Online Task Force
Meeting #3
Monday, September 29, 2014

Link to the meeting recording:

Meeting Notes:

The meeting of the Online Task Force (OTF) was called to order by Ethan Hemming, Task Force chair.

Task force members introduced themselves.

OTF members and staff in attendance:

Judy Bauernschmidt
Brian Bissell
Scott Campbell
Joe Dinnetz
Leanne Emm
Diana Gamboa
Ethan Hemming
Chaille Hymes
Renee Martinez
Dale McCall
Kim McClelland
Dan Morris
Linda VanMatre
John Myers
Melanie Sloan
Josh Cunningham
Sunny Deye

Guests in attendance (also introduced themselves):

Dave Rogowski
Alex Medlev
Melissa Osse
Heather Omara
Kris Enright

The meeting notes from meeting #2 were reviewed and approved by the OTF members in attendance.

John Myers reviewed the proposed agenda and requested comments and/or suggestions for changes, and received neither.

Data Request Review

Ethan Hemming began the review of received data requests.
Renee Martinez updated the OTF members on the progress of her preparation of the data request regarding enrollment and completion. Renee is removing AECs and single district data from the data set so that the data provided to the OTF reflects multi-district online schools only.

Colorado Online School Performance Document

Ethan provided a large format (11x17) of the Colorado Online School Performance document provided and acknowledged that it provided "a lot of data, with more data beyond and below this document."
OTF members were asked to share their reaction to this document.

OTF members provided the following responses:
- Need to be aware of the number of students   when comparing schools and student performance
- There are students that are not included in this data
    - Part-time students
    - Only some blended students (online and in brick and mortar) are included in this data
        - Many may be counted at their neighborhood school
    - Supplemental instruction (are primarily in a brick and mortar school, but take 2 or 3 courses online) are not represented here
    - Student that are enrolled in a neighborhood school and enter an online school, intentionally, for a short time basis (for life reasons), the progress that that student makes while in the online school is not reflected in this data because the student returns, with their progress, to the brick and mortar school; i.e. there is no performance measures of short term academic progress in the accountability system
        - This could be accounted for by using a simple metric to measure how many credits the student has and is supposed to have needs when they enter the online school and check these when they exit
            - CDE does not currently collect credit approval data on any student, though it could it would be possible to institute
                - Students that are not counted anywhere could be revisited if a conversation about tracking at the course level occurs
- The SPF Rating doesn't reflect the entirety of online school student and school performance
    - Online schools have higher student turnover rates (Jefferson County's 85% turnover rate was provided as an example)
    - Online schools take greater risks on students and this risk should be acknowledged
    - The appeal process allows AECs (or districts can on behalf of the AECs)to bring other data to demonstrate their quality, possibly including course completion: this system could be applied to multi-district online schools

Authorizer Standard Themes

Two themes regarding multi-district authorizer standards were discussed:

1. Multi-district authorizers need to be savvy to the kinds of data that can assess multi-district online schools, in addition to what is provided by the state (SPF Rating)
2. Multi-district authorizers need to be able to interpret these data, including looking for "bright spots" and failures in all schools

State charter authorizer standards, agreed to be a good parallel, look at data beyond SPF ratings, including the governance and finances, for example, to ensure that there is quality. The recommendations of the OTF can say "as an authorizer you should . . ." without impeding the state or impeding autonomy and interfering with local control.

OTF members agreed that the challenge was to make multi-district online education work for the students.

NCSL Charter Authorizer Presentation

Josh Cunningham, with the NCSL, presented on charter authorizer standards that are relevant to Multidistrict online schools.

Colorado

Josh reviewed current Colorado policy:
- Multidistrict online schools can be authorized by local school districts, BOCES and the Charter School Institute
- Authorizers must apply to the CDE Office of Blended and Online Learning for online school certification
    - CDE measures whether:
        - The Authorizer has the resources and capacity to oversee the Online School.
        - The Authorizer has documented and verified that the Online School meets an acceptable level of compliance with the Quality Standards for Online Schools.
        - The Authorizer and the multi-district Online School have agreed on a plan for operating the Online School.
- Authorizers must seek certification for each multidistrict online school it wishes to authorize
- Certification is permanent and cannot be revoked by the state
    - CDE certification does not constitute final approval of the school itself. That decision lies with the authorizer

Ohio

Josh then presented the Ohio policy for charter school authorization:

According to Keeping Pace 2013, Ohio ranks 3rd in online school enrollments with 38,519 (Colorado is 5th at 17,289). All Ohio online schools are authorized and operated as charter schools. Applications to open an online school evaluate both the authorizer and the proposed school together. OH doesn't differentiate between single and multi-district online schools

