

Executive Summary

The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board (PCSB) is one of the nation's leading charter school authorizers. PCSB oversees 60 Washington, DC charter schools across 109 campuses.

Under PCSB's watch, DC's charter sector and schools have greatly improved student performance, school quality, and city-wide access to high quality seats in recent years. PCSB's transformative approach to charter school authorization is a model for others to follow.

Charter school authorizers are entities with three main tasks. They 1) approve schools, 2) oversee schools while in operation, and 3) revoke school charters if they fail to meet their performance goals. Because charter schools are autonomous, authorizers, if using best practice, do not dictate how they operate. Instead, they hold schools responsible for meeting the goals articulated within their charter agreements.

The impact of an effective charter school authorizer on student performance is illustrated by the strength and success of PCSB. As the District of Columbia's sole authorizer, PCSB oversees all public charter schools in Washington, DC. Through a multi-faceted approach, PCSB ensures that schools perform satisfactorily (across a wide variety of academic measures), are financially sustainable, and operate as public schools that are free and open to all students. PCSB has developed a model of authorization and oversight that has improved the quality of Washington, DC's charter school sector and led to DC public charter school students making significant learning gains. The performance of DC's charter school sector has

improved over each of the past several years, and DC charter schools significantly outperform the city's traditional public schools while enrolling similar or higher percentages of educationally disadvantaged students. According to one study, the average student enrolled in a Washington, DC charter school receives an educational benefit equivalent to 99 extra days of school per year compared to his or her peers attending the city's traditional public schools.¹

PCSB's approach is derived from its mission, vision, and core values. It is dedicated to transforming public education in Washington, DC and to ensuring that every student is provided with a quality education. PCSB gives DC charter schools a high degree of autonomy in exchange for accountability for results, and encourages schools to exhibit fidelity by requiring schools to remain faithful to their status as public schools and responsibility to educate all students equitably.

¹ Center for Research on Education Outcomes. (2013). *National Charter School Study 2013*. Stanford University: Stanford, CA.



PCSB has developed highly effective practices for regulating charter schools that span each stage of the “lifecycle” of a charter school. PCSB’s particularly innovative practices at different stages of the lifecycle of a charter school include:

Application and Approval: PCSB uses a **differentiated application** for operators of charter schools with a demonstrated track record of success, helping bring quality public charter schools to Washington, DC.

Oversight and Evaluation: PCSB uses a series of **multi-dimensional and complementary frameworks** that comprehensively and holistically measure and hold schools accountable for performance. These include the Performance Management Framework, or PMF, and the Financial and Audit Review.

Response Based on School Performance: PCSB closely monitors the performance of DC charter schools, and is committed to upholding its responsibility to close schools failing to meet their performance goals. Nearly one out of three charter schools ever opened in DC is now closed. PCSB encourages the use of **asset acquisitions** when closing schools, wherein the assets and students of underperforming schools are acquired by an organization or management

team with a demonstrated record of success in operating charter schools.

PCSB’s approach to charter school authorization and oversight has made Washington, DC home to one of the strongest charter school sectors in the nation. This case study:

- Illustrates PCSB’s approach to charter school authorization and oversight;
- Explains the philosophy behind PCSB’s approach;
- Highlights PCSB’s partners and community stakeholders; and
- Provides a model for authorizers to learn from (and entities interested in authorizing)

By adapting and implementing PCSB’s practices, other authorizers can strengthen their portfolios of charter schools and the charter sector as a whole. State governments looking to create an authorizing entity, or entities, can use this case study as a guide when crafting legislation and organizational policy.