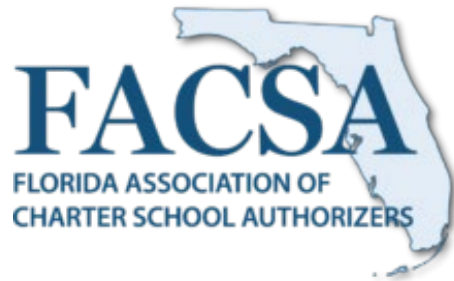


Students with Disabilities in Florida Charter Schools: Authorizer Practices to Support Access and Equity



Florida Charter School Conference
October 2019

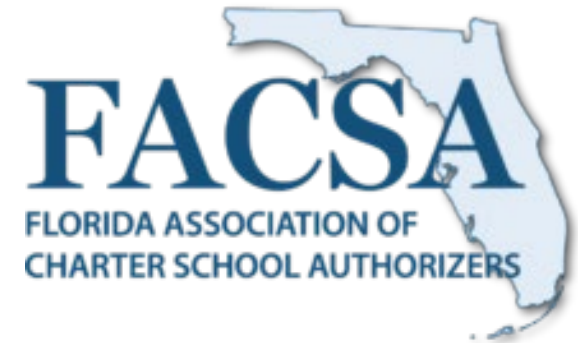
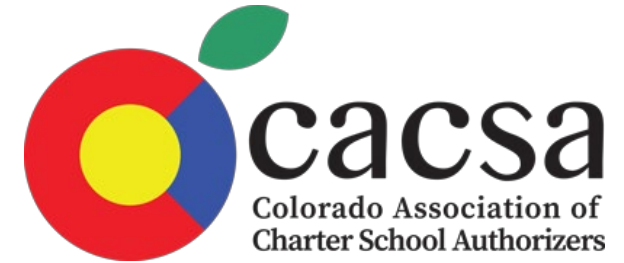
Tri-State Alliance for Improving District-Led Charter Authorizing

Colorado Charter School Institute – 3-Year National Dissemination Grant from the USDE Office of Innovation and Improvement

- Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA)
- Florida Association of Charter School Authorizers (FACSA)
- California Charter Authorizing Professionals (CCAP)

State and National Partners

- Florida Special Education Collaborative (FLSpEC)
- National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools (NCSECS)



Goals

Tri-State Alliance for Improving District-Led Charter Authorizing

- Improve quality of charter school sector
- Create and disseminate replicable best-practice resources
- Support effective authorizing and charter school oversight by school districts, including small/rural authorizers
- Expand educational choice options for disadvantaged students, students with disabilities, and English language learners

Florida's Focus – Students with Disabilities

Florida Special Education Collaborative (FLSpEC)

To accomplish grant goals, FACSA contracted with **Florida Special Education Collaborative (FLSpEC)**

