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ABSTRACT
        This paper presents national 2000-01 data from charter
schools and charter-school authorizers in the United States regarding the
various stages of the accountability process: the charter application stage,
the monitoring stage, and the sanctions stage. The larger accountability
context of public schools and its impact on charter schools are also
discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of the continuing mismatch
between the theory and the reality of charter-school accountability. The
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externally defined and imposed outcomes measures on the other. (Author)

Multiple Perspectives on Charter School Accountability: Research Findings from Charter Schools and Charter School Authorizers.

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2003

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Abstract

The authors present national data from charter schools and charter school authorizers in the United States on the multistage process of charter school accountability. The larger accountability context of public schools and its impact on charter schools is also discussed. The authors identify the mismatch between the theory and the reality of charter school accountability. The authors maintain that the original vision of charter school-level goal setting is being eclipsed by state assessment mandates and other accountability requirements. Furthermore, charter school accountability relationships continue to emphasize traditional inputs at most stages of the accountability process, especially during the implementation of sanctions against schools. Hence, the original theory of charter school accountability is compromised by the continuing emphasis on inputs, on one hand, and by externally defined and imposed outcome measures.

I.   Introduction

Accountability is a key component of the charter school movement. Charter schools are public schools authorized by various agencies, including local school districts and universities, with the understanding that they will be freed from all or some of the provisions of the state's education code. In exchange for this flexibility, they are held accountable for meeting the goals identified in their charter contracts. In theory, a charter school can be closed by its authorizer or the state if it fails to meet the terms of its charter.

Accountability has also become the focus of the larger educational policy environment. Even before the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, states were beginning to hold all schools accountable for results: creating and aligning new assessments with curriculum

standards and imposing consequences if schools did not realize certain outcomes. The increased focus on public school accountability has been accompanied by a shift in the discourse about accountability. Some observers have described this as a shift from "traditional" to "new" accountability systems. Traditional, or "old," public accountability focused almost exclusively on the legal expenditure of public funds and other "inputs" (Ladd, 1996). The "new" type of accountability that emerged in the 1990s focuses on school and student outcomes (Fuhrman, 1999; Elmore, Abelmann, and Fuhrman, 1996). Through this new orientation, states and districts are communicating expectations for student performance (e.g., through content and performance standards) and requiring that all schools meet certain performance standards.

Because of the individualized nature of charter school contracts, charter schools, in theory, should have individualized goals and objectives rather than the more standardized objectives of these larger state accountability systems. However, the reality of accountability relationships between charter schools and other agencies contradicts this theory, particularly within the current accountability context of public education. Like other public schools, charter schools have been swept up in a rising tide of externally imposed accountability demands from states and school districts. Furthermore, charter school accountability continues to emphasize traditional inputs at most stages of the accountability process, especially during the processes of charter revocation, nonrenewal, and the implementation of other sanctions against schools. These findings indicate that the original vision of charter schools as unique institutions with individualized accountability plans may not be possible within the current intergovernmental configuration of states and charter school authorizers. In addition, these findings also suggest that more traditional forms of accountability may be overshadowing charter school accountability.

This paper is based on data collected during the second year of SRI International's 5-year evaluation of the U.S. Department of Education's Public Charter Schools Program.[1] It extends a preliminary discussion of charter school accountability and charter school authorizers developed previously by two of the authors (Anderson and Finnigan, 2001). The paper

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[1] For the full set of 2000-01 findings, see Anderson, L., Adelman, N., Finnigan, K., Cotton, L., Donnelly, M., & Price T. (2002, November). *A decade of charter schools.* Menlo Park, California: SRI International. Available at: http://www.sri.com/policy/cep/choice/yr2.pdf. The accountability findings in the main report have been adapted for this paper and interpreted in greater depth by the authors. The authors wish to thank colleagues Katherine Baisden, Denise Cardoso, Bonnee Groover, and Ash Vasudeva for their contributions to the research reported in this paper. Michelle LaPointe, our project officer at the U.S. Department of Education when these data were collected and reported, also provided valuable assistance. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors.

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presents 2000-01 data from charter schools and charter school authorizers regarding the various stages of the accountability process: the charter application stage, the monitoring stage, and the sanctions stage. The paper concludes with a discussion of the continuing mismatch between the theory and the reality of charter school accountability.

