Assessment of Charter Schools Program Dissemination Funding

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Since the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, the charter school movement has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing education reform efforts in the United States. By the 2005-2006 school year, 41 states and the District of Columbia had passed a law allowing charter schools to open and more than 3,500 charter schools were operating around the country.

Charter schools are public schools that are allowed to operate free of many of the regulations and restrictions that govern traditional district schools. They are given this freedom in return for greater accountability for academic results. Charter school founders and their sponsors (or authorizers) agree on a contract that outlines what the school expects to accomplish academically within a certain number of years. If the school is not able to meet the goals of this "charter" in the time period specified, the authorizer has the right to terminate the charter and close the school.

Proponents of the charter school movement believe that charter schools benefit families and students in numerous ways. Not only can they provide a strong educational program for the families who chose to send their children to them, but they also have the potential to improve the wider educational system. "One of the central rationales for the charter approach," writes one of the leading early proponents of charter schools in Minnesota, "is encouraging the existing public school system to respond with innovative changes of its own."[1] In this view, writes another set of charter school supporters, charter schools "function as R&D sites or labs that experiment with novel practices that can then be moved into other schools."[2]

Many of the people responsible for writing charter school laws across the country shared this belief that charter schools could have a positive influence on overall student achievement. According to a recent survey of national charter school laws, 90 percent of the laws that have a preamble or "purposes" section include as one of their purposes the hope that charter schools will "improve the achievement of all students."[3] For this purpose to be accomplished, charter schools that develop promising practices internally need to engage in some type of "dissemination," either through replication in new schools or by sharing them with existing schools. A large and cautionary body of research exploring unsuccessful attempts at school reform and school change suggests that there are substantial barriers to overcome in order for dissemination efforts to get the anticipated results. And yet, if the charter school movement is going to have the desired impact, these barriers will need to be addressed and overcome.

Context

In an effort to promote dissemination of successful school practices, federal policymakers established the dissemination grant program as part of their broader charter school funding strategy in 1998. Federal support for charter schools began in 1995 with the

authorization of the Public Charter Schools Program, since changed to the Charter Schools Program (CSP). This competitive grant program is administered by the Office of Innovation and Improvement within the U.S. Department of Education. Under this program, state education agencies (SEAs) receive funds which they then award to individual charter schools in the form of two types of subgrants: 1) start-up subgrants that can be used to plan and design the charter school's educational program, and for early implementation of a charter school; and 2) dissemination subgrants that can be used to support activities that help open new public schools or to share the lessons learned by charter schools with other public schools. Originally, all of the funds went to start-up and development grants. Beginning in 1998, the federal government allowed states to set aside money for dissemination.

For those SEAs that receive CSP funds, participation in the dissemination grant program is voluntary. The SEA may choose to reserve up to 10 percent of its CSP grant funds to support dissemination activities, or it can choose to use these funds exclusively for start-up and planning subgrants. In their initial applications for CSP funds, state applicants indicate whether they plan to participate in the dissemination grant program, and briefly describe how they plan to use these funds.

The dissemination grant program represents a potentially powerful national resource to effect the kind of widespread improvement in public education that charter school proponents and state legislators originally envisioned would occur. This report will examine whether the program as currently administered is having the desired impact on student performance and will make recommendations to strengthen future dissemination efforts.

Evaluation Questions

The overall questions guiding this evaluation are as follows:

- How can we make the most of successful charter schools by spreading their effective practices?
- How well has the dissemination grant program furthered this goal?
- What could be done to improve the effectiveness of the dissemination grant program?

In addition to these overall questions, the specific questions guiding this evaluation can be grouped into three areas:

State Participation in the Dissemination Grant Program

- How widespread is the dissemination grant program at the state level?
- How much money is spent on the dissemination grant program?

Overview of Individual State Programs

- At the individual state level, what is the stated purpose of funding dissemination grants?
- What state-based criteria do states use in awarding funds?

- How widespread is the dissemination grant program at the school level?
- To what extent are states measuring the impact of dissemination grant funds?