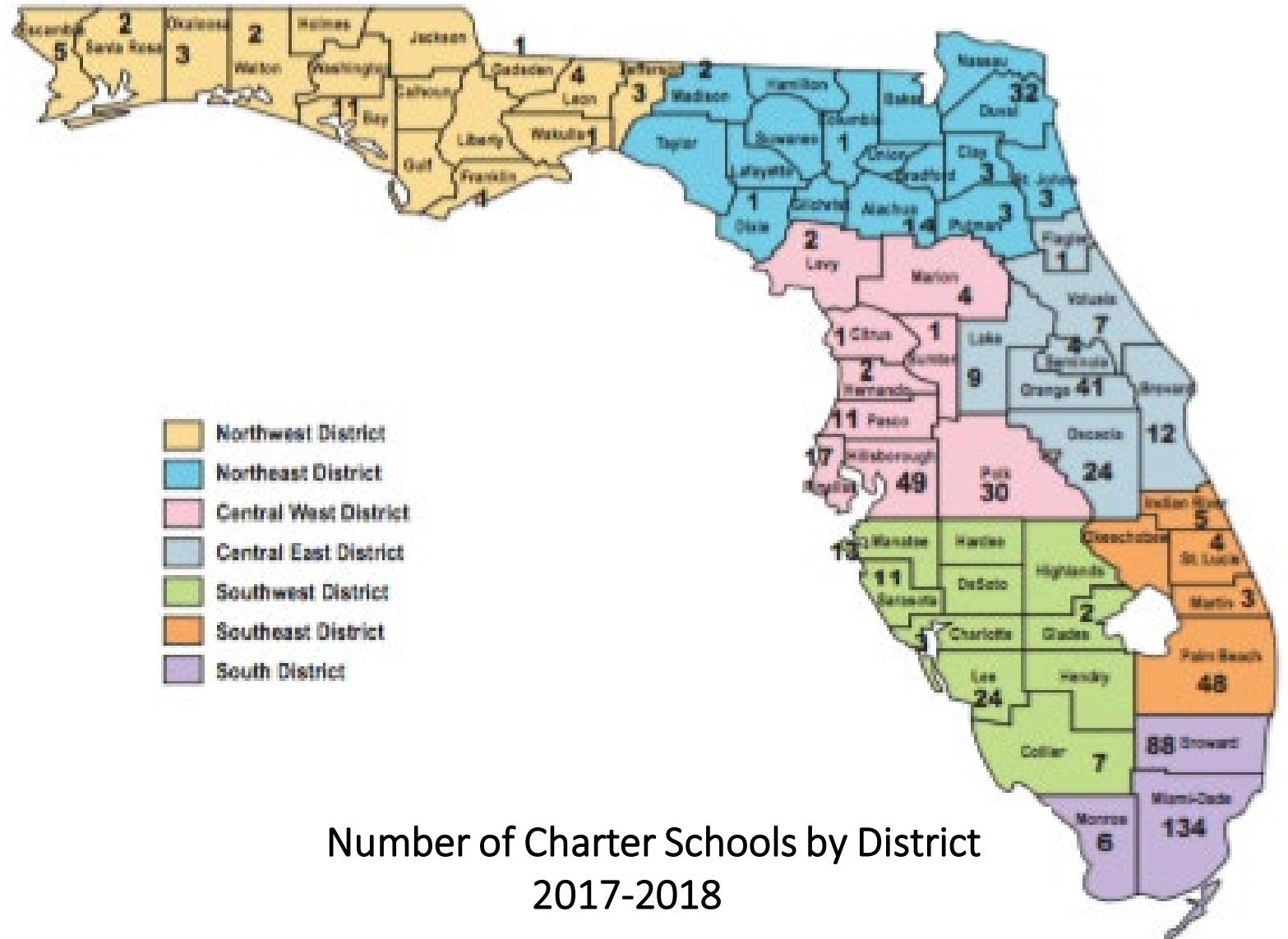
Non-profit organization

- Established to support charter schools in the development and implementation of robust and adaptable exceptional student education (ESE) programs
- Designed to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities, fostering equity and access to educational choice for all of Florida Students



