



ONE MILLION LIVES

*year
1*



nacsa
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

Stories of Momentum and Success

When NACSA launched the *One Million Lives* campaign one year ago, we set an ambitious goal: to work to establish better schools for one million children.

The math is straightforward: if our sector opens 2,000 great new charters and closes as many as 1,000 low-performing ones, this will impact 3,000 schools, giving one million children the opportunity to attend better schools.

One Million Lives reflects the growing consensus about what smart charter growth looks like: encouraging the replication of the best and brightest schools and making the toughest of decisions—closing poorly-performing schools. And while the math is straightforward, the hard work required to face these challenges is not.

One Million Lives is engaging authorizers, along with a broad coalition of school operators, lawmakers, funders, and others, to get this work done. **This initiative creates community—an ever-stronger community of practice—so we can build upon known successes, and so no one has to face these challenges alone.**

We are tackling this goal with three central areas of focus: **Policy**—NACSA advocates for stronger state and federal laws that will support smarter growth and stronger accountability; **Practice**—NACSA provides a suite of tools, training, evaluation, and hands-on consultation for authorizers ready to improve their practice; and **People**—NACSA offers human capital initiatives and powerful, personalized online resources to strengthen the skills of authorizing staff and build the talent pipeline.

While the details are important, and the total number of children is our driving goal, the first word of the campaign name—**ONE**—remains our daily motivator. Our public schools work—or don't—one school at a time, for one child at a time. After all, what matters most to a parent seeking a fresh start for their child and an open door to excellence? One great school for their child.

Here we share some data, stories, and voices from Year One of our *One Million Lives* campaign.

Trends in Policy

When we launched *One Million Lives* in November of 2012, one of our goals was to increase the number of state charter laws that meet NACSA's school and authorizer accountability standards. At that time, five states had already passed laws containing at least a majority of these policies: Hawaii, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, and Ohio. Today, with the addition of Indiana, Mississippi, Nevada, Texas, and Washington, that number has doubled. NACSA won several key victories in 2013 using a multi-layered approach: cultivating partnerships with other state and national advocacy groups, creating and disseminating educational materials, convening legislators, and offering expert testimony.

Trends in Practice

When we launched *One Million Lives*, one of our goals was to increase the number of Large Authorizers implementing NACSA's Essential Practices. This year, 42 percent of Large Authorizers reported implementing at least 90 percent of our Essential Practices, up from only 23 percent the previous year. To strengthen these results, we worked directly with authorizers around the country to evaluate and then make improvements to their practices. We also have expanded our resource-rich online *Knowledge Core*, with tools and practical guidance reflecting best practice. These improvements are captured each year through an extensive survey of authorizers resulting in the annual *State of Charter School Authorizing* report, as well as the *Index of Essential Practices*.

Trends in People

When we launched *One Million Lives*, we knew it was important to increase the skills of authorizing leaders as well as to build a better pipeline for future authorizing talent. NACSA created two programs to meet these objectives and invest in the people who do this work. The *Leaders Program*, which has served 20 authorizing leaders to date, has already received dozens of applications for its third cohort planned for the spring of 2014. The *Fellows Program*—designed for talented individuals interested but inexperienced in the field of authorizing—had its first cohort complete fellowships in New Jersey, New York, and Philadelphia last fall. The second cohort of Fellows is in place now in the authorizing offices of Arizona, North Carolina, and Washington, D.C.

*January 2013:
Washington state's ballot measure
to allow charters takes effect*

This past year, a number of states voted to join the growing national charter school community. Washington was one such state that passed charter school ballot initiatives and created statewide charter school commissions.

While some states face the challenge of improving existing charter school laws written almost two decades ago, Washington is in an ideal position to get certain things right from the start. At the first meeting of the state's Charter School Commission, it was clear that quality authorizing practices were going to be at the heart of their work. The Commission quickly defined its mission to align with NACSA's [Principles & Standards for Quality Charter School Authorizing](#). And by the fall of 2013, with the creation of a rigorous and comprehensive application process and high standards for charter accountability, the Commission confirmed quality as their cornerstone. With our assistance, the new Commission launched its first application process for charter schools.

