



Testimony before the House Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education,  
and Related Agencies

Education Priorities/ESEA Reauthorization

Greg Richmond  
President & CEO  
National Association of Charter School Authorizers

March 17, 2010

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Good Morning Chairman Obey, Ranking Member Tiahrt, and Members of the Subcommittee. Thank you for inviting me to speak with you today. I am Greg Richmond, President and CEO of the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA).

NACSA is a membership organization, not of charter schools, but of the agencies that oversee charter schools. We work with our member agencies to grow the number of high-quality charter schools across the nation by setting professional standards and providing technical assistance directly to authorizers.

Allow me to show you this picture that appeared earlier this month in the Chicago Tribune, under the headline, “Every Urban Prep Senior is College-Bound. One hundred percent of first senior class at all male, all African-American Englewood Academy is accepted to universities.”

Take a moment to look at the joy in the faces of these boys, all admitted to Urban Prep by lottery. Imagine the pride of their mothers, fathers and grandparents. Tim King, the founder of this charter school that opened less than four years ago, says, “There were those who said you can't defy the data. Black boys are killed. Black boys drop out of high school. Black boys go to jail. Black boys don't go to college. They were wrong.”



One hundred percent of graduates admitted to college would be a terrific achievement for any school in America, but in the inner-city of Chicago, this achievement is truly remarkable.

But it should not be remarkable, it should be the norm. All children – white, black and brown – in every community in America should be able to attend a school that prepares them to go to college and to succeed in life.

This Committee has the ability to make this type of opportunity available to millions more students, by acting boldly in support of federal efforts to expand educational opportunities and by demanding results. To that end, I urge you to continue to support the start-up of new charter schools and to include provisions that promote quality as you do so.

This boldness was evident in Fiscal Year 2010, when the Committee appropriated \$256 million, \$40 million above 2009, to support the start-up of over 1,300 new charter schools. The 2010 appropriations bill also included new accountability measures, supported by my association, to ensure that new charter schools are held accountable.

I would like to thank you, Chairman Obey and Congressman Tiahrt for your leadership which ensured that these new accountability measures were included in the final bill.

In the Administration's proposed reauthorization of ESEA, we enthusiastically support the proposal to expand the range and quality of educational choices available to students by increasing the number of high-performing charter schools. We also know that public oversight of charter schools is highly variable across the country, leading to excellent charter schools in some communities and unacceptably weak charter schools in others. Any federal effort to increase the number of charter schools should be accompanied by an equal effort to ensure quality oversight that maintains high standards, preserves school-level autonomy, and safeguards student and public interests.

To that end, we recommend that Congress explicitly reserve at least \$5 million in FY2011 for the purpose of improving oversight of charter schools which will ensure that federal funds are supporting only quality schools. Additionally, we would recommend that language in last year's bill outlining three key quality control standards – contracts, audits and accountability for student performance – be repeated again this year.

My members, the agencies that oversee charter schools, recognize that there is nothing automatic about being a charter school. For every Urban Prep success story, there may be another school with weak academic results or poor financial management. These poorly performing charter schools need to be held accountable. Yet all too often, oversight of these schools is weak and poorly performing charter schools are allowed to stay open.

Just last week, for example, the FAME Charter School in Fremont, California had its charter renewed for five years by the Alameda County Board of Education, despite a state audit that identified dozens of irregularities, including an unusually high salary of \$336,663 for the school's principal, for whom the school also bought a \$75,000 Mercedes.

These types of abuses are a disservice to children and taxpayers and they tarnish the achievements of the thousands of good charter schools, like Urban Prep, that play by the rules and provide quality educational opportunities for hundreds of thousands of children.

Authorizers are your partners in assuring charter schools provide more high-quality educational opportunities for children, while playing by the rules and serving the public interest. Authorizers who follow professional standards set by my organization are more likely to thoroughly evaluate proposals for new schools, approving good proposals and denying weak proposals. They are also more likely to provide proper oversight that respects the autonomy of charter schools while holding them accountable for results.

Yet for many years, the role of authorizers in the charter school sector has not been understood nor supported by policy makers. Over the past fifteen years, the federal government has allocated \$2 billion to support the creation of new charter schools. During that same time, less than \$2 million, or only one-tenth of one percent, has been invested to ensure that those schools are held to high standards and properly monitored by a competent authorizing agency.

Last year, you began to remedy this lack of federal support for quality oversight, thanks to the leadership of this Committee that I mentioned earlier. In FY 2011, I urge you to continue that leadership by allocating \$5 million directly for quality authorizing so that many more children have the opportunity, like the boys at Urban Prep Academy, to attend a great school that prepares them to go to college and to succeed in life.

Thank you.