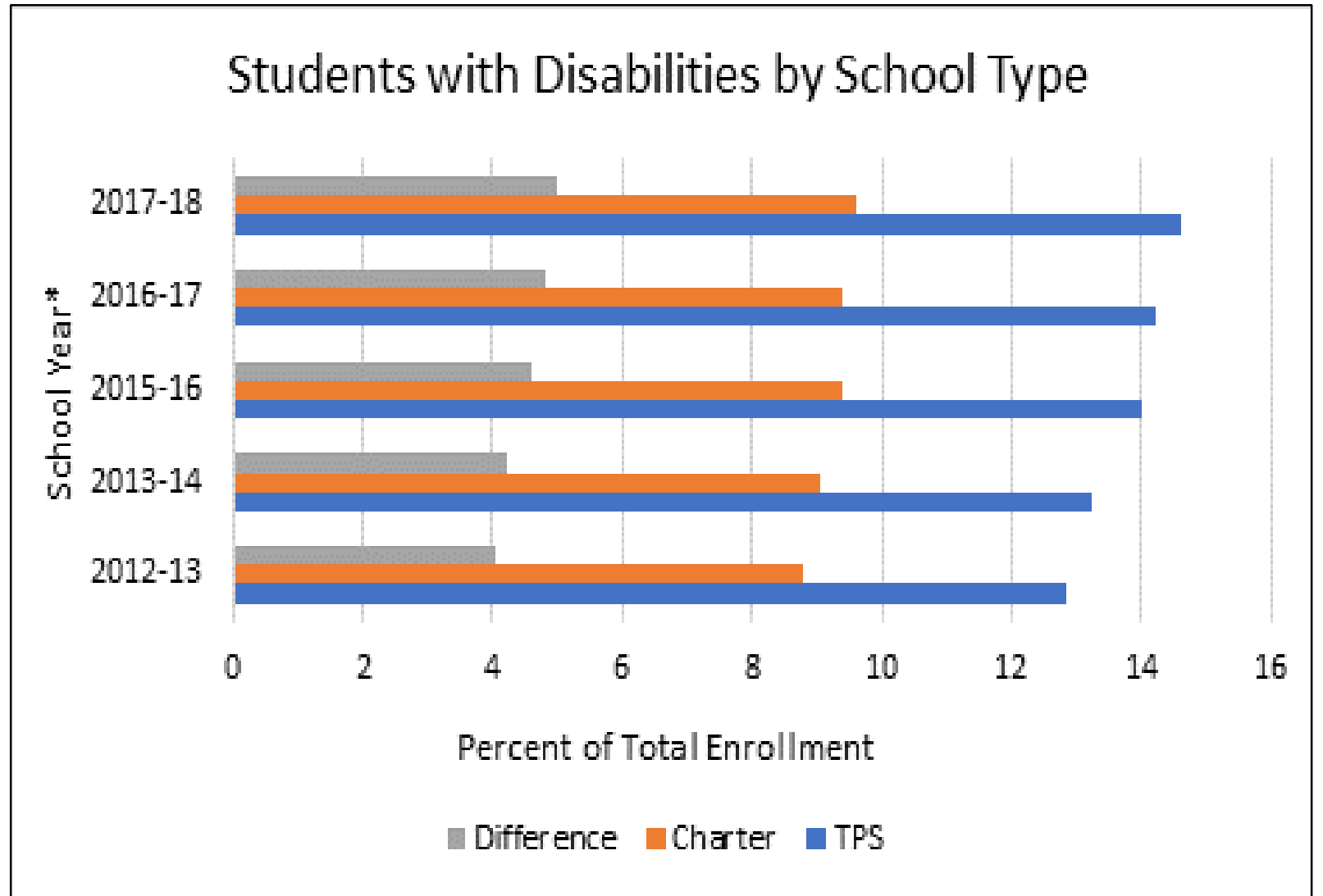
Background

- 48 Florida districts
- 655 charter schools
- 295,000 students



Background

- 14.6% of students with disabilities statewide
- 9.6% students with disabilities in charter schools
- 5% gap



An increasing gap within Florida

Needs Assessment and Landscape Analysis

Phase One



Needs Assessment

Identify barriers that may exist that prevent districts from ensuring that their charter school portfolio adequately serves students with disabilities



Landscape Analysis

Draft a report to inform deliberation by FACSA's planning for activities that will reduce barriers and improve access and services for students with disabilities in the state

Methodology

Review of Previous Studies/Existing Information

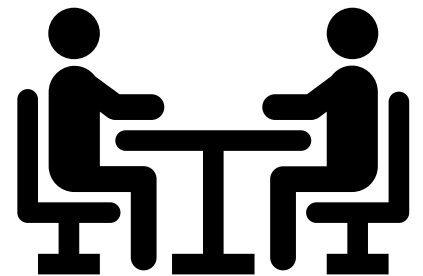
- Publicly accessible data from FLDOE
- National publications

Survey

- 35 respondents
- 19 districts
- 18 items

Interview

- Charter school contacts from authorizing districts
- 1-hour interviews



Analysis and Findings

Survey and interview results were analyzed for trends and significant outliers

Findings were organized into the following seven major categories:

1. Application review and approval
2. Recruitment and enrollment
3. District services and supports
4. Technical assistance and professional development
5. Oversight and monitoring
6. Funding of ESE services
7. State resources and supports



Phase One:
Summarized into
SWOT ANALYSIS

SWOT ANALYSIS: (INTERNAL) STRENGTHS



1. Authorizers are committed to ensuring equitable access to charter schools.
2. Designated district staff as charter school contacts and ESE contacts, provide a framework for coordination of efforts.
3. Exemplar charter schools provide opportunities to share positive practices.
4. Authorizer processes and systems currently available or in use provide a foundation from which to build.
5. Existing ESE PD specific to the charter school environment that can serve as a foundation for PD developed for a larger statewide audience.

SWOT ANALYSIS: (INTERNAL) WEAKNESSES



1. Messaging from district staff to charter schools is not always consistent within each district.
2. The current charter application process enables authorizers to probe for applicants' understanding of ESE obligations, but even groups who present themselves well during the interview process often fail to implement an appropriate array of ESE services.
3. Lack of clear guidance regarding specific actions that can or should be taken to increase enrollment of students with disabilities (absent a clear violation of nondiscrimination law).