II. Accountability Findings from Charter Schools and Charter School Authorizers

Charter school accountability involves three stages or steps: charter application and award, ongoing monitoring, and sanctions for charter schools with problems. As the data in this section indicate, authorizers emphasize a combination of inputs and outcomes during these stages. The data presented in this section answer the following research questions, which correspond to the different stages of the accountability process:

1. What is the application process for charter schools?
2. What are the most important things that authorizers look for when deciding whether to charter schools? What are the most important reasons for which authorizers deny applications?
3. On which indicators are charter schools monitored, and by which agencies?
4. What are the measures of student performance for which charter schools are accountable?
5. What percentage of charter schools have come up for renewal? What are the reasons charters are revoked or not renewed?
6. Beyond nonrenewal (and revocation), what other sanctions are imposed on charter schools, how often, and why?

Awarding Charters

Provided the roles and responsibilities of both the proposed charter school and the authorizer are clearly understood during the charter development and application process, charter school accountability begins before the charter is awarded. Although this degree of clarity does not always exist, charter school authorizers interviewed for this study referred to the need to be clear about the roles and responsibilities of each party in the charter contract and to ensure that goals and expectations are clear to each party at the very beginning of the relationship. In this subsection, we describe the charter application process and the factors considered by authorizers in their decisions to award or deny charters.

What is the application process for charter schools?

Charter school authorizers reported a variety of application procedures for charter schools. Most authorizers include an interview or public hearing (85 percent), a formal deadline for applications (e.g., as part of an annual application and approval cycle) (70 percent),[2] and the formation of a committee to review applications (68 percent).[3] Most authorizers (59 percent) also provide assistance to applicants. About half (48 percent) have a multistage process in which a preliminary review of applications yields a smaller number of applicants who are invited to submit fuller proposals.

To some extent, the application process for charters depends on the type of authorizer. States were more likely than local or university authorizers to distribute application packets, assist school founders in the application process, have a formal review committee, and implement a ranking system to score applications.[4] In all cases, state-level authorizers were more likely than the local or university authorizers to report these application processes. Like many other differences between authorizer types, this pattern may be due to the higher average number of schools chartered by state authorizers. In other words, the volume of applications tends to drive the creation of policies, procedures, and infrastructure for the chartering process.

What are the most important things that authorizers look for when deciding whether to charter schools? What are the most important reasons for which authorizers deny applications?

For the most part, authorizers do not "rubber-stamp" all charter applications in the name of creating more choices in the education system. Rather, authorizers generally apply specific criteria when they review charter applications. Often, authorizers specify an outline to guide proposal preparation, with particular elements that must be adequately addressed before charter approval. Exhibit 1 looks at the relative importance of particular elements or criteria that authorizers may use when reviewing applications and making the decision to issue a charter. Accountability provisions, the mission and goals of the school, the curriculum, health and safety issues, and finances lead the list of elements authorizers consider in their decision-making

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[2] Seventy-one percent also mentioned an ongoing review of applications; however, this seems to contradict the finding that 70 percent have formal deadlines for the application and approval cycle. This finding may indicate multiple opportunities for planning groups to submit applications.

[3] Authorizer data is weighted but the number of authorizers included in the table is unweighted so as not to be misleading. See Appendix for details on the weights applied.

[4] See Anderson, et al., 2002, for more details on these differences.

process. Note that only one element, transportation, falls below the score for "somewhat important."

Exhibit 1
ELEMENTS CITED BY AUTHORIZERS IN THEIR DECISIONS TO ISSUE CHARTERS

	Mean[a] (n=98)
Accountability provisions	3.89
Mission and goals of the school	3.84
Curriculum	3.82
Health and safety issues	3.81
Finances	3.81
Assessment	3.77
Governance and management	3.76
Special education program/services	3.65
Admission procedures	3.58
Instructional strategies	3.57
Background of school leaders	3.48
Personnel policies or requirements	3.33
Student population	3.35
Student discipline policies	3.30
School facilities	3.23
Transportation	2.55

[a]The mean scores are based on converting responses to a 4-point scale with "very important" equal to 4, "somewhat important" equal to 3, "not very important" equal to 2, and "not at all important" equal to 1. Note: The total means are weighted to represent the authorizer universe.

