





Untapped Expertise: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as Charter School Authorizers

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

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The Reinventing America's Schools Project is a nationally recognized thought leader and policy advisor housed at the Progressive Policy Institute. The project champions a model of schools called "21st century school systems," or systems that provide parents with more choice, and give schools and school leaders more autonomy in return for more accountability. Our research shows that public school systems that do this produce the most rapid improvement in student performance for poor students and students of color.

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nacsa
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS

The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) advances and strengthens the ideas and practices of authorizing so students and communities—especially those who are historically under-resourced—thrive. NACSA believes that quality authorizing is essential and must balance access, autonomy, and accountability in overseeing the overall performance of their portfolios of schools.

Find out more about authorizing and NACSA at:
qualitycharters.org

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He has extensive charter school authorizing, education research and policy, community engagement, and strategic advocacy experience. Before being appointed CEO at NACSA, Karega headed NACSA's research initiatives, was a former Education & Charter Schools Director with the Indianapolis Mayor's Office, the Board Chair of the Indiana Charter Schools Board (Indiana's statewide authorizer), the Director of the Indianapolis affiliate of Stand for Children, and on the leadership team of Indiana University's Equity Project, housed at the Center for Evaluation and Education Policy.

Karega has authored or co-authored numerous professional publications and has presented at many research conferences across the country on charter school authorizing, racial/ethnic disproportionality in school discipline, and special education reform.

Karega earned his Ph.D. and master's degree in educational psychology from Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana, and a bachelor's degree in psychology from DePauw University in Greencastle, Indiana.

Foreword

The path to change is paved by bold thinkers who turn bold ideas into bold action. A weak link in this value chain will derail even the most transformational intentions. That's why this seminal report is so critical. Not only does it plant the seeds for change in our schools, but it also provides the roadmap for how to achieve it, the data driving the thinking, and the mutual benefits of seeing this idea come to fruition.

As the leaders of our two organizations, UNCF (United Negro College Fund) and the National Charter Collaborative, respectively, we share a common mission and a common bond — a relentless pursuit of empowering people of color to thrive from early education through college and beyond. By helping put them in a position to succeed academically, the foundation for self-determination is built.

What we have come to understand, however, is that the full potential of this common bond has not yet been realized.

As the authors illustrate in the pages that follow, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and charter schools now have a unique opportunity to better each other and themselves. In doing so, in further strengthening their already impactful partnership, they can create a catalyst that reimagines education for all students, that creates a system in which children become learners, learners become achievers, and achievers become leaders.

We know from generations of lived experience that when the fate of our community is in the hands of others, it often means being left behind. Through struggle, resilience, and perseverance, we have made extraordinary strides in commanding agency over our lives, beginning with education. Ensuring our children and future generations have access to a high-quality education in classrooms led by teachers of color has become a rallying cry. And now we see a path to making that a reality, one that we are proud to be paving.



DR. MICHAEL LOMAX, PH.D.
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Untapped Expertise: Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) as Charter School Authorizers

PPI AND NACSA
COLLABORATION

FEBRUARY 2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For generations, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have been a catalyst for transformation in K-12 through initiatives, including diversifying teaching pipelines, starting new schools, and establishing programs designed to meet the aspirations of students far away from quality opportunities.

And yet, in many ways, we have not yet realized the full potential for how HBCUs can drive educational opportunities for all K-12 students. At a time when parents across the country are demanding new and better schools for their children, HBCUs represent an under-tapped source of expertise. This is especially relevant for Black families because of the disproportionate impact that unfinished learning has on them and the systemic barriers to high-quality education that this community

has historically faced. HBCUs have a unique history, legacy, and record of advancing Black achievement and wellness, which makes them ideal partners in redesigning public education for the 21st century.

Elevating HBCUs' Role in K-12 Education

HBCUs and their alumni have played powerful roles in K-12 public education, including charter schools. Alumni are leading outstanding charter learning institutions with exceptional student outcomes, and some HBCUs have partnered with charter schools in effective ways including integrating charter schools on their campuses. This arrangement provides students with a unique experience in which they are introduced to the promise and prestige of higher education earlier in their educational journey. And we believe it is merely the start of a partnership that can have a profound difference in the lives of underserved communities.

Charter schools have proven to be a powerful tool for boosting student achievement, especially among low-income families and families of color. Charter schools are public schools, free and open to all students. They currently serve nearly four million students

across 7,700 schools in 45 states and the District of Columbia. When permitted to thrive, charter schools offer families a variety of educational options from which to choose the best fit for their child. They are the opposite of one-size-fits-all schooling. Their unique blend of parental choice, school autonomy, personalized learning, and strict accountability for results illuminates the way toward higher-performing schools for all U.S. students, regardless of their zip code. They create a healthy mix of different types of public schools that helps improve all of public education.

What makes public charter schools innovative and nimble is how they are governed and overseen. The key is charter school authorizers – governmentally approved and supervised entities that decide who is qualified to start a charter school and receive public funding. They determine each school's academic, financial, and operational expectations; oversee school performance; enforce contractual performance and compliance expectations; and decide which schools should be given the privilege of continuing to educate students.

A practical barrier to quality public school options is the shortage of effective governance and oversight provided by charter school authorizers.

When done well, authorizing is a catalyst for expanding access to quality educational opportunities for students, families, and communities, especially those that have been overlooked, undervalued, and ignored.

But when done poorly – due to overregulation, insufficient institutional commitment, micromanagement, sheer incompetence, or inherent conflicts of interest – weak authorizing contributes to educational failure.

Authorizing charter schools is a relatively new way of making transformative change in K-12 governance and oversight. HBCUs as authorizers is a means to a critical end and one HBCUs have been doing since their inception: better educational opportunities for all students.