The Commission made its first numeric contributions to our [One Million Lives](#) campaign when it announced the approval of seven schools in early 2014.

A VOICE FOR HOPE

"I love attending a quality charter school; every student should have the choice and the chance to attend a great charter school."

—Daniel Million, Senior,
Preuss School UCSD,
California

A VOICE FOR ACCOUNTABILITY

"Authorizing is about more than just technical knowledge. It's about developing our collective will to say, 'I'm accountable for the success and failure of children.'"

—Karega Rausch, Research
Associate, The Equity Project
at Indiana University, Center
for Evaluation and Education
Policy

IN THE FIRST
YEAR OF ONE
MILLION LIVES,
AUTHORIZERS
CHANGED THE
LIVES OF OVER

*232,000
students*

February 2013:
Ball State moves to close low-performing schools

One Million Lives illustrates both the promise and profound challenge of authorizing: giving more children an opportunity to attend great schools requires the courage to close down the ones that just aren't succeeding.

Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana is an authorizer demonstrating that courage. Last year, Ball State decided not to renew seven schools. These complex decisions, affecting thousands of families, were the result of progressively deeper exploration into the schools' data. This was possible due to Ball State's work to revamp their application process and decision making, the implementation of performance contracting, and ongoing oversight and evaluation.

To implement these improvements, Ball State received assistance from NACSA as a PMRC (Performance Management, Replication, and Closure) demonstration site allowing the authorizer to benefit from the project's models and resources.

As Ball State shared its new accountability framework with schools it gave them opportunities to review key data points to better understand how they were being evaluated. Ball State then used this framework to make decisions, including the nonrenewal of persistently underperforming schools.

The post-script points to a very real concern of authorizers moving to close low-performers: of the non-renewed schools, two found an alternate authorizer and continue to operate while one re-opened as a private school.

NACSA'S 96
AUTHORIZER
MEMBERS OVERSEE
2,992 SCHOOLS,
WHICH IS

50%

OF ALL CHARTER
SCHOOLS

A VOICE FOR CHOICE

"Our goal is to provide more high-value public school options for parents and families, particularly those whose children attend schools that are not meeting their needs."

—Steve Sundquist, Chair of
Washington State Charter
School Commission

*May 2013:
Texas legislature approves landmark reforms*

Texas, with almost 10 percent of all U.S. charter schools, has a large impact on the sector. This year, their potential to lead received a huge boost: the Texas legislature passed a top-to-bottom improvement of their charter school law.

For the first time, the state's new performance standards allow for the closure of low-performing schools and the replication of outstanding ones. NACSA advocated vigorously for this statute and worked closely with legislative staff to help them draft effective bill language. We are encouraged to see this new momentum to balance charter school expansion with accountability.

Strengthened authorizer practices include the creation and implementation of performance frameworks, performance-based contracts, strong renewal standards, and default nonrenewal and/or closure of failing schools. On the growth side, the new law encourages expansion of quality schools by gradually raising the charter school cap and streamlining expansion protocols for high-performing charters.

NACSA will work with the Texas Education Agency staff throughout 2014 to continue to implement these improvements and strengthen the state's charter sector.

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PARTICIPANTS
AT NACSA
CONFERENCE



6 NACSA
FELLOWS
PLACED

A VOICE FOR RESPONSIBILITY

“We’ve worked very hard to transition to these improved accountability systems, provide timely notice to schools, and still act responsibly on the undeniable data they provided. We had to make these decisions—which are extremely difficult for schools and their communities—because we know they are the right decisions for children.”

—Bob Marra, Executive
Director, Ball State
University’s Office of Charter
Schools, Indiana

*May 2013:
Nevada bets on stronger accountability*

Nevada can now be added to the growing list of states getting serious about quality. Their revised charter law requires performance-based contracts for each school, performance standards for renewal and closure, additional transparency by authorizers on school performance, and the default closure of consistently failing schools.

