Integrating Special Education into Key Authorizer Practices: Rubrics to Examine Charter Applications, Operations, and Renewals

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Building The Capacity of Charter Schools: Effectively Serving Students With Disabilities
SESSION OVERVIEW

• Project description

• Integrating special education into key authorizer procedures
  o Authorization/replication
  o Operation
  o Renewal

• Practice:
  o Charter School Scenario #1
  o Charter School Scenario #2

• Discussion/feedback

• Key sources
National Charter School Resource Center

National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)
Charter schools continue to struggle to provide high quality special education programs...
PROCEDURAL CHALLENGES

Lack of clarity about legal responsibility
- Independent single school district or...
- Part of an existing district

Limited access to standard service infrastructures
- Intermediate agencies
- Cooperatives
- Associations
OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

- Amassing special education capacity
- Managing limited special education dollars
- Navigating shared service delivery
- Balancing autonomy and accountability
Create-mission driven schools that include students with disabilities by design rather than as an add-on

Develop innovative service provision models in a time-compressed manner absent having to overcome existing policies and practices.

Cultivate special education infrastructures and conduct research to track effectiveness and financial sustainability.

Provide online and hybrid/blended learning environments that support highly individualized learning.
To realize full potential of charter sector, schools must build capacity in order to appeal to and be able to educate students with disabilities.

Charter school authorizers play a critical role in building that capacity.
To date, most technical assistance related to special education has focused on charter school operators but...
...charter school authorizers are uniquely positioned to make certain that:

- new and replication applicants have the capacity to educate children with disabilities and
- existing operators are providing high quality special education and related services to all students with disabilities and are complying with all applicable laws, rules and regulations.
Response

Develop three phase “rubric” document for authorizers to improve their capacity to support development and maintenance of high quality special education programs to ensure students with disabilities have equal access to charter schools.
Existing technical assistance documents produced by: the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)

Research conducted under the auspices of Project SEARCH, SPEDTACS, Project Intersect

TA Customizer projects funded by the U.S. Department of Education

Work commissioned by the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE).
June – Sept: Draft Rubric

Oct: Vet rubric with key stakeholders, hold focus group at NACSA to gather feedback regarding content

Nov - June: Revise and soft release rubric to select authorizers to pilot

June - Sept: Finalize, disseminate, document pilot, and develop brief regarding implementation
THREE PHASES

Application/Replication

Operation

Renewal/Reauthorization
APPLICATION PHASE

Provide authorizers with a tool to assess applicant’s capacity to provide a high quality special education program,

Infuse a layer of transparency into the authorization process

Disseminate a blue print for applicants about what they need to do to make certain they are prepared to educate students with disabilities.
Process is different for first time applicants than for existing schools looking to replicate.

Rubric elements for new applicants focus on indications of the group’s understanding of the challenges and requirements of serving students with disabilities in a charter setting; those for schools seeking to replicate focus on the track record already established by the organization.
Help authorizers to ensure that currently operating charter schools are meeting obligations to include students with disabilities appropriately and serve them compliantly for the purpose of building charter school capacity.
RENEWAL & CLOSURE PHASE

Provide a structure for authorizers to examine individual charter school’s practices over the life of charter for the purpose of informing renewal decisions:

- Child Find
- Enrollment procedures
- Initial evaluations
- Development of IEPs
- Provision of related services and transition services
- Academic outcomes
## Examples of Rubric Categories

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policies and practices</th>
<th>Records review</th>
<th>Curriculum and instruction</th>
<th>Assessment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td>Service provision</td>
<td>IEP development</td>
<td>Staffing/administration</td>
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<td>Funding</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Facility</td>
<td>Parent and community engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>Management companies</td>
<td>Virtual/blended learning environments</td>
<td>Academic outcomes</td>
</tr>
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## SAMPLE RUBRIC SECTION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operations Category</th>
<th>Core Elements</th>
<th>Key Considerations</th>
<th>Best Practices</th>
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| Enrollment and Retention | Enrollment and retention numbers and categories of students with disabilities and categories of disabilities | • Does the school monitor the percentage of students with disabilities it enrolls generally? By category of disability?  
• Does it take ongoing steps to ensure the retention of students with disabilities? | Once the school is up and running, it is important that the plans laid out in the application for fostering the identification and enrollment of students with disabilities are implemented and that the school embraces the ongoing obligation to seek and retain them. In order to ensure success in this area, the school should have a practice of gathering, reviewing, and, where needed, acting on this information. |
| Admissions          | Admission of students without discrimination and in accordance with applicable law | • Does the school’s admission process intentionally or unintentionally impede the admission and/or enrollment of students with disabilities?                                                                 | As public schools, charter schools may not discriminate on the basis of disability. Admissions and enrollment practices must be consistent with federal and state law requirements. Charter schools engaging in “counseling out” (i.e., seeking to persuade parents of students with disabilities from seeking admission or from accepting a place in the school) are acting improperly and violating applicable law. |
SCENARIO DISCUSSION

- Read scenarios
- Discuss key challenges
- Brainstorm strategies to avoid or resolve challenges
DISCUSSION

What challenges are you facing related to educating students with disabilities?

To what extent could a more intentional, thorough, and transparent discussion of special education pre-empt or address these challenges?

What strategies have you developed to build your capacity to educate students with disabilities?

What role is your authorizer playing in helping you to build special education capacity?
KEY SOURCES


QUESTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS?

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