Special Education:
Supporting Students with Disabilities in Charter Schools

September 15, 2015
Agenda

- Welcome and Introductions
- Context
- Equity at Scale
- Understanding the Entry Gap for Charter Schools Students with Special Needs
- Q&A
Introducing our Presenters

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About the National Charter School Resource Center

www.charterschoolcenter.ed.gov

- Funded through the U.S. Department of Education
- Makes accessible high-quality resources to support the charter school sector
Webinar Logistics

➤ Please use the chat feature to post questions
➤ Questions will be answered during Q&A
➤ Use chat for help with technical issues
➤ Webinar recordings will be available on the NCSRC website later today (www.charterschoolcenter.ed.gov)
➤ We will ask you to fill out a survey on the webinar during Q&A
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43 states, plus the District of Columbia, have charter schools in operation.

Approximately 6.4 million students – 13.1% of the student population between the ages of six and 21 – receive special education and related services in public schools every year.

95% of these students are enrolled in neighborhood schools.

From school year 1999–2000 to 2011–2012, the number of students enrolled in public charter schools increased from 0.3 million to 2.1 million students.

Approximately 10.5% of the students enrolled in charter schools have a disability that qualifies them for special education and related services.
Charter schools are public schools and as such have the **opportunity and obligation to serve all students** – including those with disabilities.

**State laws allocate authority** over special education and other areas.
- Some charter schools are Local Education Agencies (LEAs).
- Some are schools within a district LEA.
- State chartering boards or other independent Authorizers may be LEAs.

The **LEA is primarily responsible** for ensuring that special education is provided.

The LEA must provide a **full spectrum of placement options** for students.

Many state laws provide flexibilities to charter schools – more autonomy in exchange for more accountability – but **federal laws still apply**.
Context (slide 3 of 5)

Layers of Authority

- Federal Education Law
- State Charter School & Special Education Law
- District Requirements (where applicable)
- Authorizer Rules
- Charter Contract Requirements
Federal Authorities

➤ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): 20 U.S.C. §§ 1400 et seq.
➤ IDEA Regulations: 34 C.F.R. 300 et seq.
➤ Americans with Disabilities Education Act: 42 U.S.C. §§ 12101 et seq.
➤ 504 & ADA Regulations: 34 C.F.R. 104
It is challenging to generalize about how special education factors play out in charter schools – they are **defined by variety**.

Special education is more of a **spectrum** than a singular application; so are charter schools.

But we can see **commonalities, trends, shared concerns and opportunities** for serving students with disabilities in charter schools.

The **NCSRC** is focused on this work.

With recent research in this area, we have identified key factors and opportunities to **issues impacting students with disabilities in charter schools**.
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In the early days of chartering, most schools were small and independent.

Now, many schools are part of larger networks, united by a common program and often by a partnership with a management organization.

- Charter Management Organization = CMO (non-profit)
- Education Management Organization = EMO (for-profit)
- Education Service Provider = ESP (generic term for either)

Networks have scale, expertise, and resources to impact quality and options for special education in charter schools.

State laws are generally silent on the role such organizations can play; some ESPs have begun exploring the possibility of network collaboration.
NCSECS - Equity at Scale (slide 2 of 2)

Modest Offerings
- Shared resources
- Academic model
- Professional development offerings

More Innovative Offerings
- Satellite classrooms (serving students in multiple schools within network)
- Mega-networking (linked networks sharing practices)
- Services beyond network (to district; other networks)
- Network LEA
Final Thoughts

- This is a challenging area and will continue to be so – equity and choice are values that do not always easily align.

- Many signs of recent progress
  - Increased national focus on these issues.
  - National Alliance for Public Charter Schools model charter school law Version 2 to include much richer language around special education.
  - Many schools searching for ways to serve more students with moderate to severe disabilities.
  - Networks stretching to use their scale to offer stronger special education options.
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Understanding the Entry Gap for Charter Schools
Students with Special Needs (slide 1 of 5)

An Enrollment Gap from Day One
Special Education Enrollment by Grade in Denver Schools
Understanding the Entry Gap for Charter Schools
Students with Special Needs (slide 2 of 5)

An Enrollment Gap from Day One
Special Education Enrollment by Grade in Denver Schools
Understanding the Entry Gap for Charter Schools

Students with Special Needs (slide 3 of 5)

Students with Special Needs are Less Likely to Apply to Charter Schools

Of Denver students who **apply to a charter school**

5.6 have an IEP

Of Denver students who **apply to no charter school**

7.8 have an IEP
Understanding the Entry Gap for Charter Schools Students with Special Needs (slide 4 of 5)

Barriers to Choosing?
Parents Reported Difficulty in Choosing

- Enrolling a child with an IEP
- Enrolling a child for general education only

- Getting needed information to choose: 29.6%, 22%
- Finding a good fit for child: 48.6%, 39.2%
- Understanding eligibility: 37.8%, 28.9%
Understanding the Entry Gap for Charter Schools Students with Special Needs (slide 5 of 5)

Strategies to Improve Access

- Information tools
  - Overall approach to special education
  - Available services and accommodations
  - Outcomes for students with special needs

- Opportunities to meet with teachers prior to applying

- More personalized support in identifying and choosing among options
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Questions & Answers

Please submit any questions in the chat box.
Discussion

Do national trends and local examples resonate with your experiences? (Provide examples in chat box)

What factors do you see influencing special education in charter schools? (Answers in chat box)

What issues would you like to see future research efforts examine? (Answers in chat box)
# Links to Presenter Resources

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Links to Additional Resources

The U.S. Department of Education (Charter School Program)
www2.ed.gov/programs/charter/index.html

The National Charter School Research Center
www.charterschoolcenter.ed.gov

The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
www.publiccharters.org
NCSRC Resources (1 of 2)

Reports & White Papers
- District-Charter Collaboration
- Student Achievement in Charter Schools: What the Research Shows
- An Analysis of the Charter School Facility Landscape
- Finding Space: Charters in District Facilities
- Charter Schools and Military Communities: A Toolkit
- Legal Guidelines for Educating English Learners in Charter Schools
- Engaging English Learner Families in Charter Schools

Webinars
- SEA Webinar: Early Childhood Learning in Charter Schools
- General Webinar: Serving English Language Learners and Families
- Credit Enhancement Webinar: Evaluating Charter School Performance
- Credit Enhancement Webinar: Evaluating Charter School Performance During the Transition to Common Core
- Credit Enhancement Webinar: Recent Developments in CSP Guidance
- Credit Enhancement Webinar: Authorizer Collaboration
- Credit Enhancement Webinar: Collaboration to Enhance Facility Financing
- Credit Enhancement Webinar: May 2015 Workshop Preparation
- SEA Webinar: Weighted Lotteries
- SEA Webinar: Data Management Tools for Risk Based Monitoring

Newsletters
- Student Achievement in Charter Schools: What the Research Shows
- Serving English Language Learners and Families
- Charter Schools Serving Military Families
- English Learners in Charter Schools: Key Opportunities for Engagement and Integration
- Finding Space: Analyzing Charter School Facilities
NSCRC Resources (2 of 2)

Case Studies
- Two Rivers Public Charter School (SWD)
- Folk Arts Cultural Treasures Charter School (FACTS)
- Alma del Mar (EL)
- El Sol (EL)
- Brooke Roslindale Charter (SWD)

Master Classes
- Emerging Legal Issues
- Federal Funding Opportunities
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