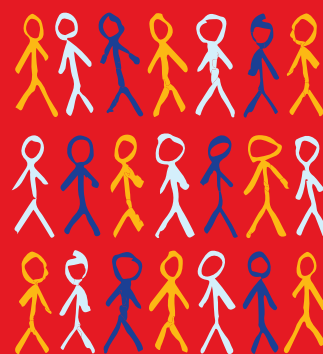
Nevada's charter school sector will reap the benefits of creating a system with strong standards and accountability provisions to back them up. Great schools will be allowed to flourish and poor performers will be forced to close.

Here NACSA worked on both the policy and practice fronts to create an accountability system grounded in strong practice and codified in state law.

As with other state legislative victories, a strong alliance between policymakers and practitioners was critical to garner support. And the law now codifies the work of staff and members of the Nevada State Public Charter School Authority—an independent office and biggest authorizer in the state—to put in place strong practices to support and expand high-quality charter options.

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SCHOOLS
OPENED
IN 2013



21 LEADERS
TRAINED
BY NACSA

A VOICE FOR PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT

“It’s important that authorizers are having conversations with schools at both ends of the spectrum: the hard conversations about closure for those who are not achieving at expected levels, and incentives for those at the high end of the portfolio about replicating.”

—Darryl Cobb, Partner,
Charter School Growth Fund,
Illinois

June 2013:
***Performance standards set clear expectations
for New Jersey charters***

For many authorizers who have improved the way they review and approve applications—as the New Jersey Department of Education did a few years ago—delving into performance frameworks is the logical next step. During the *One Million Lives* campaign's first year, we worked hands-on with such authorizers as New Jersey to both build and implement this essential element of the charter/authorizer relationship.

New Jersey leadership wanted to gather and use meaningful information, shifting away from mere compliance to get at the two other aspects of accountability: academic and financial outcomes. We provided templates of these comprehensive frameworks and the connection with those who were part of developing them, in order to find the best fit.

Then followed the central intersection between policy and practice. Once the state adopted the frameworks, NACSA helped New Jersey consider how to begin using them, from anchoring them into the charter school contract to keeping schools informed and involved.

New Jersey stands out as an example of the ripple effect that establishing performance frameworks can have on a charter school community. Both schools and authorizer now have regular and reliable access to objective, measurable criteria that define what's expected of each school. This enables all stakeholders to plan for needed improvements and avoid surprises.

A VOICE FOR POLICY CHANGE

“We know that state policy and authorizing policies matter—and they matter a great deal to charter quality for children.”

—Arne Duncan, U.S.
Secretary of Education

A VOICE FOR EXCELLENCE

“If charter schools are one important avenue for creating high-quality public school options for students and families, then we must take the necessary steps to ensure they truly are high-quality options. As authorizers, we must do our part to accept only excellence in this sector.”

—Chris Cerf, Commissioner,
New Jersey Department of
Education

*July 2013:
New contracts for Hawaii charters signal
the winds of change*

What do you get when people dedicated to education reform, policy changes to strengthen charter laws, and advanced practices converge? You get a perfect storm for [improving the charter sector](#) in Hawaii.

In 2011, an audit of the state's authorizer heaped criticism on the charter system. Leaders knew something needed to change. The alignment for real change was striking: a set of policy changes were pointed to by the audit, asked for by the legislature, demanded by the state Board, and recommended by NACSA. Still, it was the involvement of the charter schools and their advocates that ultimately ensured success.

The fixes were made over a period of more than two years through a combination of policy and practice solutions that retrofitted a once-problematic system. The new law created a solid governance structure for Hawaii's charter school system, with clear lines of authority and accountability. This act established the Hawaii Public Charter School Commission and required charter school performance contracts that provided for clear financial, organizational, and academic accountability.

Working together—schools and policymakers, advocates and legislators—Hawaii found a way to create a new structure that today respects the autonomous missions of charter schools, while holding them accountable for successfully educating their students.

A VOICE FOR CHANGE

“We understood the importance of having both autonomy and accountability focused on increasing student achievement, but we realized we were out of balance. We needed to hold our schools accountable for performance.”