- All start-up charter school authorizers must first apply to the Ohio SBE for authorizer certification

- o Authorizers can be:
    - o school districts, joint vocational school districts, public universities, qualifying non-profit organizations, and the State Department of Education
- o 3 unique pathways to certifying authorizers depending on the type of authorizer
    - o Criteria for approval:
        - ▪ Pathway 1 (for organizations that intend to be fully operating authorizers, independent of any other organizations)
            - • Demonstrate evidence of organizational commitment to authorizing;
            - • Agree to participate in a planning period of at least 18 months; and,
            - • Demonstrate the fiduciary capacity and willingness to spend $750,000 during the planning period to become established as an authorizer
        - ▪ Pathway 2 (applicant that is seeking to become an authorizer that is functionally assisted by an "exemplary" authorizer)
            - • Demonstration of agency commitment and capacity, as described by the National Association of Charter School Authorizer's (NACSA) Principles & Standards for Quality Authorizing, and core values for charter education.
        - ▪ Pathway 3 (for current authorizers of conversion charter schools in Ohio, seeking approval to authorize start-up charter schools, or for grandfathered authorizers seeking incentives associated with a rating of "exemplary")
            - • Commitment to and capacity for authorizing;
            - • Fiduciary capacity to fully support the role of an authorizer
            - • Staff capacity for authorizing

Criteria used for evaluating proposed Ohio online schools are:
1. The sponsor's experience with online schools
2. The operator's experience with online schools
3. The sponsor's schools' records of academic performance
4. The operator's affiliated schools' records of academic performance
5. A preference for operators with previous experience in Ohio

Comparing Ohio and Colorado

Rubrics used to evaluate application:

State	Rubric	
Colorado:	33 'Yes or No' questions that measure whether applicant meets statutory criteria	Oversight capacity of authorizer carries the most weight
Ohio	9 categories worth varying amounts of points adding up to a max score of 100	30 points each for academic performance of authorizer's portfolio of schools and academic performance for the operator's portfolio of schools

OTF Member Comments

OTF Members offered the following observations and responses to the OH case study.

OH rubrics (where all online schools are charters) were observed to be similar to the CO charter rubrics. In CO, different rubrics are used for charter schools and online schools. CO authorizers should have a rigorous online application process.

In CO, authorizers are being certified and not the school, which is different because the authorizer is responsible for quality, access, etc.

In OH, authorizers are rated using a performance score.

Adding criteria for authorizers with demonstrated prior performance would be good. New applications and renewals differently: if there is performance data available, it should be relied on, with a system for when performance data is unavailable. The current CO statute does not require performance information.

A request for data on the performance of authorizer certification processes was made, though it was not clear that this data exists.

A request to document what evidence supports the changes the OTF report will recommend was made and a request to explicitly state, when no data exists, why the proposal(s) was made.

The difficulty of not getting into other areas of authorizer accountability, given the charge of the OTF, was acknowledged.

The danger of duplicating the accreditation system was acknowledged.
Additionally, running afoul of what is currently in use was a concern.

Josh stated that there are only six or seven states in the country that have some kind of authorizer certifications. Those that do exist are largely for authorizers of all types of schools (including brick and mortar, charters, online schools, etc.

Problems I Would Like Authorizer Standards to Address. . .

Members shared their responses to the homework from meeting number 2: "Problems I would like authorizer standards to address . . . "

Ensuring online schools provide appropriate levels of support for students to succeed, and additional support for students at risk for failure (those who have already failed classes at previous schools, are not scoring proficient or advanced, have low growth scores, lack motivation, etc.).

The failure of some authorizers to provide proper evaluation and oversight.

The need for clear, consistent quality standards to determine charter renewal: When is it time to close a poorly performing school?

How do we know if a potential authorizer (or current authorizer) has the capacity to properly perform the duties of an authorizer?

The standards should mirror those of charter schools and provide districts with exclusive chartering authority for multi-district online schools. This would allow local communities to decide whether or not a specific online school meets the needs of that community.

A statutory change to eliminate the implied exception for "drop in centers."

A process for a student to return to the authorizing district when the student is not successful rather than returning to their home district unfunded.

Concern that no accountability for authorizers of online school may have created a financial incentive to create an online school in some districts.

Whether operators have the ability to move kids around from school to school to school to avoid the accountability system: buying time by moving kids as a school gets worse.

Concern about lack of capacity: accidental financial incentives to be a multi-district online school authorizer without the expertise or capacity to do so with no state processes to notice this happening and/or to augment the capacity of those local authorizers.

(Education Servive Provider) ESP requirements could help.

