

The National Authorizer Resource: A Preview for State Education Agency Leaders

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PEGGIE: Hello. This is Peggie Garcia from the National Charter School Resource Center. Welcome to our webinar, *The National Authorizer Resource: A Preview for State Education Agency Leaders*. As you know, the National Charter School Resource Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, and we're excited to bring you this opportunity to preview the National Authorizer Resource, a database that will be going live in the spring of 2012. Joni Pearlman is going to be here to join us; I will introduce Joni in a moment.

I'm going to go ahead and give everyone a quick orientation to the platform and I'm not going to mute people today, so if you could, use STAR 6 to mute or unmute your line or use the mute button on your existing phone. We have a relatively small group joining us today. On the left-hand side of the platform, there's a chat. I've entered a couple of chats in there today, so feel free to enter chats at any time during the call. You can also raise your hand by using the little guy that has his hand raised to indicate that you want to raise your hand, and we can call on you during the conference. Below the chat on the left-hand side, there's a file share window, and I've put the slides there in a pdf format in case you didn't receive the slides that I sent this morning with the reminder. To download it, you can basically click on the file and then the "save to my computer" button at the bottom of the file share window, and then it will give you some directions to download to your computer. If something is too small, you can also use the full-screen option at the top of your screen to make the PowerPoint slide a little bit bigger. I think that's about it. We will be recording this webinar and we will be sending you a link to the authorizer resource after the webinar is over so you can explore it on your own time, at your convenience, and send us any feedback that you have after the webinar.

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I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Joni Pearlman. Joni Pearlman is a senior technical assistance consultant at American Institutes for Research. Currently, she works on several projects that focus on helping

school districts develop data tools that target students for interventions to improve student success at the elementary and secondary levels. Ms. Pearlman has extensive experience with data and project management in both the for-profit and nonprofit settings. With that, I'm going to go ahead and turn it over to Joni. Welcome.

JONI: Thank you, Peggie. Hello everybody. Thank you for joining us today. We're going to spend the next hour walking through the National Authorizer Resource, and if you have any questions, please use the hand. We'll stop periodically throughout for questions or feedback. As Peggie mentioned, the National Authorizer Resource is a database—it's a source of information that connects authorizing information with school-level information. Our goal is to have a comprehensive source available to the public. There will be a pretty in-depth search functionality available, and we'll show that in a few minutes. When the resource goes live, it will be available through the National Charter School Resource Center website (www.charterschoolcenter.org), so it will be publicly available to all.

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I'm going to spend the next few minutes talking about data sources and data collection. In our attempt to make this a comprehensive source of information, we've worked with a lot of partners to gather information. We've worked with the:

- National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (<http://www.publiccharters.org/>)
- National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA; <http://www.qualitycharters.org/>)
- States
- Authorizers
- U.S. Department of Education

In terms of the data collection and how that ties to the data sources, we worked closely with the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools and NACSA to obtain initial lists of charter schools to obtain authorizers and their contacts. We also worked with the states, so you and your colleagues can get state-level information—school renewal, open dates, closure dates—anything that we could gather from the states. We also did a little bit of public research, and finally we did a survey that we rolled out

to all authorizers last summer—over 900 authorizers representing nearly 5,900 campuses— and our goal is to gather information from all of the authorizers. We had 42 percent of authorizers respond, representing about 79 percent of the campuses in the database that we had. We had a pretty strong response rate. We worked with a subcontractor, our partners, to help increase the responses and outreach to our authorizers to ensure that we had correct information. As time goes on, we'll be reaching out to our authorizers periodically throughout the year to gather any updates. We hope to keep this as real time as possible and as updated as possible.

I'm going to start going over the functionality and we're going to be looking at some screen shots on the tool.

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Whenever anyone enters, the first page, they'll see is the welcome page. What you'll notice is the top bar looks similar and is aligned with the National Charter School Resource Center website, so it will all be tied into that. The left side with the gray and white box is really our activity bar. This is where you can do anything that you need. You can access all of the search functionality; you can access some information about our partners; there's a frequently asked questions tab. This is really the activity place; this is where anything can be done.

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I'm next going to talk about the search functionality. The next slide is the search functionality, and you'll see that the activity bar will remain on every page. There's a white box next to the yellow magnifying glass and that's where the search functionality is. You can enter the name or partial name of any school, any authorizer, or any operator and it will return any of those three entities that match to your search criteria. I believe in the search criteria that we have—we entered Chicago—the matching authorizer was Chicago Public Schools, a matching operator was Chicago International Charter School, a matching school was Chicago Talent Development High School. It will display all of those that match your search term. That's our basic search functionality.