Notice that there is a mix of input-oriented elements on the list in Exhibit 1, such as finances, as well as outcome-oriented elements, such as assessment, among the most highly rated elements. This mixture of elements at this stage of the accountability process is important, particularly because the composition appears to be less balanced at later accountability stages.

In general, charter denial appears to happen infrequently, with fewer than one-quarter (23 percent) of authorizers reporting that they have denied charter applicants because of problems with or concerns about their applications. Exhibit 2 illustrates the differences in charter application denials by type of authorizer—these differences are statistically significant (p<.01).[5] The fact that states were more likely than university and local authorizers to deny charter applications may be related to the higher volume of charter applications received by states.

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[5] The Fisher's exact test was used for this analysis.

Exhibit 2
CHARTER APPLICATION DENIAL, BY AUTHORIZER TYPE

Has your agency ever denied charter applicants because of problems or concerns with their applications?	Percentage of Authorizers			
	Local (n=77)	State (n=14)	University (n=9)	Total Authorizers (weighted) (n=100)
Yes	19	86	44	23
No	81	14	56	77

Using the same list of elements as those displayed in Exhibit 1, authorizer survey respondents who reported ever having denied a charter applicant were asked to identify those problem areas that caused them to deny charters. The relative importance of concerns cited by authorizers in decisions to deny charters, presented in Exhibit 3, show that the most frequently cited problems with charter applications center on governance and management, finances, instructional strategies, and curriculum. Again, please note the mix of input- and outcome-oriented reasons for denying charter applications.

Exhibit 3
AUTHORIZERS' REASONS FOR DENYING CHARTER APPLICANTS

	Mean[a] (n=29)
Governance and management	3.22
Finances	3.11
Instructional strategies	3.08
Curriculum	3.03
Mission and goals of the school	2.79
Assessment	2.66
Accountability provisions	2.70
Background of school leaders	2.65
Admission procedures	2.69
Special education program/services	2.55
School facilities	2.46
Personnel policies or requirements	2.45
Student population	2.39
Health and safety issues	2.19
Student discipline policies	2.03
Transportation	1.61

[a]The mean scores are based on converting responses to a 4-point scale with "frequently a problem" equal to 4, "sometimes a problem" equal to 3, "rarely a problem" equal to 2, and "never a problem" equal to 1. Note: The total means are weighted to represent the authorizer universe.

Monitoring Charter Schools

The second stage of accountability begins once charters are awarded and schools begin operations as charter entities. Most charter schools undergo some type of monitoring process by their authorizers, governing bodies, or other agencies. This monitoring process varies by authorizer but usually includes an annual review of certain educational outcomes or data. The agencies responsible for monitoring charter schools and accountability indicators are the focus of this subsection.

On which indicators are charter school monitored, and by which agencies?

The survey of charter schools asked school leaders about external monitoring of a large number of elements associated with school operations. Potentially, charter schools are monitored by and held accountable to more entities than other public schools because, in addition to any state monitoring required by a state's charter school law, all charter schools have authorizers, and many have their own governing boards as well. The purpose of this survey item was to establish charter school leaders' perceptions of who oversees them and for what purposes.

Authorizers also were asked about their monitoring activities, using the same list of potential areas for monitoring asked of charter school leaders. Specifically, the authorizers were asked to indicate the percentage of their chartered schools that were monitored in each potential area of accountability listed. Authorizers reported that they were most likely to monitor most or all of their schools in the following areas: student performance on statewide assessments, financial record keeping, compliance with federal or state regulations, and enrollment numbers (Exhibit 4). Although the units of analysis for the school and authorizer surveys are not directly comparable, it is interesting to look at the two perspectives on the same set of monitoring criteria.

Exhibit 4
ACCOUNTABILITY AREAS MONITORED BY CHARTER SCHOOL AUTHORIZERS:
SCHOOL AND AUTHORIZER PERSPECTIVES

Area Monitored	Percentage of Schools	
	School Survey (n=381)	Authorizer Survey[a] (n=96)
Student achievement results on statewide assessment	60	95
Compliance with federal or state regulations	59	90
Special education services	59	9
Financial record keeping	58	91
Student achievement results on other standardized tests	48	75
Enrollment numbers	45	87
Alignment of curriculum to state standards	45	72
Other student performance indicators, such as attendance rates	40	68
Student performance on performance-based tests	39	72
Parent satisfaction	38	58
Governance or decision-making	35	64
Diversity of student body	35	60
Relationship with management company	34	28
School management or leadership	33	68
Student discipline and school safety	32	67
Instructional practices	31	62
Staff performance	24	45
School waiting list	24	43
Staff attendance	22	34
Parent or community involvement	20	57
Student portfolios or demonstration of work	13	38

[a]Note: Authorizer respondents were asked what percentage of schools they monitored in each area. Data presented are weighted average percentages of schools as reported by authorizers.