Is there a way to limit forum shopping? OH just passed legislation that prevents an authorizer from approving a charter school that has similar board, principal, and/or teachers to a previously closed school; i.e., a school cannot just open under another name.

Ownership of the student by the authorizer: there can be a disconnect between the authorizer and the school/students that are being served (a geographical distance example was provided) which could create a disconnect between the authorizer and the student being provided for.

Need for an education piece to be an authorizer to ensure they have the capacity.

Support for the student's first entry to the online school: counseling and assessment to ensure the model is good for them.

Also need an off-ramp/exiting program: currently, this can be costly, including truancy court

Need something in the criteria that speaks to the student's needs, especially in regards to IEPs and ELLs, which parents may waive in the online environment.

Details on support authorizers provide: how many site visits to learning centers do authorizers conduct, for example.

Need to be able to evaluate schools based on what they delivered. Need to recommend that schools are responsible for and get credit for the amount of instruction they provide

Authorizer Standards Discussion

The OTF members had a conversation using the MN case study information as a guide.

Commissioner's criteria for approving charter authorizers (MN):

1) Capacity and infrastructure
2) Application criteria and process
3) Contracting process; can multi-district without a contract (it's common)
4) Ongoing oversight and evaluation processes
5) Renewal criteria and processes

OTF members suggested that the NACSA principles and standards could fit into these for a working template.

Application contents (as described in the MN statute):

1) [Describe]how chartering schools is a way for the organization to carry out its mission;

OTF members agreed with this and felt it both paralleled the charter process and led to #2 (below).

2) A description of the capacity of the organization to serve as an authorizer, including the personnel who will perform the authorizing duties, their qualifications, the amount of time they will be assigned to this responsibility, and the financial resources allocated by the organization to this responsibility;

OTF members agreed that this was the right level of description, providing a fair proxy for the ability of the authorizer to provide support.

Professional development needs to be added to this list. Metrics, such as a scale, proportions relative to the number of students served, and/or a rubric, were also identified as potentially lacking.

Differentiating for contract, charter, and districts was recommended.

3) A description of the application and review process the authorizer will use to make decisions regarding the granting of charters;
4) A description of the type of contract it will arrange with the schools it charters that meets the provisions of subdivision 6;

The need to specifically address IEPs, non-district kids, etc. was identified.

The contract could change over time and performance could be captured through modification to metrics (ex.: rubrics) while the statute stands.

5) The process to be used for providing ongoing oversight of the school consistent with the contract expectations specified in clause (4) that assures that the schools chartered are complying with both the provisions of applicable law and rules, and with the contract;

6) A description of the criteria and process the authorizer will use to grant expanded applications under subdivision 4, paragraph (j);

7) The process for making decisions regarding the renewal or termination of the school's charter based on evidence that demonstrates the academic, organizational, and financial competency of the school, including its success in increasing student achievement and meeting the goals of the charter school agreement; and

Authorizers should conduct annual reviews; have a methodology for providing supports; have transparent processes so that the serving of students across districts is apparent for accountability measurement.

Ultimately, the authorizer should be clearly stating how they do their work.

These could be differentiated in treatment for district online schools, which would receive similar treatment to brick and mortar schools, and contract and charter online schools, which would receive similar treatment to charter schools: the respective policies and procedures would be applied accordingly.

Need to have a process for when authorizers lose their status (MN provides a year lead time).

8) An assurance specifying that the organization is committed to serving as an authorizer for the full five-year term.

Next Steps

APA will combine the content of the OTF member conversation around Authorizer Standards, the MN criteria and application content, and NACSA's Principles & Standards to craft a working document for OTF members to work with. This will be shared with the OTF members by Friday, October 3rd.

OTF members will review current CO legislative statute, rules and regulations pertaining to online schools and authorizer standards. As a result of this homework, OTF members will identify what within these documents they agree with, don't agree with, and provide recommendations. In addition to this work, re-certification, lost certification and termination will also need to be addressed.

The OTF members will reply to APA with their responses to the above two items (combined criteria and application authorizer standards document and the CO statute, rules, and regulations) by Thursday, October 9th.

Gretchen will provide information on how CDE reviews other programs for potential learning and application to the OTF work.

Data Requests:

OTF members requested international authorizer standards for review. APA will seek these resources. iNACOL was suggested as an additional source.

Rule Making

Gretchen requested comments received by the OTF members on rule making.
Leanne clarified to the OTF members that the existing rules and regulations allow for authorizers to either keep the rules or adopt new ones; the new rules will not allow that choice.

CDE has not received any other feedback and requested OTF members seek out comments and share these with CDE prior to the board vote in the end of November.

Adjourned

The meeting was then adjourned.