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We also have an advanced search functionality. If you click on advanced search, you still have the activity bar, but here you're able to search by state, you're able to search by entity type, you're also able to search by campus date—so when it was opened or when it was renewed. As time goes on and we collect more information, our goal is to enhance that advanced search functionality. It could be type of school—whether it's a virtual school—or there could be search functionality on closure information...as much as we can include so that people can narrow their search.

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The final search functionality we have is a browse functionality. When you're on the advanced search functionality on the right-hand side, there's a state map and that's our browse functionality. You click on a state and whatever state you click on—the states in blue—they have charter laws. When you click on the state, it will return authorizers and/or those schools in that state, so that's another option. I'm going to pause for a minute to see if anybody has any questions or anything around the search functionality, and then we'll dive into the data that's in the tool.

PEGGIE: Feel free to speak up if you're on the phone to ask questions, or you can enter a question in the chat. Are there any questions right now?

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JONI: I think we'll move on. When you do a search functionality, the first line of entities that will return are the authorizers, so when you click on an authorizer you would be brought to an authorizer profile screen. This screen, as you can see, has:

- An authorizer name
- The location
- A map of where that location is
- A type (if it's an LEA, institute of higher education, nonprofit, state)
- Whether or not it's active
- The number of open campuses

For the authorizer it has basic information, which contains:

- The survey responses that were related to authorizing practices
- Information about charter length, renewal decisions, automatic renewals allowed
- The total number of applications received
- Any information we gathered around authorizing practices

That's under the basic information tab.

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The second tab on the authorizer profile is the school's tab. What you'll see is that it has the same information at the top regarding the authorizer, and then it has the school- level information. It has:

- The school
- Its location
- When it was opened
- When the last charter ended
- When the current charter ends
- Whether or not the school is closed

There are two options for going to a school. You can either go through the search functionality or, if you know the authorizer, you'd still be able to access the school through the authorizer profile.

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When you do an initial search, the second entity that will return is an operator profile. The database and the tool contain campuses, so if a charter, an authorizer, has multiple campuses, it will show the multiple campuses. Those are the operators. When we looked at the initial search, there was Chicago International Charter School—that's the operator. They have a charter granted by Chicago Public Schools. It's the same information. Our goal was really to make the pages consistent, easy to navigate, and easy to understand. What this one has in addition that the authorizer profile doesn't have is the NCES ID because for this example, it's held at the operator level. It has the grades served; it has the authorizer—and you'll notice the authorizer is in blue—so if you wanted to click and go directly back to the authorizer, you could. Then there is the

note that says “the operator holds the charter for the associated schools.” The schools that are under this authorizer are listed here.

The second tab here is performance, which we don’t have, but this is probably a good time to talk a little bit about the performance data that we’re working on. We’re working with the Department of Education and the ED Facts team to obtain performance data to display in the authorizer resource. Performance data will include AYP [Adequate Yearly Progress], hopefully a comparison to state averages, and school-level data, hopefully by subgroups. We’re currently working with the Department of Education to obtain and identify the data that we would like to display. Our goal is to really have a comprehensive picture of a school, the operator, and/or the authorizer, so the performance information will really round out the information that we currently have.

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I’m going to move onto the school profile. The school profile once again looks very similar to the operator or the authorizer profile. Because this is a campus, it has the operator information as well as the authorizer information. If it was a stand-alone campus that held its own NCES ID, that NCES ID would be noted on this page. If you look in the middle of the page, there are a number of tabs starting with key dates. This is information that we’ve collected through the survey or from the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, NACSA, or your SEA colleagues or the state education agencies for the respective states. As you can see, it’s pretty basic information. We’re looking for the open date, the previous charter end date, the renewal status, and when the current charter end date is. These were all questions that were asked in our authorizer survey.

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After the key date, we have school information, which is just basic school-level information.

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We have status; the status tab would appear if it was in cautionary or remedial status. We have a tab for authorizer comments, which is a

functionality we're working on building that would enable authorizers to go in and enter comments they have about that school. It could say that the authorizer has changed—this is a new authorizer. It could say there's been a change in state policy—this is how it impacted our school. It would be anything that the authorizer wanted to provide to give additional context.

Finally, there's a tab on performance. If a school was closed, there would be another tab that would indicate "closed," and it would have closure information. This information on this screen is the information that will display for all schools. If a school is closed or if a school is in cautionary or remedial status, there could be additional tabs that would display that information from the survey.

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I'm going to pause for a second before I ... I have a few more points to make, but I didn't know if anybody had any questions or thoughts about, or initial reactions to this tool—any opportunities you see, any information you would like to see.

PEGGIE: You can go ahead and unmute your phone using STAR 6 to speak over the phone; you can enter a question in the chat. Feel free to speak over the phone as we have a relatively small group today. It looks like Robert is typing.