To speed the pace of school improvement and modernization, America needs more strong charter school authorizers. Given their capacities and expertise, the nation's HBCUs are natural candidates to assume this role.

Recommendations for Policymakers: NACSA and PPI urge state policymakers to take the following steps to start empowering willing HBCUs to become strong charter school authorizers:

- Query college leaders to determine if there is at least one HBCU interested in becoming a high-quality charter school authorizer (HBCUs can contact state policymakers directly to express interest);
- Examine national best practices on quality authorizing and how other states have structured authoring infrastructures to determine the best fit for your state;
- Determine the scope of HBCU authorizing (e.g. one institution or multiple institutions) and any other limitations (e.g. only HBCUs of a certain size);
- Enact legislation allowing for one or more HBCUs to be authorizers;
- Ensure there is sufficient funding and resources for authorizing functions.

A Stronger Future for Education

By becoming charter school authorizers, HBCUs can build on their historical legacy of transforming K-12 education in at least four ways:

1. **Redesigning Public Education:** Overseeing and expanding quality public school options to improve the outcomes of all students.
2. **Building on educational legacies:** Overseeing high-quality and effective K-12 schools can help HBCUs build on their rich legacy by deepening connections with local communities.
3. **Strengthening ties between K-12 and higher education:** HBCU authorizers can develop unique partnerships with schools they oversee, providing access to higher education campuses, creating pipelines of new students, opportunities for dual enrollment, mentorship programs between schools and students, and research opportunities between faculty and schools.
4. **Creating strong community institutions and wealth:** New charter schools create new facilities and jobs, with opportunities for economic growth in communities, such as Black vendors who can provide new charter schools with products and services.

Our country needs stronger educational opportunities that advance the learning of all students, Black students in particular. HBCUs as charter school authorizers is a transformative way of achieving this goal. For HBCUs looking to expand their impact and strengthen their own institutions, becoming a charter school authorizer is an idea whose time has come.

INTRODUCTION

Our nation's Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) are an untapped source of expertise that can help shape the 21st-century public education system our country needs. The outcomes they continue to achieve are impressive. HBCUs have produced a highly disproportionate number of our nation's Black graduates, including its doctors, lawyers, judges, and more. Many are influencing K-12 through diversifying teaching pipelines and establishing programs and schools designed to meet the needs of students furthest from high-quality opportunities.

It's not surprising, then, that applications and enrollment at HBCUs is increasing substantially,¹ including from non-Black students seeking an HBCU education.

Utilizing that expertise and record of achievement is especially important now. America's public schools lag behind those of our international competitors, both in terms of student attainment and educational equity. The lasting influences of a global pandemic, particularly for lower-income students and students of color, have magnified the challenges of our outdated K-12 system — one that was not working well for many students even before COVID-19.² To equip young Americans to keep pace with their counterparts abroad, and to close damaging achievement gaps rooted in class and racial inequities, the United States must make reinventing public education an urgent national priority.

What if the capacity and expertise of HBCUs were applied to K-12 schooling in new, transformational ways, particularly in public school governance and oversight?

In this report, we examine the potential for HBCUs to make high-stakes decisions about who is able to start new public schools, what outcomes those schools should meet, and what to do when adults fail students.

Specifically, we call on state governments to empower willing HBCUs to become charter school authorizers. This would create a powerful new catalyst for reinventing and modernizing America's K-12 public school systems.

Charter schools are public schools, free and open to all students. They currently serve nearly four million students across 7,700 schools in 45 states and the District of Columbia. When permitted to thrive, charter schools offer families a variety of educational options from which to choose the best fit for their child. They are the opposite of one-size-fits-all schooling. Their unique blend of parental choice, school autonomy, personalized learning, and strict accountability for results illuminates the way toward higher-performing schools for all U.S. students, regardless of their zip code. They create a healthy mix of different types of public schools that helps all of public education improve.

What makes public charter schools innovative and nimble is how they are governed and overseen. The key is charter school authorizers — governmentally approved and supervised entities that decide who is qualified to start a charter school and receive public funding. They determine each school's academic, financial, and operational expectations; oversee school performance; enforce contractual performance and compliance expectations; and decide which schools should be given the privilege of continuing to educate students.

HBCUs' unique history, legacy, and record of advancing Black achievement and wellness make them ideal partners in redesigning public education for the 21st century. Moreover, their expertise can be leveraged to expand new quality learning opportunities for students from all backgrounds.

THE PROBLEM

While inequitable academic outcomes at home have narrowed slightly, the changes have been incremental. On the 1992 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), more commonly known as "The Nation's Report Card," White fourth graders scored 32 points higher than their Black counterparts in reading. By 2022, the disparity had shrunk by only four points to 28. During the same period in math, the disparity between White and Black students improved by just three points. (The scores and changes in disparity between 1992 and 2022 were similar for students in grades 8 and 12 — the grades in which students take the NAEP.) The data is clear: Outdated models of education did not work well for students prior to the pandemic, and accumulating evidence demonstrates the disproportionate negative and lingering impacts the pandemic continues to have on Black student learning and wellness.

It's no surprise, then, that U.S. parents, especially Black parents, are demanding new and better schools for their children. The shift to virtual learning brought on by the pandemic and subsequent learning loss of thousands of students — with Black students disproportionately bearing the ravages of the pandemic³ — has led to a record number of families looking for different education options and calling for school systems to be redesigned.⁴

HBCUS AND TEACHER DIVERSITY



Bowie State University

Since 1954, the number of Black teachers has been on the decline. The famed Brown vs. Board of Education ruling made segregated schools unconstitutional, but it led to the loss of nearly 100,000 Black educators who were forbidden from teaching White students in the newly integrated schools. For nearly 60 years, teacher diversity and the importance of students sharing the racial identity of their teachers has been an uphill battle. With only 7% of U.S. teachers but representing 13% of the population,⁵ Blacks are underrepresented in America's classrooms. Blacks who do teach are concentrated in the South close to HBCUs.