Overview of School Projects

- How do charter schools use their dissemination grant funds?
- Do charter schools use external organizations to facilitate dissemination?
- To what extent are charter schools measuring the impact of dissemination activities?
- What has been the impact of dissemination activity?
- Do certain kinds of dissemination activity appear more effective than others?

Key Findings

Level of Participation in Dissemination Grant Program

» Between 2000 and 2005, there were 60 successful CSP grant applications. Fifty of these 60 successful grant applicants chose to set aside some of their funds to participate in the dissemination grant program.

» Since 2000, states intended to set aside approximately $110,000,000 for dissemination grants. Rough estimates suggest states actually awarded far less, around $73,000,000, in actual dissemination grants, about two-thirds of the intended total.

» Many states struggled to find qualified schools interested in applying for dissemination grant funds.

» Between 2000 and 2005, only a few states had a large number of charter schools that met the minimum eligibility requirements to receive a dissemination grant.

» Limited data suggest that between 2000 and 2005, more than half of the charter schools that applied for a dissemination subgrant received funding.

Stated Purpose of Participating in Dissemination Grant Program

» A majority of states that chose to participate in the dissemination grant program did so because they want to disseminate best practices to BOTH charter and non-charter schools.

» Case study sites reported that charter schools had difficulty identifying non-charter schools that were interested in participating in dissemination activities.

Overview of Dissemination Activities

» Instructional programs and curriculum material were the most common types of information being disseminated.

» The majority of schools disseminated their promising practices through workshops. Case study interviewees expressed concerns about the impact these workshops had on instructional and other school practices.

» Very few states encouraged schools to partner with external organizations to facilitate dissemination.

» National data do not include much evidence of schools' use of external partners to facilitate dissemination. In case study states, school use of external organizations varied.

Impact of Dissemination Activities

» Very few states conducted evaluations of their statewide dissemination grant programs during the time period studied, but case study interviews found that some state directors questioned whether the dissemination grant program was having the desired level of impact.

» The majority of state applicants that participated in the dissemination grant program relied on schools to create their own plans for evaluation.

Recommendations

Reviewing the data collected from the program files as well as from case study interviews, the study team developed a series of policy recommendations for state and federal officials. These recommendations include a range of responses that call for increasing levels of change to the current program. Because there is a possibility that the federal statute that governs the Charter Schools Program may be revised in the next few years, the study team thought it worthwhile to put forth a series of recommendations that could guide policymakers both now and in the future. Therefore, we present three sets of options for policymakers to consider: 1) incremental changes that have the potential to improve how the current grant program is administered; 2) substantial changes that would require altering the federal statute governing the program; and 3) elimination of the dissemination grant program while directing more CSP funds toward replication of high-quality charter schools with a proven record of improving student achievement.

Option One: Improve the current program

Leverage capacity. Data from the national review and the case study interviews suggest that many charter school personnel lack the capacity (time and skills) to implement a high-quality dissemination project. Charter school leaders and staff members have multiple demands on their time and energy and many are unable or unwilling to jeopardize their success by implementing a large-scale dissemination project. Although in many cases schools address this problem by hiring outside contractors to take on some of the tasks associated with the project, several state officials expressed uncertainty about the extent to which federal guidelines allow schools to contract with outside providers to

help them plan and implement dissemination activities. The following recommendations, many of which were proposed by state officials, could potentially address some of these problems. The entities listed in parentheses indicate whether state-level officials (states) or federal officials (USDOE) would be primarily responsible for implementing the recommendation.

- Give grants to networks of schools that want to work together to share promising practices. (States)
- Give schools more freedom to contract with outside organizations for project-related services. (USDOE)
- Provide clear and consistent guidance to states about the amount of contracting that is allowable, what kinds of organizations schools may contract with, and what services these organizations can provide. (USDOE)
- Allow schools to apply for more than one dissemination grant. Once schools have completed a dissemination project, they will have increased capacity to develop and implement another project. (USDOE)

Bolster participation. Data further suggest that many states struggle to find qualified schools interested in applying for dissemination grant funds. Because some states struggle to find qualified applicants, the grant process at the state level is not always highly competitive.