From the perspective of charter school leaders, charter schools are monitored and held accountable and responsible by their own governing boards first and their authorizers second. (Fewer schools reported direct monitoring by states or other agencies.) According to the charter school survey, authorizers were less likely than charter school governing boards to monitor most of the areas listed in Exhibit 4. Both the governing body and the authorizer tended to monitor a few areas, including financial record keeping, compliance with federal and state regulations, and student achievement results on standardized tests in nearly equal proportions. However, because authorizers are outside agencies with legislated oversight responsibilities, they may have higher standing as accountability monitors than do charter schools' internal governing bodies.

Authorizer respondents also were asked whether they, as sponsors, were required to report on charter school progress to their state departments of education or other agencies. More than half (58 percent) reported that they were required to report charter progress directly to their SEAs. In addition, almost three-quarters of the authorizers (73 percent) reported that charter schools themselves were required to make their own reports to the state or other agencies. However, 18 percent of the authorizers reported that neither their agencies nor their charter schools were required to report charter school progress to the state department of education or other agencies.

Finally, please note the split between inputs and outcomes on the monitoring criteria reported by schools and authorizers. For example, *compliance with federal or state regulations* and *financial record keeping*, both input-oriented indicators, were among the top five monitoring areas reported by schools and authorizers. Likewise, the outcome indicators *student achievement results on statewide assessments and other standardized tests*, were also among the top five areas reported by schools and authorizers.

What are the measures of student performance for which charter schools are accountable?

Several survey items focused solely on outcomes, such as those items asking about the extent to which charter schools had set measurable goals in certain areas. Indeed, charter schools and charter authorizers usually agree that the accountability process should begin with measurable goals. According to the school survey, most charter schools reported having measurable goals, especially in the areas of academic achievement and student attendance. Exhibit 5 displays the frequency with which these and other types of measurable goals were reported by schools. Authorizer responses about the incidence of measurable goals in their charter schools were fairly close to the reports from charter schools themselves. Authorizers tended to report that all or most of their schools (i.e., more than 80 percent) had measurable goals in the following areas: *academic achievement, parent involvement, student attendance,* and *student promotion or graduation.*

Exhibit 5
SCHOOL REPORTS OF MEASURABLE GOALS

Goal[a]	Percentage of Schools (n=380)
Academic achievement	96
Student attendance	90
Staff performance and/or attendance	86
Student behaviors	85
Promotion or graduation	84
Parent satisfaction	78
Parent involvement	67

[a]Note: In addition to the goals listed, a small percentage of school respondents also reported measurable goals in other areas, including student involvement in community service projects, school fund-raising, career placement, and enrollment in higher education.

It is noteworthy that measurable, outcome-oriented goals are so widespread, according to both schools and authorizers. As we will see in the next section, however, a school's goals are only part of the story when sanctions such as revocation, nonrenewal, or probation are imposed on charter schools.

Imposing Sanctions

The final stage of charter school accountability is the range of consequences faced by charter schools when they do not meet the terms of their charters or experience other difficulties. For the majority of charter schools, accountability consequences, or "sanctions," have not occurred—in part, perhaps, because the majority of charters have not yet come up for renewal. Similarly, other sanctions that might occur before the renewal process are also relatively rare. Nevertheless, the 2000-01 survey data yielded interesting information about the reasons for the sanctions that are imposed. As in other topics presented in this paper, the different perspectives of charter schools and authorizers add depth and detail to the understanding of accountability consequences. (Note that charter school closure does not always occur as a sanction or punitive measure. There are a few examples of charter schools that have decided to close voluntarily or as a result of other challenges.)

What percentage of charter schools have come up for renewal? What are the reasons charters are revoked or not renewed?

Charter nonrenewal is a key sanction available to authorizers if a charter school is not meeting expectations. However, most charter schools (63 percent) had not yet faced the charter renewal process as of 2000-01. Even for those schools and authorizers undergoing the

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renewal process, charter nonrenewal is a rare event: only four authorizers reported that they had not renewed any charters.