Historically, HBCUs were the leading producer of Black educators and today is no different. Bowie State University, the oldest HBCU in Maryland, received funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Program that will exceed⁶ \$1.5 million over four years. The grant supports Bowie State's Black Male Educators Project, which works to increase the number of Black male teachers who are prepared to work with students in early childhood, elementary, secondary, and special education with the knowledge, understanding,

and skills in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). Similar programs focused on the recruitment and retention of Black teachers exist at other HBCUs.

- *North Carolina Central University*: Marathon Teaching Institute (MTI) is committed to increasing the number of African American male teachers, counselors, and PK-16 administrators.⁷
- *Virginia State University*: The teacher residency program supports graduate students who co-teach and earn a Master of Education within one year, while gaining real-world experience in a classroom under the supervision of a master teacher.⁸
- *Alabama A&M University*: Males for Alabama Education (M.A.L.E.) is a scholarship program designed to attract more minority males into the teaching profession.⁹
- *Huston-Tillotson University*: The Apple Pre-Ed Scholars Program, housed within their 100 African American Male Teacher Initiative funded by Apple Inc.,¹⁰ provides one year of scholarship support to high-achieving HT freshmen who intend to pursue a career in education.¹¹



Charter schools have proven to be a powerful tool for boosting student achievement, especially among low-income families and families of color.

Nearly 70% of all charter school students are students of color (including nearly one-quarter who are Black), and nearly 60% receive free or reduced-priced lunch.¹² A recent comprehensive report on charter school academic achievement by researchers at Stanford University reported that Black students attending charter schools received the equivalent of 35 additional days of learning in reading and 29 additional days in math, leading the authors to conclude, “This would be as if the students had attended an additional 1.5 months of schooling each year.”¹³

Moreover, this same study described more than 1,000 charter schools as “gap-busting.”¹⁴ In other words, those schools have eliminated achievement gaps between student subgroups and, overall, have better academic achievement than their state’s average. Gap-busting charter schools prove that strong and equitable educational outcomes are more than a vague aspiration; it’s a reality that should be scaled so that every child is able to attend a school that fits their unique aspirations.

Yet many state legislatures instead raise significant barriers to expanding high-quality charter schools. That’s usually because they’re captured by change-resistant school board politicians, white “progressives,” and others who blindly defend the K-12 status quo. School reformers, led by Black and Brown parents, are pushing to change policies that limit the number of schools, the number of student spots parents can access in those schools, and the amount of funding schools receive. These kinds of caps,

in states like New York¹⁵ and Massachusetts,¹⁶ are unconscionable limitations to quality opportunities for all students and students of color in particular.

Fortunately, it’s still possible even in today’s polarized political world to find champions for high-quality public education systems on both sides of the political aisle. For example, at the federal level, Democrats and Republicans recently joined forces to push for more high-quality charter schools. Last fall, Democratic Senators Michael Bennet (D-Colo.), Cory Booker (D-N.J.), Maggie Hassan (D-N.H.), and Brian Schatz (D-Hawaii) co-sponsored the Empower Charter School Educators to Lead Act (ECSEL), along with a handful of Republicans. A bipartisan bill was also filed in the U.S. House of Representatives.¹⁷ ECSEL would expand the permissible uses for federal Charter School Program (CSP) grants. The bill seeks to allow states awarded these CSP grants to distribute subgrants of up to \$100,000 to potential charter school operators to both support their schools’ planning phases and to ensure that the resulting charter school applications result in rigorous, high-quality schools.¹⁸

However, a practical barrier to growing quality public school options is the shortage of effective governance and oversight provided by charter school authorizers. Authorizers are institutions accountable to public bodies that ensure charter schools are high-quality and meet the aspirations of families, communities, and taxpayers.

According to the National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA), authorizers ensure charter schools are high quality by:

- Deciding who can start a new charter school;
- Setting academic, financial, and operational outcome expectations in collaboration with schools and aligned with federal and state policies;
- Monitoring school performance in meeting those expectations and holding schools accountable; and
- Deciding whether schools should remain open at the end of the school's charter term.¹⁹

Since every charter school has an authorizer, strong authorizing is critical to high-quality, equitable charter schools at scale. When done well, authorizing is a catalyst for expanding access to quality educational opportunities for students, families, and communities, especially those that have been overlooked, undervalued, and ignored. But when done badly — due to overregulation, insufficient institutional commitment, micromanagement, sheer incompetence, or inherent conflicts of interest — weak authorizing contributes to educational failure.

Authorizing is different than other forms of public education governance and oversight. Within the bounds of federal and state law, authorizers ensure that each school's volunteer governing board and school leadership have flexibility in how schools pursue outcomes, especially in how schools use human talent, time, and financial resources, as well as implement instructional programming. Authorizers hold the volunteer board and school leadership accountable for strong student, financial, and operational outcomes rather than dictating processes or inputs.

