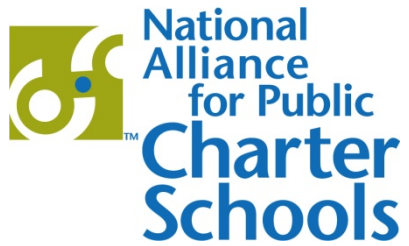


Lisa Grover, Ph.D., is the senior director of state advocacy for the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. In this capacity, Lisa works with state partners and other national reform organizations to improve existing charter school laws or enact new ones. From 2005 to 2010, she was the Chief Executive Officer of the New Mexico Coalition for Charter Schools. During her tenure, charter school student enrollment grew from 2,700 in 2005 to over 15,000 in 2010; legislation passed that established a new statewide authorizer; lease assistance payments increased from \$350 to \$700 per student; and charter schools gained access to local mill levy dollars. From 2002 to 2004, Lisa was the founding board President of one of the first rural charter schools in New Mexico, recognized by The Washington Post's Challenge Index as one of the top high schools in the country in preparing college-ready students. Lisa began her career as a high school Spanish teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District and also taught English as a Second Language in China, Ecuador, and Mexico. She holds a Doctorate Degree in Romance Languages and a Masters Degree in Linguistics and Multi-cultural Education from the University of New Mexico.



Lisa S. Grover, Ph.D.
Senior Director of State Advocacy
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
Testimony before the Senate Education Committee
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- Good morning Madam Chair and Members of the Committee.
- I'm Lisa Grover, the Senior Director of State Advocacy at the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools.
- The Alliance is a national nonprofit organization solely committed to advancing the public charter school movement.
- Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Committee as it explores how to advance the policy environment in Texas that's supportive of the growth of high-quality charters.
- In my presentation this morning, I will provide a snapshot of the charter movement across the nation and discuss some ways that Texas can improve its charter policy environment based upon legislative changes other states have made in recent years.

Snapshot of the Movement

- Currently, 41 states and D.C. have charter laws on the books.
- There are more than 5,600 charters open, serving over 2 million students.
- In terms of growth, 400 to 500 new charters open each year, and 180,000 to 200,000 new charter students enroll in charters each year.
- In addition, there is a huge demand for more charter seats, as over 600,000 students are on waiting lists to enroll in a charter.
- Nationally, charters enroll a higher percentage of students of color than traditional public schools, a higher percentage of students that qualify for free- and reduced-price lunch, a higher percentage of English language learners, and the same percentage of students with an Individualized Education Plan.

- Furthermore, research overwhelmingly shows that charters typically serve students who are either academically behind their traditional public school peers or at the same academic level.
- In terms of performance, many charters are usually among the top performers in their districts. The best in class are shattering low expectations and long-standing barriers that have prevented too many students from achieving educational success.
- However, we also see there are still too many chronically low-performing charters in some states.
- The challenge, therefore, is to create policy environments that encourage the creation of high-performing charters, while ensuring that chronically low-performing charters are closed.
- To create such a strong charter school policy environment, I recommend taking action in three areas.

Caps

- The first area is caps.
- Currently, 18 states and D.C. have imposed caps on charter growth - with some states imposing more than one kind of limit.
- Some caps are worse than others (for example, Mississippi's 12 overall vs. California's 100 per year).
- The good news is that more and more states have lifted their caps over the past few years. In fact, 20 states have partially or entirely lifted caps since June 2009.
- Notable recent examples include North Carolina's elimination of its cap of 100 charter schools, Michigan's phasing out of its cap on the number of charter schools that can be approved by public universities, and Missouri's allowing of charters statewide (they had previously allowed them just in Kansas City and St. Louis).
- After two decades of charter research and experience, we can say with assurance that there is no demonstrable connection between charter caps and stronger outcomes.
- In short, arbitrary caps are blunt instruments that fail to lead to high-quality charters.
- If state leaders wish to elevate charter quality, policy makers should improve laws that we know to directly impact quality, such as adequate facilities support and sufficient accountability mechanisms.

Facilities Support

- The second area is facilities support.
- The 42 jurisdictions with public charter school laws vary greatly in how they fund charters.

- However, most states share one commonality: they usually provide significantly less funding to public charter school students than to their traditional public school student counterparts.
- In fact, a 2010 study found that public charter schools receive just 78% of the dollars that would normally flow to traditional public schools.
- The primary reason for funding inequity is that unlike school districts, most charters do not receive funding for facilities.
- Nor do charters have independent taxing or bonding authority – the tools generally used by school districts to finance their buildings.
- While no states have solved the facilities challenge yet, some have made more progress than others by implementing a menu of approaches that include a per pupil facilities allotment and/or providing charters with access to underutilized or unused district space.
- On the facilities funding point, a growing number of states are providing some dollars to charters to cover their facilities costs.
- In fact, 16 states and D.C. now provide facilities funding to charters either in the form of a per-pupil allotment, a grant program, or a loan program.
- As state policies to emulate, D.C. provides public charter schools with approximately \$3,000 per-pupil for facilities and Massachusetts provides approximately \$900 per pupil.
- An increasing number of states are also providing charters with access to vacant public school facilities.
- These are buildings that taxpayers have already paid for, and too many of them are sitting empty – at the same time that charter operators scramble to find adequate and affordable facilities, which they'll use more taxpayer dollars to fund.
- This situation just doesn't add up, particularly in such tight budget times.
- As a state policy to emulate, Indiana requires school districts to provide a list of buildings that are closed, unused, or unoccupied for a period of two years to the state department of education and make them available for lease or purchase to any public charter school.
- If a public charter school wishes to use a school building on the list, the school district must lease the building for \$1 a year for a term at the charter's discretion or sell the building for \$1.

Accountability

- The third and final area that will lead to high quality charter schools is accountability.
- From our perspective, the long-term viability of the public charter school movement is directly connected to the quality of the schools that are created.
- States that are making advances on charter accountability are implementing measures in three ways.
- First, states are creating independent statewide charter authorizers. The primary advantage of such entities is that their core mission is the authorization of public charter schools.
- Approving high quality charter schools is the only thing they do, allowing them to develop expertise on a tough task that is usually given inadequate attention in a state.
- In a growing phenomenon across the country, 10 states and D.C. now have independent statewide charter authorizers.
- Second, states are revising laws and regulations to enhance authorizers' application, contracting, oversight, and renewal/non-renewal/revocation processes.
- These major authorizer quality control measures set the stage for the future growth of high-quality public charter schools in these states.
- Four states that have recently taken such action are Hawaii, Missouri, New Mexico, and Rhode Island.
- Third, states are ensuring authorizers have the resources to effectively perform their duties.
- For example, Louisiana allows authorizers to annually charge each charter school it authorizes a fee in an amount equal to two percent of per-pupil funding for administrative overhead costs.
- Louisiana also requires authorizers to publicly report their expenditures as one way to ensure authorizers are accountable to the public for how they spend these dollars.
- Thank you again for the opportunity to present to you today.
- I'm happy to answer any questions you may have at this time and to serve as a resource to the Committee as it continues its work over the next several months.