In addition to nonrenewal, charters also can be revoked before the end of the charter cycle if the authorizer has concerns that are too pressing to wait for the renewal process. Data on the prevalence of early charter revocation come from the authorizer survey. Charters have been revoked by 8 percent of authorizers, with state authorizers being more likely than other authorizer types to do so. The number of charters revoked by individual authorizers ranged from one to six.

The 12 authorizers that reported either revoking or not renewing charters also reported the reasons for their decisions (Exhibit 6). The most frequent reasons for revoking or not renewing charters were *school financial viability or management* (100 percent) and *school management, leadership, or governance* (83 percent). These are both input indicators. Relatively lower percentages of authorizers reported outcome-oriented reasons for revoking or not renewing charters: 64 percent because of problems with academic progress and 50 percent because of problems related to growth in student performance. Although only 12 authorizers reported revoking or not renewing one or more charters, these preliminary findings indicate that charter schools are being closed more often because of financial and management concerns than because of concerns about the academic program or student performance.

Exhibit 6
REASONS GIVEN BY AUTHORIZERS FOR REVOKING OR NOT RENEWING CHARTERS

Reason	Percentage of Authorizers (weighted) (n=12)
Financial viability or management	100
School management, leadership, or governance	83
Progress toward academic goals for students	64
Enrollment numbers	64
Curricular and instructional strategies	57
Progress toward other goals included in charter	50
Growth in student performance	50
Comparisons between achievement scores in charter schools and regular public schools	44
Conflicts of interest	41
Actual student performance levels, e.g., with regard to a benchmark	36
Progress toward nonacademic goals for students	33
Parent satisfaction levels	30
Student admission procedures	27
Facilities	27
Health and safety	27

Beyond nonrenewal (and revocation), what other sanctions are imposed on charter schools, how often, and why?

As in the case of permanent sanctions described above, the overwhelming majority of charter schools have not faced lesser sanctions, such as probation and written notification about state or charter school authorizer concerns. In surveys of states and authorizers during 1999-2000, the study team found that these sanctions were constructive attempts to address problems within charter schools without necessarily shutting down the schools. In the 2000-01 school survey, the team found that 6 percent of schools had received written notification from the state or authorizer about concerns, 2 percent had been placed on probation, and fewer than 1 percent had their charter temporarily revoked or withdrawn.

Two percent of schools reported that they either were currently on probation or had been in the past. Although the different perspectives are not directly comparable, we also asked authorizers about the prevalence of probation. Fourteen percent of authorizers reported having placed one or more schools on probation, with state and university authorizers being more likely than local authorizers to report taking action of this kind—this difference may be linked to the larger number of schools that state and university authorizers have chartered. (Among

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authorizers who have used this strategy, the average number of schools placed on probation was two, with a range from one to six schools.)

When lesser sanctions were imposed, the top two concerns of states or authorizers cited by school respondents were input indicators: *school management, leadership, or governance* and *financial viability or management* (Exhibit 7). The third most frequently reported reason was outcome-oriented: *comparisons between achievement scores in charter schools and regular public schools.* Note, however, that this reason was reported by fewer than one-third of charter schools.

Authorizers also reported why they placed schools on probation. The two top reasons in the authorizer column of Exhibit 7—*financial viability or management* and *school management, leadership, or governance*—match the top two reasons for sanctions reported by charter schools. Four outcome-oriented reasons come next on the authorizer list (*progress toward academic goals for students, actual student performance levels, growth in student performance, and comparisons between achievement scores in charter schools and regular schools*), but are reported by a smaller percentage of authorizers than the input-oriented indicators that lead the list.

