A CALL TO ACTION TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF FULL TIME VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS

PRESENTATION TO THE NEW MEXICO LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

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THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE IS THE LEADING NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION FOCUSED ON INCREASING STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT BY FOSTERING A STRONG CHARTER SCHOOL SECTOR.

OUR WORK FOCUSES ON FOUR AREAS:

FEDERAL POLICY
STATE POLICY
COMMUNICATIONS
RESEARCH AND DATA

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS (NACSA) IS AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR EFFECTIVE CHARTER SCHOOL POLICY AND THOUGHTFUL CHARTER AUTHORIZING PRACTICES THAT LEAD TO MORE GREAT PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

OUR POLICY WORK IS BASED ON THESE PRINCIPLES:

**AUTHORIZER CAPACITY
ACCOUNTABILITY
ACCESS & EQUITY
AUTONOMY**

IN 2015, THREE RESEARCH ORGANIZATIONS
     - THE CENTER FOR REINVENTING PUBLIC EDUCATION
     - MATHEMATICA POLICY RESEARCH
     - THE CENTER FOR RESEARCH ON EDUCATION OPTIONS (CREDO)
RELEASED THREE SEPARATE REPORTS ON THE PERFORMANCE OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FULL-TIME VIRTUAL SCHOOLS.

THESE STUDIES REVEALED LOW PERFORMANCE BY MOST STUDENTS ENROLLED IN FULL TIME VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS.

IN 2016, THREE NATIONAL REFORM ORGANIZATIONS
     - NAPCS
     - NACSA
     - 50 CANN
RELEASED A REPORT OUTLINING POLICY STEPS LAWMAKERS CAN ENACT TO IMPROVE THE PERFORMANCE OF FULL TIME VIRTUAL CHARTER SCHOOLS.

The Basics of Virtual Charter School Education Across the Nation

- ❖ **35 states and D.C.** have legislation on the books to allow full-time virtual charter schools.

- ❖ 135 full-time virtual charter schools were **open in 23 states and D.C.** as of August 2014.

- ❖ Approximately 180,000 students attend a virtual charter school across these states.

- ❖ **"The Big Three"** enroll the majority of students: OH, PA, and CA.

- ❖ Almost **70% of full-time virtual charter schools** are operated by for-profit entities (compared to 15% of brick and mortar charter schools).

- ❖ Full-time virtual charter schools **serve significantly more white students and significantly fewer Hispanic students** than traditional public schools.

❖ Full-time virtual charter schools serve more students in poverty (48% vs. 39%) and significantly fewer English-language learners than traditional public schools 1% vs. 8%).

❖ Full-time virtual charter schools serve a higher percentage of Caucasian students (69% vs. 49%) and fewer Hispanic students (11% vs. 29%) and roughly the same percentage of African American students (13% vs. 15% as compared with traditional public schools.

❖ The mobility rate for full-time virtual charter school students before they enroll in these schools is the same as it is for traditional public school students.

Academic Results

❖ Compared to traditional public school students, full-time virtual charter school students have much weaker academic growth overall. These students experience **180 fewer days of learning in Math and 72 fewer days of learning in reading.***

❖ **All subgroups of students have weaker academic growth** in full-time virtual charter schools than in traditional public schools.

❖ The average full-time virtual charter school student stays for two years.

❖ The **mobility rates** for students after they leave full-time virtual charter schools is 36%, leading to a chaotic school experience.

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❖ **These policy options are tailored to the unique problems that have emerged among too many full-time virtual charter schools.**

❖ **We do not support these policy options for brick-and-mortar charter schools or blended model charter schools that make use of both brick-and-mortar and online settings.**

POLICY OPTIONS

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AUTHORIZING OPTIONS

❖ States should only permit authorizers that have been granted **statewide or regional chartering authority** to oversee full-time virtual charter schools that enroll students from more than one district. Colorado, Maine, Oklahoma, California and Texas use this approach.

❖ States should allow districts to authorize full-time virtual charter schools that **enroll students only from within their districts**.

❖ States should **cap the amount of authorizing fees** that an authorizer can withhold from a full-time virtual charter school.

ENROLLMENT CRITERIA

❖ States should initially maintain a core principle that full-time virtual charter schools, like all other types of charter schools, must serve all students.

❖ Should it be shown that other interventions prove unable to make full-time virtual charter schools successful with all students, states should **study the creation of criteria for enrollment.** This change may require that full-time virtual charter schools operate as something other than charter schools.

❖ States should insist as a condition of receiving a charter contract, that **full-time virtual schools be required to make necessary adjustments** to ensure that all students are engaged and succeeding. This could include employing sufficient staff and ensuring adult support at home to help the student with independent self-paced learning that is commonly used in full time virtual schools.

ENROLLMENT LEVELS

❖ States should require authorizers and schools to **create desired enrollment levels** for the full-time virtual charter schools for each year of a charter school's contract. Ohio is a leader in this area.

❖ Levels should not exceed a certain number of students per school in any given year, and **allow schools to grow – or not – based on academic performance.**

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ACCOUNTABILITY FOR PERFORMANCE

❖ States should require **additional, virtual school-specific goals** regarding student enrollment, attendance, engagement, achievement, truancy, attrition, finances, and operations.

❖ These goals should be outlined in the charter application (if a school intends to contract with a virtual school provider) and negotiated as part of the charter contract.

❖ These goals are **in addition to the rigorous goals** that every charter school contract should contain.

❖ The authorizer should make renewal and closure decisions based upon schools' achievement of the goals in their contracts.

FUNDING LEVELS

❖States should require full-time virtual charter school operators to propose and justify student funding in their charter school applications.

❖States should seek guidance from experts and researchers in determining responsible levels of funding based on the real costs of full-time virtual charter schools.*

See "The Costs of Online Learning", by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2012.

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National Studies on Full Time Virtual Charter Schools

1. Gill, Brian, Lucas Walsh, Claire Smither Wulsin, Holly Matulewicz, Veronica Severn, Eric Gau, Amanda Lee, and Tess Kerwin, *Inside Online Charter Schools,* Cambridge, MA: Matematica Policy Research, 2015.

2. Pazhouh, Rosa, Robin Lake, and Larry Miller, *The Policy Framework for Online Charter Schools,* Bothell, WA: Center for Reinventing Public Education, October 2015.

3. Woodworth, James, Margaret Raymond, Kurt Chirbas, Maribel Gonzalez, Yohannes Negassi, Will Snow, and Christine Van Donge, *Online Charter School Study,* Stanford, CA: Stanford University, October 2015.

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