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been authorizing charter schools since 1994. HEI authorizers currently oversee schools that serve more than 10% of all charter school students nationwide. In 2022, there were 38 HEI authorizers overseeing 650 charter schools across 12 states. Statutes in 15 states allow for one or more HEIs to be authorizers,²⁰ and there appears to be some recent appetite to increase that number. For example, Florida recently passed legislation allowing HEIs in the state university system to authorize charter schools. And, while unsuccessful, a bill was filed in Mississippi in the last legislative session that sought to allow HEIs to become authorizers.²¹

State policy specifies the entities eligible to authorize charter schools and how they are held accountable. Enabling legislation for HEI authorizers, like HBCUs, may be narrow or broad, and will be state-specific. Examples include:

- New York restricts HEI authorizing to a single HEI authorizer by name.
- Michigan restricts HEI authorizers to community colleges and public universities.
- Indiana allows for public and nonprofit HEIs to authorize but requires nonprofit HEIs to assign authorizer responsibilities to a separate legal entity required to follow all state public access laws.
- Missouri restricts HEI authorizers to institutions with approved teacher preparation programs and other requirements.²²

The decisions that authorizers make over time determine the type and quality of charter school options accessible to families. Strong authorizers promote only quality options and

weed out low performers; weak authorizers account for the unevenness in charter school quality across the country. While there are many exemplary authorizers nationwide,²³ there are

also examples of authorizers becoming overly bureaucratic and, in some places, actively hostile to growing quality options.²⁴

MOREHOUSE CENTER FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION (MCEE)



Morehouse Center for Excellence in Education was created to 1) cultivate and prepare world-class educators; 2) impact the education ecosystem to create lasting change; 3) build communities of practice, inquiry, and belonging; and 4) bridge the theory and practice gap.²⁵

- **World-Class Educators:** MCEE collaborates with Morehouse Education Department to provide robust academic programming that aims to dramatically increase the number of graduates who are well-prepared to become exceptional educators through the Early Childhood Education Major (grades P-5) and Secondary Education Minor (grades 6-12), both leading to certification.
- **Impact Educational Ecosystem:** MCEE and the Education Department customize courses and internship opportunities best suited to students' academic interests and career goals. After a self-discovery advisory session, students are guided through five steps of the ELITE (Explore, Lead, Innovate, Teach, Engage) Pathway.
- **Build Communities of Practice, Inquiry, and Belonging:** Through support and funding from the Gilead Foundation and its health through education equity focus, MCEE is launching the My Brother's Teacher Program (MBT). This intergenerational mentorship program supports the professional and personal development of pre-service, new, and veteran educators.
- **Bridge the Theory and Practice Gap:** The Morehouse Lab School at Utopian Academy for the Arts gives students proximity to instructional best practices in real-time. Lab School students are mentored by Morehouse College's aspiring educators and engage in on-campus activities.

UNCF



Supported by a recent investment from Bloomberg Philanthropies, UNCF has described innovative ways HBCUs can partner with K-12 education and charter schools, including diversifying authorizing. See more at <https://uncf.org/pages/hbcu-k-12-partnerships>.

THE OPPORTUNITY

To speed the pace of school improvement and modernization, America needs more strong charter school authorizers. Given their capacities and expertise, the nation's HBCUs are natural candidates to assume this role.

In fact, HBCUs and HBCU graduates already are increasingly playing key roles in transforming public education through charter schools. UNCF recently outlined a set of pathways for how HBCUs can partner with charter schooling.²⁶ Whether through leading schools, teaching in schools, providing key services and resources, advocating for key policies, starting new schools, and more, it's clear that HBCUs and alumni are leading in transforming K-12 educational opportunities and demonstrating the power of self-determination.

Yet, there is a risk that such efforts may not be sustainable. Significant superintendent turnover, school board electoral politics, and other factors outside the control of HBCUs and their alumni put important school redesign efforts at risk. HBCUs should not leave critical reform opportunities to chance; rather HBCUs can close the loop of self-determination by themselves becoming charter school authorizers.

The Power and Deepening Influence of HBCUs

Engaging HBCUs as K-12 change agents is a smart strategy, as they continue to demonstrate their power to promote educational excellence. According to UNCF, while HBCUs make up only 3% of the country's colleges and universities, they enroll 10% of all Black students²⁷ and produce almost 20% of all Black graduates.²⁸ More specifically, HBCUs are responsible for one-half of the nation's Black teachers, 85% of Black doctors, 80% of Black federal judges, 75% of Black veterinarians, and 75% of Black military officers.²⁹

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, enrollment at HBCUs is on the rise, increasing by 57% in 2022.³⁰ It seems likely, given the recent Supreme Court decisions dramatically changing affirmative action policies in higher education, that HBCU enrollment will continue to increase.³¹ Given such a record of achievement, it's not surprising that demand for an HBCU education is on the rise for non-Black students as well,³² including White students: in 2021, non-Black students made up one-quarter of HBCU enrollment, compared with 15% in 1976.³³

HBCUs have a significant opportunity to reshape K-12 public education, especially in the southern U.S., where the majority of HBCUs are located. In 2023, there were 99 HBCUs located in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. According to the U.S. Department of Education, more than half of Black K-12 students are in the South.³⁴ That means state legislators in places like Georgia, Louisiana, Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida have a tremendous opportunity to capitalize on their proximity to HBCUs and meet constituents' needs by thoughtfully growing the number of schools available for all students, Black students in particular. HBCUs have been a catalyst for transformation in K-12 for generations. Authorizing charter schools is a relatively new way of making transformative change in governance and oversight, and one HBCUs should actively consider. HBCUs as authorizers is a means to a critical end and one HBCUs have been doing since their inception: better educational opportunities for all students.

By becoming charter school authorizers, HBCUs can deepen their influence in K-12 education in at least four ways:

- **Redesigning Public Education:** Expanding quality public school options to improve the outcomes of all students.
- **Building on educational legacies:** Overseeing high-quality and effective K-12 schools can help HBCUs build on their rich legacy by deepening connections with local communities.
- **Strengthening ties between K-12 and higher education:** HBCU authorizers can develop unique partnerships with schools they oversee, providing access to higher education

campuses, opportunities for dual enrollment, mentorship programs between schools and students, and research opportunities between faculty and schools.