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JONI: I'm just going to show a few more of the slides that we have. The school information that we talked about has whether or not it's an alternative school, virtual or cyber, or if this school was converted from a traditional district school. Then the final tab on here is status—cautionary or remedial—so this school is an example of one that is in cautionary/remedial status. It talks a little bit about the actions that have been taken and the reason. That's the high level of information that will be available in a school profile. Again, if the school was closed, it would have a tab indicating the closure information. It would have things like closure date, reason for closure—and that would be displayed as well.

PEGGIE: Robert from Wisconsin is asking: Who is notified if information is updated? Do the schools know if a data point has changed?

JONI: We rely on the field to provide us this information. Part of it is on our survey, so most of the information that's in here is being provided to us, and we would hope that the authorizer is working with their schools to notify them when information changes. Most of the things that are being asked, the schools are going to know—what their renewal date is; they'll know about their provisional or cautionary action status. Most of our communication is at the authorizer level. We work closely with them. We have had some communications with schools, but it's primarily through the authorizer, and we do stress to them to communicate this to their schools when it does go live. We'll make sure they know this is a database that's available to everybody, including their schools, and we're going to encourage them to have their schools look at this and use this.

PEGGIE: Could you talk a little bit about your timing for your update?

JONI: The timing for our update... I think I mentioned earlier that we do an authorizer survey, and that is our primary source of data. This past year, we conducted the survey in June and July, and we found that it wasn't the ideal time because a lot of renewal decisions are made at the end of June. Our goal this year is to do the survey in July and August, with the hopes of updating and having everything launched by the end of September. In the interim, about every four months or so we send out e-mails, or we will. We sent one group out. We'll be sending e-mails out to authorizers to review, verify, and provide us any feedback that they have on the site. We did one in October, and we'll be doing one in January. We got positive feedback. We did get some information about change in authorizer, some information about upcoming school closures.

Our primary source is the survey, our secondary source are these midterm updates that we'll do throughout the year, then our third source will probably be working with you and your state, your colleagues. We're going through a process right now where we're doing some reconciliation of lists with the Department of Education, and we'll probably be reaching out to the SEAs to confirm some information.

PEGGIE: Great. If SEAs or schools wanted to contact you if the information was incorrect in the database, how would they go about doing that?

JONI: On the actual database, there is a “contact us” button. That will allow them to contact us directly. We have a mailbox that’s monitored on a daily basis that is checked, and then we’re able to respond and communicate with people.

PEGGIE: Great. Robert has another question. This is great to start a conversation about how we can add things that we hadn’t thought about before and what would be most useful for you, as leaders of SEAs, that might be most useful for the field. Robert is curious about whether or not we’ll be able to search for schools by pedagogical model. Could we look at Montessori schools in a state or project-based learning, which is a big movement in Wisconsin?

JONI: At this time we don’t have that functionality, but that’s something we could consider adding. If that’s something that would be important and help with people using this database, that’s definitely something we would look into.

PEGGIE: That’s a great idea. Thank you, Robert. It looks like Gail is typing. If anybody wants to call in, I did put the number to call in at the top, so you’re welcome to call in as well as entering things over the chat.

JONI: While Gail is typing , I’ll talk a little bit about some of the uses as we’ve talked to people in the field. When we’ve talked to authorizers, we’ve gotten some very strong feedback that this is a really good opportunity for them to compare their practices to their peers, either within their own state or outside of their state, to see what other people are doing. They think it will be a really good opportunity to learn from other people’s practices.

They also have given us feedback that this would be a good thing to be able to share; they receive a lot of data requests and they’d be able to direct people to that. There’s a downloadable functionality with it, and so that would be a really good source of information or referral for authorizers to say that all of our information, our most up-to-date information, is available at this website.

An additional functionality we’re looking at is comparison functionality. We’re looking more at a school-by-school functionality initially and possibly the authorizer, but I don’t know right now what our timeline, our functionality, is to be able to compare authorizers between states. But that’s definitely something we’ve had some initial conversations about with

the Department of Education, whether it's compare to schools, up to four schools, or they can check different boxes that they would like to compare on. Some people have asked that they want to be able to compare on the number of schools that authorizers have because there are different practices—if somebody has only five schools versus somebody who has 45 schools. We are looking at those things.

PEGGIE: Gail, if you have specific things that you'd like to be able to compare on, please share that with us, and as we build these functionalities we can definitely build in those requests from the field.

JONI: I don't know how feasible it is—and that's something we can definitely look into—on comparing state by state. Given all the different laws in states, there might be things in terms of number of authorizers with X number of schools or things like that, maybe some charter term lengths, but I don't know that we'll be able to do a lot of comparison between states.