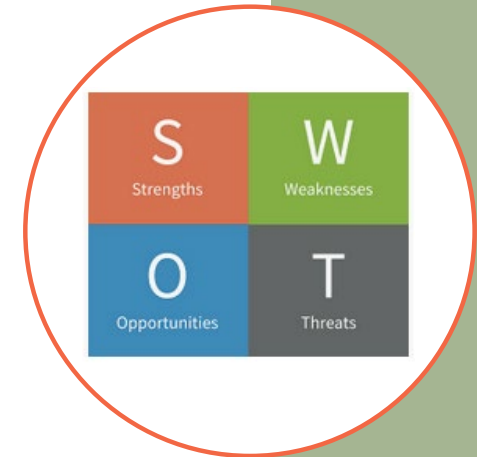
SWOT ANALYSIS: (EXTERNAL) OPPORTUNITIES



1. Reports of SWD enrollment disaggregated by district and, when applicable, CMO/EMO will allow authorizers to:
 - Focus efforts on schools with the greatest opportunity for improvement
 - Identify promising practices from schools with enrollment most reflective of the district as a whole
2. Requesting and obtaining formal guidance from FLDOE (e.g., memos, TAPs) regarding students with disabilities and charter schools can give weight and authority to authorizers' efforts.
3. Solicit input from stakeholders such as charter school boards, CMOs/EMOs, or FLDOE may serve to elevate this topic across the charter school landscape and foster a broader base of support and action.

SWOT ANALYSIS: (EXTERNAL) THREATS

1. Many charter applicants lack a realistic understanding of ESE services and supports a typical public school is expected to provide.
2. Limitations on FLDOE's ability to timely provide formal written guidance that goes beyond language already in statute may limit authorizers' ability to garner buy-in from charter schools.
3. Some sections of the Florida Standard Charter Contract contain areas of ambiguity leaving specific obligations open to interpretation.
4. Lack of clear guidance to districts and charter schools regarding the extent to which allowances agreed upon in original charter applications.
5. Enrollment at charter schools is capped and many charter schools maintain wait lists.
6. Common misunderstanding that charter schools do not have to serve most students with disabilities.



Barriers

Barriers that may prevent districts (including small and rural authorizers) from ensuring that their charter school portfolio adequately serve students with disabilities were identified as internal weaknesses and external threats in the SWOT analysis.

Action Plan

Phase Two



Action Plan

Establish measurable goals and outcomes to address barriers that prevent authorizers from ensuring that their charter schools adequately serve students with disabilities.

Action Plan Items

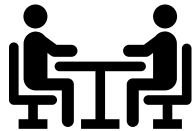


36 recommendations were made to close the gap between traditional and charter school enrollment of students with disabilities. The action plan addresses 20 that were prioritized as high need and critical as well as additional research needed in year 2.

- **Methods to Close the Gap**

- Utilize the capacity interview process to probe the applicants' true understanding of the charter school's ESE obligation
- Leverage existing professional development for both district staff and charter school leaders
- Utilize contract language changes to eliminate ambiguity as to school and authorizer responsibilities
- Streamline and formalize communication, practices, and procedures for ESE monitoring and contract renewals
- Establish networking opportunities for ESE and Charter district staff to engage in ongoing collaboration

Implementation of the Plan



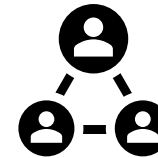
Make available a draft of guided and specific questions for authorizers to use during the charter applicants' interview.



Review existing PD for district and charter school leaders and make sure it meets the needs identified in this project.



Create new PD and offer webinars and training sessions



Work to create a streamlined communication process between FDOE, Districts, and Charter Schools

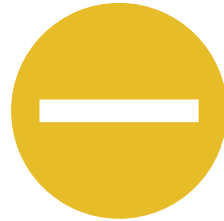


Create opportunities for district staff and charter school leaders to engage in ongoing collaboration

Gathering Stakeholder Input



What in your district do you find problematic with charter schools serving students with disabilities?



Are there additional barriers that were not identified here today?



PLEASE COMPLETE THE OUT THE DOOR/EXIT SLIP.
Your input will be used as guidance moving forward.

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Thank you!



Improving access
and services for
students with
disabilities in
charter schools