- Identify grantees publicly and broadly as having high-quality educational programs so schools can leverage dissemination grants to attract additional resources and to recruit students. (States)
- Solicit help from charter support organizations and charter school authorizers to identify schools that have promising practices and then market the grant to these schools. (States)
- Allow applicants to submit preliminary proposals to the state office to make sure schools are meeting quality requirements and have a strong proposal overall. (States)
- Share research about high-quality dissemination practices with potential applicants and with state officials in the form of tools that could be used during the selection process. (USDOE)
- Allow schools to benefit more directly from participation by offering larger grants to fewer schools or by allowing schools more leeway to invest funds internally in project-related resources that will have long-term benefit to the school. (States and USDOE)

Expand current demand. State officials and school-level grantees report that it is often difficult for charter schools to find schools interested in participating in dissemination projects. This is particularly true with efforts to encourage non-charter school participation. In addition, some schools report that many non-charter schools do not have the flexibility to implement programs charter schools want to disseminate.

- Encourage charter schools to share a large enough percentage of the funding with target schools so they have a strong incentive to participate in a project. (States)
- Award priority points during the application process to projects that have an already identified list of charter and/or non-charter school targets. (States)
- Require charter schools to include information about non-charter target schools in their applications, including contracts or guarantees of flexibility from school and district. (States)
- Expend more effort to publicize charter schools' successes so other schools and districts are more interested in learning from their promising practices. (States)
- Encourage states to play a role in helping charter schools identify low-performing schools that could directly benefit from the project the school is planning to develop. (USDOE)
- Rethink need to have non-charter school recipients — allow efforts to focus on sharing promising practices with other charter or charter-like schools. (States and USDOE)

Fund evaluation. Some state officials and schools report that they do not know what types of dissemination activities are likely to have the greatest impact on student achievement. States also struggle to understand if dissemination projects are having an impact on target schools statewide, either by improving student achievement or some other measure. At the federal level, there is no evidence about the impact of the dissemination grant program on student achievement nationwide.

- As the dissemination program moves forward, fund a large-scale national evaluation to determine whether the dissemination grant program is having an impact on student achievement. (USDOE)
- Provide states and schools with evaluation guidelines and tools to help them evaluate the impact dissemination projects are having on student achievement at the school and state level. (USDOE)
- Fund projects for more than two years so that there is sufficient time to evaluate impact. (States and USDOE)
- Fund research to determine what types of projects and what methods of dissemination have the most impact on student achievement. Share this research with potential applicants and with state officials in the form of tools that could be used during the selection process. (States and USDOE)

Improve reporting procedures. In the course of this evaluation, it became clear to the study team that annual performance reports do not provide accurate and consistent information about the amount of funding spent on dissemination, the competitiveness of the grant process, the types of activities that are being funded, or the impact these projects are having on the target schools. This finding is echoed in other reports, including a recent Office of Management and Budget evaluation of the CSP program

(2005), as well as an evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program conducted by SRI International in 2004.

- Improve annual performance reporting process by requiring states to: 1) submit accurate financial information in a consistent format that makes it possible to determine how much states are spending on dissemination; 2) include information about the number of schools that were eligible, that applied and that were funded on an annual basis; 3) provide information about the types of projects that were funded; and 4) report on state- and project-level evaluation results. (USDOE)

Option Two: Open up the application process

An alternative to making changes to the dissemination program as currently configured would be to significantly alter the program by creating a separate grant program for dissemination that is administered quite differently.

There are several strong reasons for considering this, the primary one being that there is currently very little evidence to suggest that the current program is having an impact on school-level practices in other schools or, ultimately, on student achievement. While some projects that have been implemented under this program may have had an impact, there is little reason to think that, overall, the program is having its desired effect.

