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Report: More states focus on charter school performance, authorizers

DENVER – A growing number of states have enacted legislation on the oversight and performance of charter schools in an effort to establish standards for the semi-autonomous public schools.

While most states have charter school laws, more states are concentrating specifically on authorizers and the role those entities play. For example, 15 states and the District of Columbia established standards for authorizers, and 11 states and D.C. set explicit performance thresholds that determine if a particular school’s doors remain open.

A report released today by the Education Commission of the States reviews laws in all 50 states and an accompanying database outlines findings in policy areas such as accountability, autonomy, teachers and finance.

Key highlights from the report include:

- **Overview**: 42 states and D.C. have charter school laws. Those without legislation are Alabama, Kentucky, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Vermont and West Virginia.
- **Statewide authorizing bodies**: 33 states and D.C. established such entities, though the structure of these bodies varies from state to state.
- **Standards for authorizers**: 15 states and D.C. have standards for authorizers, including Nevada, New Mexico and Ohio.
- **Annual reports by authorizers**: 16 states and D.C. require authorizers to submit annual reports on the schools under their charge, including Illinois and Maine.
- **Thresholds for performance**: 11 states and D.C. enacted policies for automatic closures if a charter school fails to meet performance standards. Examples include Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee.
- **Caps on numbers of charters schools or students served**: 20 states and D.C. set limits on student population or how many charter schools will be allowed to open. Examples include Missouri, New York and Rhode Island.
- **Explicit attention to virtual or cyber charters**: More than 20 states with charter school laws have policies directed at online charter schools, and 10 states require additional oversight.

The report included a case study of Oregon, a state with robust virtual charter school policies. The state targets specific aspects related to academic achievement, family engagement, finance and licensure. Among the policies, cyber charters must have a process for monitoring and tracking student progress through valid assessments.

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The Education Commission of the States was created by states, for states, in 1965. We track policy, translate research, provide unbiased advice and create opportunities for state policymakers to learn from one another.