Exhibit 7
REASONS FOR SANCTIONS, AS REPORTED BY SCHOOLS AND AUTHORIZERS

	Percentage of Schools (n=29)	Percentage of Authorizers (n=18) (weighted)
School management, leadership, or governance	45	69
Financial viability or management	43	70
Comparisons between achievement scores in charter schools and regular schools	28	33
Facilities	21	21
Conflicts of interest	18	23
Curricular and instructional strategies	17	25
Progress toward other goals included in charter	17	22
Health and safety	17	15
Progress toward academic goals for students	14	50
Progress toward nonacademic goals for students	14	4
Growth in student performance	14	37
Parent satisfaction levels	14	12
Actual student performance levels, e.g., with regard to a benchmark	10	44
Enrollment numbers	10	16
Student admission procedures	3	20

We have presented the findings in this section according to the key stages of the charter school accountability process and documented the accountability foci at each stage. In addition, we have attempted to demonstrate the different mix of inputs and outcomes at each of these stages. In the next section, we revisit an argument we made about charter school accountability in earlier work (Anderson and Finnigan, 2001) and see how it holds up in the face of newer data from charter schools and charter school authorizers.

III. The Continuing Mismatch between Theory and Practice in Charter School Accountability

As the findings in this paper indicate, the three-stage charter school accountability process is very different from the traditional public school accountability system. That is, charter school accountability is characterized by the distinct stages of awarding charters, monitoring charter school progress, and implementing sanctions. However, charter school accountability has not come to focus primarily on outcomes as many had hoped. Instead, charter school educators, authorizers, and states appear to be relying on what they already know about accountability: inputs and external mandates. In other words, the "old" accountability is still embedded in the rules and regulations that govern charter schools.

In addition to the distinction between inputs and outcomes, the literature on accountability focuses on external accountability versus internal accountability. This is another accountability dimension that is important for charter schools. "External" and "internal" indicate the locus or source of accountability requirements with reference to the school. External accountability refers to state- or district-imposed accountability requirements, usually requiring standardized tests, as well as fiscal accountability and other inputs. These systems "assume a world in which *all* schools are held accountable to the same expectations for student performance" (Abelmann and Elmore, 1999, p. 1). Internal accountability refers to accountability systems within the school, including goals that are set by the schools themselves. The current accountability rhetoric emphasizes both internal and external accountability systems that target outcomes, downplaying the traditional emphasis on inputs. The reality of accountability for charter schools appears to be quite different, as we have documented above. Inputs have not gone away. Moreover, federal and state-level accountability systems, in general, seem to have compromised the degree to which individualized accountability plans at the charter school level are realized in practice.

Each locus of accountability (external and internal) can be combined with each focus of the accountability system (inputs and outcomes) (see Exhibit 8). In the overall public education system, internal accountability occurs within the school, while external accountability is typically enforced by the state or a school district.

Exhibit 8
AN ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK FOR CHARTER SCHOOLS

Focus of Accountability System	Locus of Accountability	
	External (often imposed by the state)	Internal (within the charter school)
Inputs	Fiscal management, audits, compliance with regulations	School-level resource allocation decisions, business plan, school mission
Outcomes/Results	Performance on standardized tests	Meeting goals set by the charter school

The original theory of charter school accountability is represented in the shaded box of Exhibit 8: charter schools are accountable for results. The internal locus of accountability is a second distinctive feature of the theory of charter school accountability. That is, charter schools were originally envisioned as being free to establish and pursue their own goals. Internal accountability was supposed to take center stage in the charter movement by reducing the burden of external accountability regulations on charter schools (Manno, 1999).

In practice, however, charter schools are caught between the different types and loci of accountability. At the application stage, for example, it appears that groundwork is being laid for input- and outcome-oriented accountability measures. Inputs such as finances and outcomes such as assessment are cited in authorizers' decisions to award or deny charters. Similarly, there is a split between inputs and outcomes in the monitoring criteria reported by schools and authorizers. However, the mix is less balanced in connection with the accountability consequences faced by charter schools that are having problems. Even though "consequences" are only one stage of charter school accountability—and the prevalence of consequences relatively low—we believe that the ability to revoke a charter and close a school for academic nonperformance is the defining premise of the theory of charter school accountability. Yet, inputs are more frequently reported than outcomes as the reasons why authorizers revoke or do not renew charters. Charter schools are being closed more often because of financial and management concerns than because of concerns about the academic program or student performance. The same imbalance between inputs and outcomes persists

in reasons cited for lesser sanctions (such as placing a school on probation), according to charter schools and authorizers.

In the comparatively less frequent cases when charter schools *are* held accountable for outcomes, the outcomes tend to be defined and imposed by outside entities. These externally imposed outcomes frequently include scores on state- or district-mandated standardized tests rather than outcomes that address the individualized goals set by the school. Although charter schools may set their own goals in addition to standardized test scores, test scores are likely to be the most important outcome reported to outside audiences.