- **Creating strong community institutions and wealth:** New charter schools create new facilities and jobs, with opportunities for economic growth in communities, such as Black vendors who can provide new charter schools with products and services,³⁵

HBCUs would bring enormous social capital as well as educational expertise to the field of charter school authorizing. For example, a report by UNCF, *Imparting Wisdom*, identifies HBCU practices that have elevated Black achievement and wellness in higher education, such as cultivating nurturing support systems, leveraging Black culture and identify, and setting high expectations that can serve as model approaches to K-12 educational excellence.³⁶ Another report by the Charter School Growth Fund and Energy Converters profiles HBCU graduates leading charter schools³⁷ showing how critical autonomy is to their ability to lead fearlessly and how their HBCU experiences inform how they create school culture, hire staff, and relentlessly pursue key student outcomes. Moreover, HBCU authorizers who employ Black leadership and staff will help to diversify the profession of authorizing — one that currently employs a higher proportion of leaders and staff of color than the district-run sector but is still not representative of students educated in charter schools.³⁸

MAKING IT HAPPEN: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

NACSA and PPI urge state policymakers to take the following steps to start empowering willing HBCUs to become strong charter school authorizers:

- Query college leaders to determine if there is at least one HBCU interested in becoming a high-quality charter school authorizer (HBCUs can contact state policymakers directly to express interest);
- Examine national best practices on quality authorizing and how other states have structured authoring infrastructures to determine the best fit for your state;
- Determine the scope of HBCU authorizing (e.g. one institution or multiple institutions) and any other limitations (e.g. only HBCUs of a certain size)

- Enact legislation allowing for one or more HBCUs to be authorizers.
- Ensure there is sufficient funding and resources for authorizing functions.

NACSA recommends policy guardrails in states with multiple authorizers and a history of inappropriate authorizing activities (e.g., schools shopping for the lowest quality authorizer available).³⁹ That includes policies that require an approval process so only institutions ready to authorize are allowed to do so, and policies that hold all authorizers to high standards.⁴⁰

FLORIDA A&M UNIVERSITY DEVELOPMENTAL RESEARCH SCHOOL



FAMU Campus

Founded in 1887, the Development Research School (DRS) was established as a Teacher Training School for Florida A&M University.⁴¹ In 1932, the Lucy Moten Elementary at Florida A&M University was established as an outgrowth of the Model School. The school was created specifically for students studying at the grammar school or Colored Normal School. Over the years, the name of the school has changed several times to include Demonstration School, Laboratory School, and FAMU High School.

During the early years of the school's existence, it served only elementary students

and was located in temporary quarters in Tallahassee, Florida. In 1921, it was known as the Demonstration Elementary School. Due to increased enrollment, The Model School (as it was then called) moved its three intermediate grades to a junior high school building. The new facility had been known as the Teacher's Cottage.

The "laboratory school" nomenclature was functional until the Florida Legislature enacted the Sidney Martin Developmental Research School Act of 1991, which designated the K-12 laboratory School as a Developmental Research School. Further, the legislation mandated that FAMU DRS operate as a designated public school district, and stipulated that "the mission shall be the provision of a vehicle for the conduct of research, demonstration, and evaluation regarding management, teaching, and learning. Further, FAMU DRS shall emphasize mathematics, science, technology, and foreign languages."

ROSENWALD SCHOOLS



Pine Grove, A Rosenwald School

Between 1917 and 1932, nearly 5,000 rural schoolhouses, modest one-, two-, and three-teacher buildings known as Rosenwald Schools, came to serve more than 700,000 Black children exclusively over four decades.⁴² It was through the shared ideals and a partnership between Booker T. Washington, an educator, intellectual, and prominent Black thought leader, and Julius Rosenwald, a German-Jewish immigrant who accumulated his wealth as head of the behemoth retailer, Sears, Roebuck and Co., that Rosenwald Schools would come to comprise more than one in five Black schools operating throughout the South by 1928.⁴³

In the Jim Crow South, institutionalized segregation pushed rural Black students into

poor public schools. Municipal education expenditures were a small fraction of monies spent on educating similarly situated White children. In North Carolina alone, the state only spent \$2.30 per Black student in 1915 compared to nearly \$7.40 per White student and nearly \$30 per student nationally, according to research by Tom Hanchett, a Rosenwald Schools scholar and community historian.⁴⁴

Examples of how HBCUs actively contribute to quality K-12 public education today are prevalent. For example, Morgan State University in Baltimore created a free Science, Engineering, Math, and Aerospace Academy (SEMAA) for students and their parents.⁴¹ Coppin State University in Baltimore helped create Rosemont Academy. This public charter elementary and middle school allows Coppin State students to get real-time experience in communities that can benefit the most from the most well-trained teachers.⁴⁵ Morgan State's SEMAA program effectively addresses perceived barriers to student success, like low educational attainment of the parents or cost. Coppin State's effort to give future teachers real-life experience in schools with the most need prepares their students on day one as teachers, which will reduce the likelihood they leave the profession within five years.

HBCU LABORATORY SCHOOLS



Southern University

In the 19th century, many universities and normal schools or teacher training institutions opened “laboratory schools.”⁴⁶ Unlike college-preparatory schools, laboratory schools were directly related to the research or teacher-training purposes of the universities. These schools have served a number of functions over the years, including teacher training, demonstration, and experimentation. A major objective of the Laboratory School or “Lab School” model has been to participate in the preparation of teachers, while providing a good elementary and secondary education for HBCU-bound students.⁴⁷

The founding and growth of this model began in the early part of the century as a follow-up to the training school model supported by northern philanthropists and local residents

from 1910-1930.⁴⁸ Training schools at the time emphasized vocational training and domestic training. Training schools were founded in the north, but were concentrated in southern states like Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. Training schools were often founded in close proximity to HBCU campuses.