In addition, an entirely separate grant program for dissemination would help applicants focus their applications and their performance reporting on the specific purpose of dissemination. Many of the problems with the current dissemination program seem to be a result of it having been folded into a larger, existing program. Therefore, state officials understandably discuss and in some cases treat it as an afterthought relative to the other 90 percent of the CSP funds that are spent on charter school start-up and development. Establishing a separate grant program exclusively to fund dissemination would address this concern.

To address the capacity problems mentioned above, policymakers should also consider establishing a nationwide RFP process to allocate dissemination funds in place of the current practice of directing all dissemination funds to individual charter schools via SEAs. While some states and individual charter schools are well equipped to manage dissemination efforts, many lack the capacity and incentive to focus on this work. Opening up the process to a wider range of organizations with the capabilities and will to disseminate best practices effectively would inject a new level of quality and energy into the work of spreading charter schools' success more broadly.

In such a process, multiple organizations would be eligible for dissemination funding in addition to states. Eligible organizations could include individual charter schools, consortia of charter schools, districts, states, and nonprofit organizations. Applicants could propose to work within a single city or state, or to work more broadly. In order to direct funds to organizations with the potential to have a significant impact, federal

officials could offer fewer awards for larger amounts of money. Currently, states collectively can spend up to $20 million on dissemination annually. If these numbers remain constant, the federal government could plan to award ten grants averaging $2 million annually, for example. Organizations could propose a range of dissemination activities to conduct with this grant funding, including replication of a successful school design in new schools, through a charter management organization or other network structure, as well as consulting or training designed to help existing schools adopt an effective practice.

The criteria for awarding dissemination grants nationally could be relatively straightforward and include:

- **The overall quality of the project.** Is the project based on a proven approach to improving student achievement developed or executed primarily within one or more public charter schools? Is there evidence that the proposed method of dissemination or replication is likely to be successful in spreading the effective charter school approach? Only methods with the potential to have real and lasting effects, either through the creation of new schools or transforming existing schools significantly, would be considered.
- **The capacity of the organization.** Does the applicant have the capacity to execute the plan?
- **Level of impact.** How many schools and ultimately how many students would realistically be affected by this project? What types of outcomes are likely? Are project outcomes tied to improved student achievement?

Option Three: Eliminate the dissemination grant program and direct more CSP funds to replication

A final option is to consider eliminating the option for states to participate in the dissemination grant program altogether. This would not require substantial changes to the existing CSP grant structure — state charter school offices would still be the only entities eligible to apply for funds — but these offices would no longer have the option to spend 10 percent of their funds on school-based dissemination projects. In place of dissemination, the statute could require states to spend a percentage of their grant funds on replicating successful charter school models in new schools. In this way, dissemination funds would be redirected toward an alternative form of "dissemination," scaling up existing charter school models that have a proven record of improving student achievement, rather than the existing program that forces schools to tackle all of the barriers associated with disseminating successful programs and practices to other schools.

In the past few years there has been growing national interest in the "replication" strategy. Advocates of replication argue that the best way to improve student achievement is to identify the most successful charter school models and replicate those models on a regional or even national scale. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the

Walton Family Foundations, and intermediate organizations such as NewSchools Venture Fund and the Charter Growth Fund, have made significant grants in support of replication. They have also begun to identify the major barriers to successful scale-up and worked to develop strategies and tools to overcome these challenges. NewSchools Venture Fund, for example, provides management support in the form of board membership, strategic planning, and results monitoring to its grantees.

Each of these funders has already developed tools for screening potential schools and school leaders that could be more widely shared, but at a minimum, states would need to develop replication funding criteria that include:

- **A proven record of academic success.** Schools considered for replication funding would need to have demonstrated dramatic, measurable gains in student achievement, particularly among underserved or marginalized student populations.
- **Strong entrepreneurial leadership.** The success of any replication effort will depend in large part on the ability of the leadership team to execute a complex scale-up effort. For this reason the leadership team should have not only educational expertise, but also financial and management experience or the ability to access that experience.
- **The potential to have an impact on large numbers of students.** In addition to being academically successful, the school model should address the identified needs of large numbers of students. While some excellent charter schools serve relatively small student populations, programs that address the challenges that are common to large numbers of students (urban students, at-risk students, etc.) who live in diverse geographic regions are the best candidates for replication.

