What Have We Learned in 15 Years About Getting High-Quality Charter Schools? Lessons for Washington State

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- **Strong authorizing is key to quality**
  - Districts cannot be only authorizer; but authorizers need to build competency
  - Weak or negligent authorizing leads to many low-performing schools
  - Promote authorizer clarity/accountability in law, implementation

- **You cannot get good schools without paying for them**
  - Provide for equal access to resources (state, local, federal funds) and facilities access or funding
  - Predictability, flow of funding are as important as amounts

- **Caps discussions should be about quality, not politics**

- **Good schools can and should be replicated**
  - Consider ways to attract and build charter national providers: money, personnel, authorizing, regulatory, allow one governing board for all CMO schools

- **Time and investment ease start-up pains**
  - Provide planning and start-up funding
  - Proposal and review cycles must allow adequate time for planning

- **Provide strong autonomy and accountability**
  - Do not bother to create more schools with limited autonomy (charter lite)
  - But balance that freedom with no-nonsense accountability (i.e., closures)

- **Clear language, oversight, and financial incentives are best guarantees for equal student access to charters**
  - Special education and other pots of funds should follow kids
  - Avoid quotas or other rigid input requirements

- **Do not expect to get it right the first time**

- **Do not expect the law to take care of quality**

The National Charter School Research Project (NCSRP) was established at the University of Washington’s Center on Reinventing Public Education in the fall of 2004 with funding from a consortium of foundations. NCSRP brings rigor, evidence, and balance to the national charter school debate.

The Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington Bothell engages in independent research and policy analysis on a range of K-12 public education reform issues, including choice & charters, finance & productivity, teachers, urban district reform, leadership, and state & federal reform.