Lab high schools also evolved from model schools that were part of the core teacher training curriculum at HBCUs.⁴⁹ Lab schools were at the vanguard of the accreditation battle, participated in national curriculum studies, and boasted high graduation and college entrance rates. Led by well-educated, reform-minded Blacks who molded their own approaches to teaching and curriculum and were grounded in sound progressive educational theory, these HBCU lab high schools represented privileged educational experiences. While the major function of the lab school was teacher training, lab schools like the one founded by Southern University in Baton Rouge produced doctors, dentists, psychologists, psychiatrists, lawyers, engineers, artists, athletes, university administrators, military officers, entrepreneurs, educators, and other professionals.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HBCU LEADERSHIP

NACSA has developed a process — used with a range of aspiring and new authorizers across the country — to develop best-in-class authorizing infrastructures customized to the unique values and contexts of the institution. Based on NACSA’s more than 20 years of experience and

expertise, this process can set up an authorizer for success, as illustrated in Table 1. Even in states that do not currently allow for HBCU authorizing, the first two steps — exploration and pre-building — can help the institution and advocacy partners establish viability prior to making a case to state legislative officials.

TABLE 1: HBCUS INTERESTED IN BECOMING AUTHORIZERS

	EXPLORATION	PRE-BUILDING	SYSTEM/TOOL BUILDING	LAUNCH & SYSTEM REFINEMENT	ONGOING SUPPORT
PURPOSE	Understand landscape to inform if becoming an authorizer makes sense	Development and communication of institutional philosophy and approach	Building customized authorizing systems and approaches communication of institutional philosophy and approach	Launch, refine, and conduct key activities	Ensure staffing is supported throughout development
KEY ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School design site visits • Authorizing model exploration • Statutory and policy analysis (e.g. what's required to become an authorizer and what is required vs. permitted vs. silent in statute) • Philosophy and approach to authorizing • Stakeholder engagement (internal and external) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement (cont'd) • Multi-year strategic plan development • Authorizing office staffing models (both early in authorizing lifecycle and when authorizing systems are established) • Authorizing office financial projections (years 0-3, 3-5, 5+) • Identification of authorizing office leadership • Identification of internal working group • Establish relationships with other regulatory bodies (e.g. state DOE) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement (cont'd) • Charter contract (rights and responsibilities of each party) • Application system, policies, and protocols • Oversight and monitoring system, policies, and protocols • Performance framework/ outcome expectations • Decision-maker (e.g. Board) training • Renewal system, policies, and protocols • Closure system, policies, and protocols • Stakeholder communication system, policies, and protocols • Internal HR and operating systems (including job descriptions, hiring etc. as needed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder engagement (cont'd) • Application request for proposals • Execute and refine application and other systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scaffold support as needed • Refining strategic plan assumptions, including staffing and financial projections • NACSA Programming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Monthly Convenings - Cohort-based leadership development programs - Authorizing101 - Annual leadership conference • Interpret changes to state law on charter schools and/or authorizing • Customized additional system/tool development

Among the most important recommendations for HBCU leadership to start with includes:

- Conduct a landscape analysis that includes a description of the current quality of K-12 educational offerings, profiles of graduates at your institution, and common academic challenges of admitted and rejected applicants/enrollees;
- Visit and have discussions with key stakeholders including trustees, alumni, faculty and staff;
- Establish your institution's unique value proposition for doing charter school authorizing;
- Visit high-quality schools and authorizers.

Our organizations stand ready to collaborate with HBCUs and state policymakers in exploring

HBCU authorization.

CONCLUSION

The fight for educational opportunity for all U.S. students is not new. For generations, power structures have used violence, fear, political power, and legislative action to deny Black families access to equally resourced public schools. While much has changed, even more has remained the same.

It does not have to remain this way.

The untapped expertise of our nation's HBCUs is an opportunity to reshape public education for the 21st century and raise the achievement of all students. Establishing opportunities for them to make the final call on the most consequential schooling decisions by becoming charter school authorizers is an idea whose time has come.

HOWARD UNIVERSITY MIDDLE SCHOOL OF MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

Founded in 2005, the Howard University Middle School of Mathematics and Science (MS)2 uses a personalized curriculum designed to help students in Mathematics and Science and to connect and integrate stem disciplines into all core subjects.⁵⁰ The school is housed on the campus of Howard University and authorized by the DC Public Charter School Board. All students, regardless of skill levels, learning styles, personalities, and cultures, are prepared to meet and exceed the learning standards of the District of Columbia. Students have access to programs created in partnership with the university:

- Students complete the Smithsonian Science for Global Goals: Environmental Justice project, where students learn about

concerns of their community in order to communicate accurate, helpful, and trusted information about environmental justice.

- Students visit the School of Medicine where they talk with medical students about studying medicine. Middle school students experienced firsthand what a day in the life of a college medical student is like. The interaction allowed school students to begin to make decisions about a future career in medicine.

Teachers customize the learning environment for their close to 300 students to adapt to distance learning and the needs of every learner. The vision was realized in 2016 with the first Howard University STEM graduates who had completed middle school at (MS)2.

EARLY COLLEGE CHARTER SCHOOL AT DELAWARE STATE UNIVERSITY



Delaware State University

The Early College School at Delaware State University is a tuition-free public charter school. The school is open to all students

throughout the state and offers students a chance to accelerate high school matriculation and their college education. Students have the potential to earn high school credits prior to Grade 9, which provides them the opportunity to earn college credits while still in high school. Students gain college credit in pathways that are aligned with the undergraduate majors at Delaware State University including Driver Education, ELA, Math, PE/Health Education, RTI/Special Education, Science, and Social Studies. The school is authorized by the Delaware Department of Education.

Addendum

WHO ARE AUTHORIZERS AND HOW ARE THEY STRUCTURED?