These three options present very different levels of change in the current structure of this program. Regardless of the specific steps that policymakers decide to take with regard to improving how charter schools disseminate their promising practices, one thing that is clear from the existing program is the need for rigorous evaluation that will inform future development.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

Background

Since the first charter school opened in Minnesota in 1992, the charter school movement has emerged as one of the most rapidly growing education reform efforts in the United States. By the 2005–2006 school year, 40 states and the District of Columbia had passed a law allowing charter schools to open and more than 3,500 charter schools were operating around the country (see Table 1).
Although states' charter school laws differ in many respects, the state legislators who crafted these laws had several common goals. In a study of "legislative intent," Smarick (2005) closely examined the nation's 41 charter school laws to determine the original goals of these laws. In 32 of the states, legislators included a preamble or purposes section outlining why they were establishing charter schools in their states. Reviewing these sections, Smarick found that 90 percent of the laws that include a preamble mention two specific purposes: "Providing more options to all families" and "Improving the achievement of all students." Eighty percent of the laws mention a third purpose, "Encouraging classroom innovation," and 70 percent a fourth, "Generating more accountability." These are, in effect, the pillars of the charter school idea.

All charter schools share a few common characteristics. According to Finn, Manno and Vanourek (2000, p. 15): 1) They can be created by almost anyone; 2) They are exempt from most state and local regulations, essentially autonomous in their operations; 3) They are attended by youngsters whose parents chose them; 4) They are staffed by educators who are also there by choice; and 5) They are liable to be closed for not producing satisfactory results. Typically, a group of people who wish to start a charter school submit a detailed application outlining their instructional approach, leadership credentials, financial plans, and specific student performance goals to a legally designated authorizing body. This authorizing body then determines whether they will grant the applicants a "charter" to operate for a certain number of years, usually between three and five. At the end of this time, the authorizer determines if the school's leadership has met the performance agreements outlined in their charter and decides whether to renew the charter.

Beyond these common structural characteristics (autonomy, accountability, and choice), individual charter schools have little in common with each other. Because charter school leaders typically have control over many aspects of their operations, including budgets, curriculum, instruction and staffing, their missions and educational practices differ widely. Some schools serve special populations of students (such as students who are at risk for dropping out of school), some deliver instruction through distance learning, some have a longer school day, and some focus on a particular curricular approach, such as math and technology or character education.

It is this high degree of variation that leads some observers to believe that charter schools could be a source of innovative practices that lead to higher student achievement, not just for other charter schools, but for the wider arena of traditional public schools as well.

This hope is reflected in the fact that 90 percent of charter school laws' preambles mention improving the achievement of all students as a goal for the law. As envisioned by these advocates, charter schools are free to try innovative practices, but they are also responsible for measuring whether these practices have the desired impact on student achievement.

Table 1. Number of Operating Charter Schools and Enrollment by State, 2005*

State	Schools Operating	Enrollment
Alaska	20	2,682
Arizona	449	96,934
Arkansas	11	1,486
California	592	219,480
Colorado	116	38,032
Connecticut	15	2,676
Delaware	15	6,791
Florida	334	92,214
Georgia	49	21,116
Hawaii	27	5,405
Idaho	23	7,795
Illinois	41	17,235
Indiana	29	7,013
Iowa	7	1,332
Kansas	25	1,950
Louisiana	21	6,685
Maryland	15	3,812
Massachusetts	57	20,555
Michigan	225	91,567
Minnesota	126	20,650
Mississippi	1	380
Missouri	26	10,780
Nevada	20	6,672
New Hampshire	6	517
New Jersey	52	14,440
New Mexico	51	9,888
New York	79	21,468
North Carolina	100	28,154
Ohio	277	85,082
Oklahoma	13	3,866
Oregon	62	9,616
Pennsylvania	103	33,656
Rhode Island	11	2,398
South Carolina	26	5,171
Tennessee	12	1,842
Texas	259	85,444
Utah	39	11,797
Virginia	5	528
Washington, DC	43	11,530
Wisconsin	188	35,406
Wyoming	3	479