PEGGIE: This is also going to be a work in progress, so as things change in the educational policy environment—as the Common Core of Data is implemented and we have new assessments that are the same across states, which is very different from the situation that exists right now— it might be that we can expand the functionality to include more cross-state analysis. Please continue to check this and continue to give us feedback about how this can be best used for you as state education agencies and for your schools in the field.

JONI: I think in the long term...this is our first pass; this is our first year of doing this. I think that in three years it's going to look very different. In the long term, we'd like to eventually bring in some noncharter information to be able to do some comparisons there, so that families or authorizers can compare between traditional district schools that are in their same demographic or their same geographic location.

We also think this could be a very helpful tool for families. They'd be able to find schools that have the same authorizer; they'd be able to learn about renewal history or understand when there's an upcoming renewal. They could use this to find a school that provides a unique setting, whether it's an alternative population or a cyber or virtual school. We think this could help some families, especially as they start to explore charters and charters grow in certain areas where they haven't been before.

We think researchers will also be another user, especially given the downloadable functionality. It allows them to compare. They'd be able to search for entities meeting certain criteria; they'd be able to download and analyze the data. We think this tool could serve a large, broad population. We're really excited about it, and the best feedback we've gotten is from users—whether it's authorizers, other SEAs—so anything that comes to mind we would really, really appreciate; any feedback that you have, any thoughts that you have.

PEGGIE: Any ideas that you have about improving the functionality, adding to it, would certainly be welcome.

JONI: Any uses, any opportunities you see from this of how it could be useful, or any opportunities you see with it would be really helpful for us to really understand.

PEGGIE: And also any concerns that you might see. If there are any concerns you have from your position in an SEA, or concerns that schools might have in the field, we also want to hear that feedback as well. Do you want to talk a little bit about a plan for going live?

JONI: The same link we will be sending to you the authorizers have seen in their first review or feedback. Our goal would be to be live in the first part of next year—that would be fully live, fully available. The one piece of information—I'm a fully transparent person—that we're still working on is obtaining the performance data. We have commitment from the Department of Education to have the data and to display the data, which is very exciting; we're just working out the final steps to obtain the data. We do have to do a little bit more reconciliation between the two lists, which is where we might be reaching out to you and your colleagues at the state level, and then we hope that we can start getting information fairly soon. We're still finalizing the download functionality of that information as well. Then once we receive that information, we'll be able to probably enhance some of our comparison functionality, some of our search functionality. The other piece of data we're looking at including is enrollment information, not only grade but student enrollment. We did receive some feedback that is really important—that people want to know whether or not they're looking at a small school or a large school. That's another piece of information that we're working on obtaining.

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The last piece I will talk about is on the school profile page you looked at: There's a note that says "operator holds the charter for the associated schools." Where we have things that are not as common, like if there are multiple authorizers or there are things like a change in authorizer, those are notes that will be included. You'll know if a school has a recent change in authorizer, and it'll tell you who the previous authorizer was. We're adding all of that to display, so that when people are looking at it they have the full context of the school or the authorizer or the operator.

PEGGIE: Are there any other questions you might have at this point about the functionality or the uses, or concerns you might have or recommendations?

JONI: We love recommendations.

PEGGIE: We're still pretty new in this process and we will e-mail you the link after this webinar, so you can really dig through it and look at your particular state to make sure the information is accurate. If there are any inaccuracies, please do contact us, so we can correct those before we really do a live launch of this later this spring.

JONI: As we add multiple years of data, we're working on figuring out the display. As time goes on, the look of it will probably change a little bit and evolve to accommodate all of the new data. We'd like to keep it so that people can see historical information as well as current. As you look at it over time, the look will also evolve.

PEGGIE: I'm going to allow a long awkward pause for anyone to type or to speak up. Otherwise, we will probably end the webinar a little bit early. Please let me know if you have questions, comments, or recommendations, and I'll give some adequate wait time.

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I'm going to consider that adequate wait time. We will be sending you an e-mail within the next half hour or so with a link to the authorizer resource. We really encourage you to play around with it a little bit over the next few

weeks and to check out the data for your state. Please do communicate with us if you have any questions or concerns or recommendations. We really want to hear your feedback. We look forward to your participation in future webinars hosted by the National Charter School Resource Center.

Let me give you a quick update. I know several of you have been asking about project directors' meetings; you should be getting an e-mail from the Department soon. It looks like they're looking at late February, February 24th, for the SEA project directors' meeting in DC. You should be receiving confirmation about that soon. I know it's quite a bit later than it was last year. We will archive this webinar on our website if you'd like to go check it out: www.charterschoolcenter.org/webinars. I am going to send you to a quick evaluation. If you could take a couple of minutes and give us some feedback on the webinar through your evaluation, that would be much appreciated.

Have a wonderful holiday season. Thank you so much for joining us this afternoon, and thank you, Joni.

JONI: Thank you for having me. We look forward to hearing from you.