In 2022, there were just under 950 institutions actively authorizing at least one charter school across the country. As illustrated by Table 2,

those authorizers are typically categorized into six types, differentiated by type of institution, authorizing geography, and governance.

TABLE 2: AUTHORIZER TYPES

TYPES	COMMON NAME	GEOGRAPHIC AUTHORITY	GOVERNANCE	PROPORTION OF SCHOOLS OVERSEEN*
INDEPENDENT CHARTERING BOARD (ICB)	State charter commissions	Statewide	Board members usually appointed by elected officials	15%
STATE EDUCATION AGENCIES (SEA)		Statewide	Typically housed in State Departments of Education, SEA decision-makers are usually either elected or appointed state or department of education board members	22%
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEI)**	Colleges and universities	Mostly statewide, some have geographic restrictions	The college or university board (or some subset and/or designees) are typically the authorizing governing board members	9%
LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEA)	Local school districts	Local school district boundaries	It's elected officials (or some subset and/or designee) are authorizing board members	48%
NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS (NPO)		Statewide	The governing boards of those institutions (or a subset and/or designee) are the authorizing board	5%
NONEDUCATIONAL GOVERNMENT ENTITY (NGE)	Mayor's Office/ Municipality	Local municipality boundaries	The elected official(s) of the municipality (or designee) make up the authorizing governing board	1%

Notes:

*As of 2020

** HBCU institutions that become authorizers would likely be considered in this category

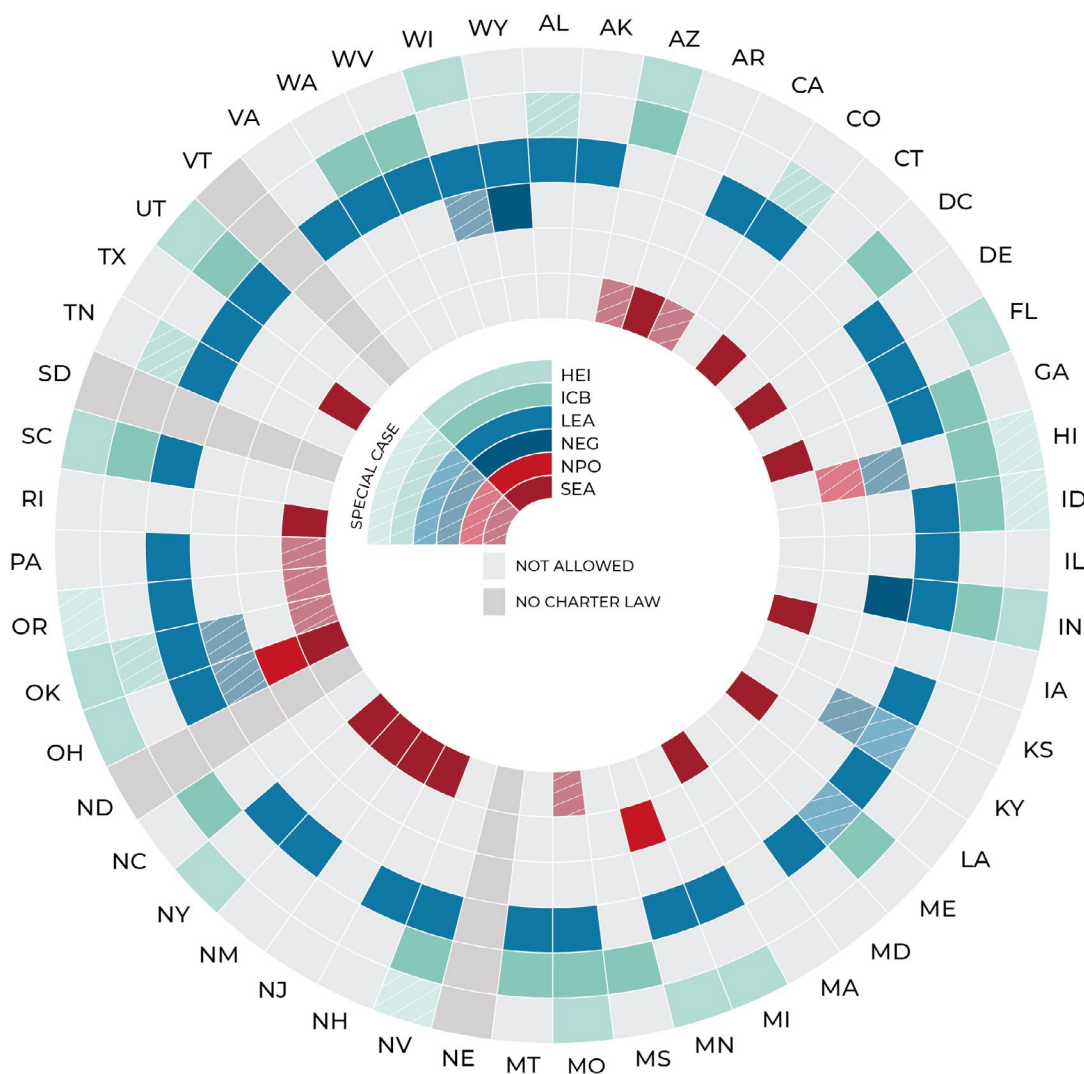
*** Two states – Minnesota and Ohio – currently have nonprofit organizations actively authorizing.

TYPES OF AUTHORIZING INSTITUTIONS

The institutions able to authorize varies by state. Some states only allow for a single entity

to authorize (e.g., Massachusetts), while most other states allow for a mix of authorizing types (e.g., Indiana).

FIGURE 1: AUTHORIZING INSTITUTIONS BY STATE



Montana's charter law passed in 2023, but will not go into effect until the 2024-25 school year. Legislative changes are expected.

