

Charter School Center Webinar Focuses on Linking High-Quality Charters to Areas of Need

A Charter School Center webinar on Aug. 18 highlighted a community development financial institution's method of mapping the distribution of quality education and included National Association of Charter School Authorizers President and CEO Greg Richmond's views about the value of the tool.

Jose Cerda III, vice president of public policy and communications at IFF, presented recent IFF analyses that use school performance data and local demographics to show the number of seats in performing schools in specific neighborhoods and the estimated number of students in the area who lack access.

For example, an analysis of St. Louis data released in 2009 shows that only four of 105 schools met state standards, serving 3.5 percent of students. The analysis shows that 52 percent of the need was concentrated in six zip codes, and that four of those areas had no performing schools. The analysis also locates areas of excess capacity.

Cerda said the research only provides a snapshot, but that it is a rich look at what's happening on the ground.

"Simplifying all the methodology and the numbers, there is a different way to think about school reform, which is instead of top down, it's bottom up," Cerda said. "If you put one good school where it's needed the most, you can accomplish a lot."

Richmond said the disaggregation of data, and the ability to take repeated snapshots over time, has the potential to improve education policy and the graphic representations provide tools to engage communities and better allocate and develop critical resources such as facilities.

"It's no longer an abstract national or state statistic," Richmond said. "We're talking about the number of seats that are needed in your community. It's very much a strategy for community engagement."

He said that on one level it comes down to a very simple subtraction problem: number of kids, number of quality seats. Just do the math."

"This is a tool that identifies need, but that in no way means that the schools you locate there will be good," Richmond said, adding that strong authorization remains essential.

Richmond also commented on how such maps might influence the role geography plays in decisions about granting charters.



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More than 50 people attended the hour-long **Linking High-Quality Charter Schools to Areas of Need** webinar, which included extensive slides detailing findings and the method behind the IFF research.



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