—State Senator Jill Tokuda,
Hawaii

42%

(UP FROM 23%)
OF LARGE
AUTHORIZERS
USE AT LEAST 11
OF NACSA'S
ESSENTIAL
PRACTICES

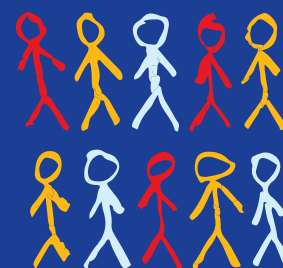
**August 2013:
Second cohort of NACSA Fellows selected**

NACSA is thinking about the next generation of authorizers, too. Our new initiative to build a better pipeline for authorizing talent, the Fellows Program, provides a NACSA-trained, high-potential young professional to work at each host authorizer for a year.

Last October, our first cohort completed their fellowships in Philadelphia, New York, and New Jersey. Two of the three fellows, who a year ago wouldn't have considered authorizing as a profession, were invited to stay on in their original placements, but accepted positions in other authorizing offices. The third chose to move on to work in education policy.

Their work was significant. Jennifer Nagourney (Philadelphia) developed a strategic vision for the office, creating performance frameworks, contracts, and intervention plans for schools. She hired five staff and trained them in NACSA best practices. She now leads the authorizing office in Delaware, where she was recruited to oversee more than 30 schools. Wendy Nelson (New Jersey) helped implement renewal protocols consistent with the newly created performance frameworks. She accepted an authorizing position with the Colorado Charter Schools Institute.

This year, NACSA is partnering with three of the nation's largest authorizers to host Fellows: Arizona State Board for Charter Schools, Washington D.C. Public Charter School Board, and North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The three newest NACSA Fellows were selected from a highly competitive pool of more than 55 applicants.



10 STATE
CHARTER LAWS
(UP FROM 4)
INCLUDE NACSA'S
ACCOUNTABILITY
PROVISIONS

A VOICE FOR THE FUTURE

"We are part of this movement together, and many people are working with a common mission of bringing quality options to the students who need them most."

—Wendy Nelson, NACSA
Fellows Program: Office of
Charter Schools, New Jersey
Department of Education
(currently with Colorado
Charter School Institute)

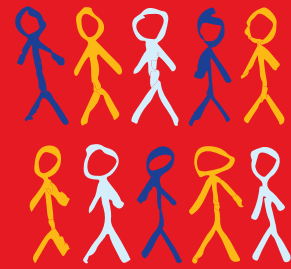
*September 2013:
Mississippi becomes the nation's newest
statewide authorizer*

At our 2013 conference, members and directors of 13 statewide chartering boards came to a special session to discuss their unique role in the charter sector and the common challenges they face.

NACSA believes that there should be alternative paths to authorizing, particularly the creation of independent statewide commissions. Our 2012 survey showed that among authorizer types, these statewide boards are most likely to have essential practices in place. This finding reinforces our desire to have more states establish independent commissions.

Their steady growth stands out—from three in 2006 to 15 in 2013—and signals that statewide boards will play an increasingly influential role in the charter world. As single-purpose authorizers, they are often expected not only to decide whether to approve and renew charter schools, but also to set a standard for quality authorizing in their states.

We have recently worked with several statewide commissions—from Hawaii to Washington, D.C.—to put in place quality authorizing practices as they launch operations or implement new initiatives. As we begin 2014, we are in conversations with the new Mississippi Charter School Authorizer Board, developing a plan of action to support their success.



10 AUTHORIZERS
RECEIVED
FORMATIVE
EVALUATIONS
FROM NACSA

A VOICE FOR FOCUS

“Our focus is to build only high-quality charters, because we don’t think there’s ever going to be a way to change public education just by building a bunch of average charter schools.”

—Al Fan, Executive Director,
Charter School Partners,
Minnesota

October 2013:
**NACSA report breaks new ground on accountability
for alternative schools**

Among the keenest challenges faced by authorizers is how to make sound decisions about schools that serve dropouts, pregnant teens, adjudicated youth, and those with life-disrupting conditions such as homelessness and substance abuse.

