracts that:

Document and respect the autonomies to which the schools are entitled – based on statute, waiver, or authorizer policy – including those related to the school's authority over educational program, staffing, finance, and scheduling.

Ensure any educational or operational services the authorizer provides for a fee over and above statutorily established rates exist in a separate contractual agreement.

Define clear, measurable, and attainable student achievement goals that the school must meet as a condition for renewal including, but not limited to, state accountability standards and set organizational performance goals.

Articulate rigorous performance indicators and standards relative to each of the stated goals.

Stipulate the process for evaluation, including but not limited to: the types of academic, organizational, financial, and compliance data monitored and used for high stakes decisions, and the process and frequency for gathering and reporting such data.

Establish performance thresholds for renewal, intervention, revocation, and non-renewal explaining the consequences for meeting, or failing to meet them. Establishes and explains procedures for renewal, intervention, revocation and non-renewal.

Include the statutory, regulatory, and procedural terms and conditions of operation.

Document clear expectations for financial and organizational operations, including a requirement for annual audits.

#### Negotiation

Ensures mutual understanding of the terms of the contract.

## Ongoing Oversight and Evaluation

A quality authorizer conducts contract oversight that evaluates performance, monitors compliance, informs intervention and renewal decisions, and ensures autonomy provided under applicable law.

### A quality authorizer:

<b>Autonomy</b>	Respects the school's authority over its day to day operations.
<b>Performance Evaluation</b>	Implements a comprehensive performance accountability system that generates multiple pieces of evidence over the term of a charter sufficient to inform a fair and rigorous renewal decisionmaking process.
<b>Monitors Compliance</b>	<p>Implements a charter school monitoring system that effectively streamlines federal, state and local program performance expectations while protecting the autonomy afforded to schools in statute.</p> <p>Monitors compliance requirements, including those legally mandated and those that are essential to fulfilling the authorizer's public oversight responsibility.</p> <p>Articulates the consequences for failing to meet compliance requirements.</p>
<b>Protects Student Rights</b>	<p>Ensures that schools admit students through a random selection process that is open to all students and does not establish undue barriers to application.</p> <p>Ensures that schools provide students with disabilities with a free, appropriate education in a least restrictive environment.</p> <p>Ensures that schools' student discipline policies and actions are fair and legal and that no student is expelled or counseled out of a school outside of that process.</p>
<b>Intervention</b>	<p>Engages in school intervention strategies that avoid potential conflicts of interest that might overshadow the authorizer's ability to make future high stakes decisions.</p> <p>Provides schools clear, adequate and evidence-based notice of problems.</p> <p>Allows reasonable time for remediation.</p> <p>Makes decisions about whether and how to renew on a clear and consistent basis.</p>



## Renewal Decisionmaking

A quality authorizer designs and implements a transparent and rigorous process that uses comprehensive data to make merit-based renewal decisions.

### A quality authorizer:

<b>Merit-Based Decisions</b>	<p>Grants renewal only to schools that achieve the goals and standards identified in the contract, are organizationally and fiscally viable, and have been faithful to the terms of the contract and applicable law.</p> <p>Avoids renewal decisions based on promises of future improvement.</p>
<b>Comprehensive Data</b>	<p>Analyzes and weighs academic, financial and operational data regarding schools' performance over time in relation to the criteria established in the charter contract.</p> <p>Considers multiple sources of data, including state mandated, standardized and internal test data, student academic growth over time, evidence of mission related outcomes, and qualitative reviews to judge school quality.</p> <p>Solicits parent and public input into the charter renewal process as identified in the charter statute.</p>
<b>Transparent Process</b>	<p>Uses defined criteria for renewal included in the charter contract.</p> <p>Regularly updates and annually publishes the process for renewal decision making.</p> <p>Clearly communicates the criteria and consequences available under state law including charter revocation, non-renewal, and renewal.</p> <p>Explains any available rights of appeal, whether to administrative or legal bodies, through which decisions of the authorizer can be challenged.</p>

Adherence to these *Principles & Standards* will guide authorizer practices to ensure that authorizers honor the autonomy of charter schools and hold charter schools accountable for high student achievement.

## Who Can Authorize Charter Schools?


State	Year Law Passed	Authorizers	State	Year Law Passed	Authorizers
Alaska	1995	LEA	Missouri	1998	LEA, SEA, HEI
Arizona	1994	LEA, ICB, SEA	Nevada	1997	LEA, SEA
Arkansas	1995	SEA	New Hampshire	1995	LEA, SEA
California	1992	LEA, RIA, SEA	New Jersey	1996	SEA
Colorado	1993	LEA, ICB	New Mexico	1993	LEA, SEA
Connecticut	1996	LEA, SEA	New York	1998	LEA, SEA, HEI
Delaware	1995	LEA, SEA	North Carolina	1996	SEA, LEA, HEI
DC	1996	LEA, ICB	Ohio	1997	LEA, RIA, HEI, NFP
Florida	1996	LEA	Oklahoma	1999	LEA, HEI
Georgia	1996	LEA, ICB	Oregon	1997	LEA, SEA
Hawaii	1994	SEA	Pennsylvania	1995	LEA, SEA
Idaho	1998	LEA, ICB	Rhode Island	1995	SEA
Illinois	1996	LEA	South Carolina	1996	LEA, ICB
Indiana	2001	LEA, HEI, MUN	Tennessee	2002	LEA
Iowa	2002	LEA	Texas	1995	LEA, SEA, HEI
Kansas	1994	LEA	Utah	1998	LEA, ICB
Louisiana	1995	LEA, SEA	Virginia	1998	LEA
Maryland	2003	LEA, SEA	Wisconsin	1993	LEA, HEI, MUN
Massachusetts	1993	SEA	Wyoming	1995	LEA
Michigan	1993	LEA, RIA, HEI			
Minnesota	1991	LEA, RIA, SEA, HEI, NFP			

### KEY

LEA Local Education Agency  
 RIA Regional/Intermediate Agency  
 SEA State Education Agency

ICB Independent Chartering Board  
 HEI Higher Education Institution  
 MUN Municipal Office  
 NFP Not-For-Profit Organization

The above table is intended to give a snapshot, using broad categories, of the types of entities with the authority to approve and oversee charter schools in a given state. Individual state laws may contain provisions that restrict the authority of certain chartering entities. Furthermore, state laws are subject to amendments that may affect the validity of this information in the future. Please consult a given state's charter school law for more detailed information.



NACSA's members first ratified the  
*Principles & Standards for Quality Charter  
School Authorizing* on May 14, 2004.

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