

Editor's Note

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Most states have them. Many state boards of education have responsibilities and authorities for them. Whether you believe charter schools are the yeast in the loaf of public education, or that they are a better type of bread, or that they are a dry bread soaking up all the gravy that ought to go to traditional schools, charter schools will stay on the table.

The authors in this issue do not argue for more or fewer so much as they urge state boards to think systemically about what they have already. What will you do with your charter schools? If your state has a charter law and charter schools, what role do those schools play in the public school system, and what role should the state board play in ensuring that these charters are serving students well?

Public Impact's Bryan Hassel kicks off the *Standard* with an overview of the charter landscape: Where are these schools, who are their students, what authorities do state boards have concerning charter schools, and what are the big issues on the horizon?

While this issue addresses the relevant state policymaking levers, the schools themselves are concentrated largely in several urban districts. Robin Lake of the Center for Reinventing Public Education focuses on the potential for district-state collaboration to increase charter quality and turn around low-performing schools.

The issue includes several perspectives on the question of charter accountability. Andy Smarick, president of the Maryland State Board of Education, argues that having two models for the delivery of public education requires

state boards to adopt two approaches to accountability. Jeffrey H. Henig, professor of political science and education at Teachers College, Columbia University, reviews 25 years of history with the charter phenomenon, concluding that the success of the sector depends critically on public officials taking seriously the task of ensuring that charters align with public interests and values: that is, stronger accountability.

In an article entitled "Who Watches the Watchers?" Nelson Smith of NACSA talks about the linchpin in state board efforts to improve these schools—charter authorizers—and what state boards can do to make sure they are up to the task. Smith cites several states' efforts to ensure that evaluations of charter authorizers are not an afterthought but rather an integral part of a system of accountability.

Rick Kahlenberg and Halley Potter tackle two critiques that have bedeviled charters—that they are hostile to teacher unions and that they are resegregating public schools—and they talk about how state boards can ensure charters are places that embrace diversity and teacher voice.

Another state board veteran, Samuel Henry, shares his own experience of charter skepticism based on its checkered history and charter pride in his home state of Oregon.

With the recent presidential election, it is certain that school choice and the role of charters in making it a reality will figure prominently in education policy dialogue in the years ahead. These authors all well equipped to guide the state board that seeks to rise above the trees and glimpse the shape of the forest. ■

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