The charter — or contract between the authorizer and school that lays out performance expectations and the rights and responsibilities of each party — is typically implemented by professional staff the authorizing board employs. Those staff (and usually

consultant specialists) carry out day-to-day authorizing functions and make high-stakes recommendations to authorizing boards. The professional staff are the ones that interact most frequently with each school's volunteer governing board and school leadership.

Authorizer staffing and activities are financed in several different ways, usually determined by state policy. There is not one common authorizing staffing model, as each institution allocates resources aligned with its vision, capacity, finances, and key objectives. The most common way authorizing activities are financed is through oversight fees from schools overseen, typically between 1% and 3% of each school's per-student state revenue.

Some authorizers finance staffing and activities through other means, such as a state appropriation or resources from the authorizing institution. This type of financing, through avenues not connected to school enrollment, is preferable, as it helps to ensure that accountability decisions are not based on the size of schools overseen (e.g., not closing a large school because of the financial impact on the authorizer's annual budget or allowing for enrollment increases for mediocre schools to increase authorizer oversight resources).

It's critical for new authorizers to have adequate start-up resources, both for the pre-authorizing development (Year 0) and the initial three to five years of authorizing operations (or until oversight revenue is sufficient to cover operational costs). With sufficient resources, authorizers can focus on authorizing quality schools, not quantity. In NACSA's experience helping develop new authorizers, it's not uncommon for start-up resources to be either a state appropriation or a combination of state appropriation and philanthropy.

A recent example, derived from NACSA's experience helping a new Midwest statewide authorizer, included a \$2 million state appropriation for five years (\$500,000 for year zero, an additional \$500,000 per year for the

first two years of operation, and downward stair stepping for Years 3-5) plus approximately \$700,000 in philanthropic support over Year 0 and Years 1-2 primarily to supplement exploration, initial tool building, and refinement.

Once enough schools have been authorized, usually between five and 10 or more schools, the enterprise should generate sufficient public resources commensurate with the number of schools overseen. For illustrative purposes, an authorizer overseeing five schools with 300 students each and receiving a 3% oversight fee – with state revenue of \$10,000 per student – would yield approximately \$450,000 in revenue annually for authorizing functions.

CONSIDERATIONS ON AUTHORIZING BOARD MEMBERSHIP FOR HBCUS

State statutes specify that the governing body of the institution is the authorizer. For HBCU's, that means the university trustees are charged with authorizing decision-making. How each institution's governing body makes decisions varies by philosophy, capacity, and approach. NACSA recommends the following structure and membership for HBCUs authorizing governance:

- The university board should create a standing authorizing committee, with an odd number of members (e.g. 5 or 7 members).
- A majority of the committee should be university board members. The authorizing committee should also be supplemented by non-board members to fill any expertise gaps.
- The university board should create policy specifying the decisions the authorizing committee is empowered to make (e.g. new charter school approvals, closure decisions etc.)

- All university board members and authorizing committee members should undergo regular training on quality authorizing, including a detailed orientation and training for any new board member or authorizing committee member.

AUTHORIZING WELL IS HARD WORK AND NOT FOR EVERYONE, BUT ACHIEVABLE

The work of ensuring autonomy, accountability, and access that results in high-quality educational opportunities with communities is hard work — and should be. Uneven charter school performance across the country is often a reflection of the quality of authorizing. There are institutional risks and challenges with authorizing. The most significant is being associated with schools that are not high-quality. Further, some institutions have decided to not be involved in charter schooling or authorizing because of perceptions of being “anti-public education” (even though charter schools are public schools that are free and open to all), concerns about faculty buy-in, and threats by local school districts. In states with strong authorizer accountability provisions, poor authorizing can also result in institutions being stripped of their authority to do so.⁵¹

While not a risk-free endeavor, there are resources and evidence, enabling strong authorizing infrastructures, resulting in exceptionally strong schools. In addition, recent research points to key practices that differentiate authorizers with strong and equitable portfolios of schools from those with mediocre to poor sets of schools.⁵² Those include:

- **Institutional Commitment.** The institutions that house authorizing are committed to doing the work well. That means the

institution makes the function of authorizing highly visible, ensures sufficient resources, aligns authorizing to the institution's mission, does not bury authorizing in multiple layers of bureaucracy, and does not see authorizing as a side project.

- **Competent Professionals.** Authorizing isn't paint-by-numbers. It takes a high degree of competent professional judgment to do well. Having strong processes and protocols matters, but will not be effective without highly committed, professional staff and leadership.
- **Laser Focus on Quality.** Outstanding authorizers take their role as stewards of quality seriously. They say yes to strong proposals and no to bad ones. They actively establish systems promoting the growth and expansion of high-quality schools and effectively address poorly performing schools, even closing them when merited. Even when politically hard, they make decisions not based on ideology or politics, but what will result in quality opportunities for students.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES TO INFLUENCE AUTHORIZING

While becoming an authorizer is the most transformative way of closing the loop of self-determination, some HBCUs may not choose to do so, for a host of reasons. There are other impactful ways HBCUs and their alumni can influence authorizing governance and practices, such as:

- **Governance:** Each authorizing institution has a board of directors charged with high-stakes decision-making. Many of those roles are appointed, providing opportunities for

competent individuals to make consequential decisions.

- **Staff:** Data suggests that around half of large authorizing institutions annually plan to add full-time staff members.⁵³ Authorizing institutions typically need a wide range of expertise on staff, including people with experience in K-12 education leadership, data analysis and evaluation, relationship cultivation, school performance expertise, special education acumen, communication skills, and more.
- **Consultants:** Most authorizers augment full-time staff with consultants who provide expertise and additional capacity. Authorizers typically use consultants to review and evaluate new charter school applications, conduct due diligence on existing operators seeking to replicate, conduct site visits, and evaluate the academic, financial, and operational performance of schools, among other key activities.

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