The finding that charter school accountability involves both inputs and externally imposed outcomes signals a mismatch between the rhetoric and the reality of the charter movement. We believe that the original theory of charter schools implied a mix of accountability systems, but that the theory also assumed that a least some of these accountability decisions would be made internally. Our research suggests that charter schools are merging "old" and "new" types of accountability without bringing forth the new type of accountability envisioned by the theory of charter schools.

What are the implications—or limitations—of these data and the arguments presented in this paper? The first is whether the original theory of charter school accountability is still a practical means for assessing the charter school movement as it enters its second decade. If the original theory of charter school accountability has been eclipsed by increased accountability expectations for all public schools, charter school researchers must systematically describe what has happened to charter schools as a result. As the movement matures, new ways of looking at charter school accountability will need to be developed in later research. (The data reported in this paper will be augmented by a third round of data collection from the same study.)

Second, the distinctions we have drawn between inputs and outcomes—and between internal and external accountability requirements--may be too sharp. The accountability foci and loci described throughout the paper and displayed in Exhibit 8 are perhaps better understood as continua rather than black and white distinctions. For example, an authorizer can either be an internal partner or external rule-setter (or both), depending on its relationship with its charter schools. Similarly, many aspects of the accountability process—such as enrollment numbers—do not fall clearly into the input/outcome dichotomy. Nevertheless, we believe that charter

school accountability needs to be understood in the context of school accountability generally. We also believe that highlighting the different stages of charter school accountability, the different roles and perceptions of schools and authorizers, and the different definitions of accountability over time represents a contribution to this ongoing discussion.

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Appendix: Methodology

Data Collection for 2000-01

Findings from 2000-01, the second year of SRI International's evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program, are reported in this paper. The data sources and analyses are described below.

Telephone survey of charter schools. A simple random sample of 544 charter schools was surveyed from February to June 2001. The schools that were included in this sample were in operation as of September 2000. A total of 381 schools completed the survey, for a response rate of 70 percent. An analysis of the responses indicates that all states were represented in proportion to their share of the universe of charter schools.

Telephone survey of charter school authorizers. As of the summer of 2000, when the 2000-01 authorizer sample was selected, the universe of charter school authorizers that had awarded charters to schools included 457 agencies. A stratified random sample of 143 charter school authorizers was drawn from this universe. Type of authorizer was used to stratify the sample into four categories: local school board or district, or county board or office of education; state board of education, state education agency, or chief state school officer; university, college, or community college; and independent charter school board or some other type of authorizer (e.g., city council). A total of 100 authorizers completed the telephone survey, for a response rate of 70 percent.

Data Analysis for 2000-01

Once the school and authorizer survey data were collected and tabulated, a variety of data analyses were performed.[6] For both surveys, the types of authorizers were combined for both technical and conceptual reasons. The resulting new types consist of "local authorizers," which combines local education agencies and county boards or offices of education; "state authorizers"; and "university authorizers." Independent or special charter boards were dropped

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[6] Both the school and the weighted authorizer data are generalizable to their respective universes. Schools were sampled randomly; therefore, no weighting was necessary. On the other hand, some types of authorizers were oversampled; therefore, the authorizer data were weighted to correct for different sampling ratios across these types. The percentages and means for aggregate authorizer data were calculated after the following weights were applied: local authorizers 5.3, state authorizers 1.2, and university authorizers 3.0. These weighted percentages and means are used in this paper, resulting in aggregate data that are generalizable to the universe of authorizers. However, for ease of reference, the unweighted number of respondents is provided in all tables displaying data from authorizers (i.e., a total "n" of 100 is listed in the tables rather than a total "n" of 457).

from both analyses because of their low representation in each sample.[7] The quantitative analysis includes descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Finally, a variety of significance tests were conducted on both data sets, including analysis of variance, chi-squared tests, and Fisher's exact tests.[8]

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[7] Fewer than 5 percent of the schools in the 2000-01 sample were authorized by independent or special chartering boards or other authorizers, and those schools were dropped from the analyses of the school data by authorizer type. No authorizer respondents characterized their agencies as independent or special chartering boards.

[8] Fisher's exact test was used when, because of small cell sizes, chi-squared was not appropriate. Fisher's exact test was used on unweighted authorizer data.

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