This is not only a “charter” issue at heart, but it provides an opportunity for the charter sector to lead the way. Many states lack any respectable system of accountability for alternative schools. Too often, state policies leave an accountability void for such schools, either using metrics that are inappropriate for their populations or lumping them in an ill-defined “at-risk” category with no defined outcomes. So it’s hard to tell which schools are doing a good job and which are not.

This past year, NACSA created a Working Group of authorizers, charter operators, and researchers to wrestle with these issues. The resulting report, [*Anecdotes Aren’t Enough: An Evidence-Based Approach to Accountability for Alternative Charter Schools*](#), is sparking dialogue in the broader education sector. It not only examines challenges of standards, terminology, and data, it provides a roadmap to authorizers for creating their own approaches to robust, thoughtful accountability for alternative charter schools.

A VOICE FOR TRANSFORMATION

“Charter schools that are showing exemplary quality—that are game changers in quality—are intentional in saying that this work is not only for us: it’s to benefit millions of lives outside of charter schools, it’s to help transform public education.”

—José J. Cole-Gutiérrez,
NACSA Board of Directors;
NACSA Leaders Program:
Director, Charter Schools
Division; Los Angeles Unified
School District, California

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SCHOOLS
CLOSED
IN 2013

**November 2013:
Authorizing Leader becomes Deputy Superintendent
of Schools**

The adoption of sound authorizing policies and practices matters little without high-quality leadership to guide implementation. That's why we created the Leaders Program: to provide deep support to individuals who have recently started as the leader of a charter school authorizer office.

A cohort of 10 authorizers—directors and deputy directors of charter school offices—assembled for graduation at NACSA's 2013 conference, after gathering four times during the year for intensive in-person sessions. During the program, each leader received one-on-one mentoring from the program's coaches, who provided a professional adviser and sounding board. The coaches also helped guide each participant's capstone project, a discreet project designed to improve a specific authorizing practice.

Our goals of enhanced leadership and engagement are coming to fruition. One example is Joel Medley (North Carolina), who worked on leadership skills needed to increase buy-in from other state leaders. With these skills—tested during the legislative session—Medley helped move forward a policy agenda for increased accountability. Other Leaders, including Steve Canavero (Nevada), have been expanding the scope of their impact: Canavero has recently been promoted to State Deputy Superintendent.

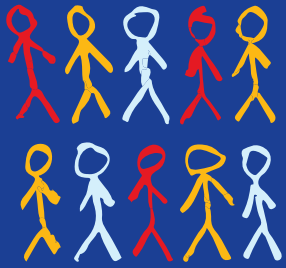
About NACSA

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is committed to advancing excellence and accountability in the charter school sector and to increasing the number of high-quality charter schools across the nation. To accomplish this mission, NACSA works to improve the policies and practices of authorizers—the organizations designated to approve, monitor, renew, and, if necessary, close charter schools. It also advocates for laws and policies that raise the bar for excellence among authorizers and the schools they charter. Visit www.qualitycharters.org.

A VOICE FOR PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY

"Beyond the leadership development, beyond the tools and techniques, it's the network and the relationships I've formed with experts that have made the difference."

**—Ethan Hemming, NACSA
Leaders Program: Executive
Director, Colorado Charter
School Institute**



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PROVISIONS



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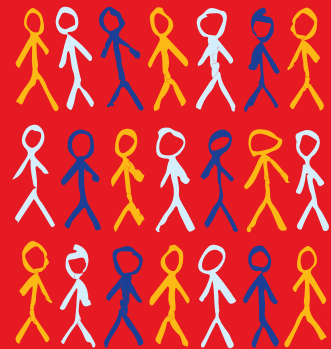
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6 NACSA
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491

Schools Opened in 2013



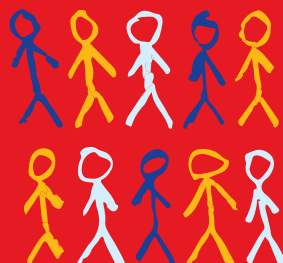
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Schools Closed in 2013



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RECEIVED FORMATIVE
EVALUATIONS FROM
NACSA

NACSA'S 96
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