* Source: Center for Education Reform, http://www.edreform.com/index.cfm?fuseAction=stateStatChart&psectionid=15&cSectionID=44

The Influence of Charter Schools on the Broader Public School System

Advocates have introduced charter school laws because they believe that charter schools have the potential to improve educational outcomes for a large number of students. There is less agreement among advocates about how best to take the promising practices developed in charter schools "to scale." One obvious way to do this is to open more charter schools. In the past few years there has been growing national interest in one strategy related to opening more schools: replication. Advocates of replication argue that the best way to improve student achievement is to identify the most successful charter school models and replicate those models on a regional or even national scale. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundations, and intermediate organizations such as NewSchools Venture Fund and the Charter Growth Fund have made significant grants in support of replication.

According to Lake (2005), there is little research evaluating the impact and relative strengths and weaknesses of the replication strategy. There are some tentative findings from the Brookings Institution that suggest that charter schools operated by management companies make greater achievement gains than other charter schools, but this evidence is preliminary. There is also some research into individual programs that have engaged in replication. Recent research reports examining academic gains made by students in 24 KIPP schools, for example, found that students in KIPP schools posted substantially better academic gains on the Stanford Achievement Test than is considered normal.[4]

Another strategy for increasing the impact of promising charter school practices is to promote the sharing of these successful practices with pre-existing schools. Because the Dissemination Grant Program was designed to encourage the dissemination of promising practices from charter schools to other schools, it is interesting to investigate what is known about how well this sharing mechanism has worked since the inception of charter schools.

The literature, as in so many other areas of charter school research, is inconclusive and mixed. A study released by RPP International in 2001 found evidence in every district studied that districts were making changes in response to charter schools. Field visits, interviews with several key administrators and community members, and a review of local media coverage in 49 districts across five states yielded findings related to the types of changes that were made in response to charter schools and the conditions that affected these responses.

Among the 49 districts in the study, nearly two-thirds (61%) said they made changes in their educational programs, meaning they formed new specialty schools, implemented new educational programs, and/or changed organizational structures in existing schools. One in five districts in the study responded to charter schools by opening a specialty school. Among the districts that implemented new educational programs in existing schools, the most common changes were introducing a full-day kindergarten class, reintroducing specialized classes like music and art, developing programs for targeted groups of students, and implementing after-school programs. According to the authors,

most of these changes replicated programs offered by area charter schools. With regard to the types of conditions that influenced whether or not districts made changes, the authors found that districts with declining enrollment were more likely to create new educational programs (60%) than districts with increasing enrollment (44%), and districts that were not the authorizer or were not the only authorizer were more likely to create new programs (55%) than were districts that were the only authorizer (40%) (RPP International, 2001). These findings suggest that the degree to which charter schools represent competition affects the educational changes that districts make in response.

In his 1998 study of eight states and the District of Columbia, Rofes classified roughly half (12 out of 25) of the districts in his sample as exhibiting "moderate" to "high" responsiveness, meaning that they had responded to charter school competition by making either what the author characterized as moderate (6 out of 25) or significant (6 out of 25) changes to the district's educational program. He classified 13 of the districts as "low" response, meaning they had either no response (9 out of 25) or mild response (4 out of 25). According to Rofes, in the schools described as moderate and high response schools, "changes included opening schools organized around a specific philosophy or theme, creating "add-on" programs such as an after-school program or all-day kindergarten, and offering more diverse activities or curricular resources" (p. 12). Nevertheless, in his final analysis, Rofes concluded that "the majority of districts had gone about business as usual and responded to charters slowly and in small ways" (p. 2). The different conclusions drawn by Rofes and the authors of the RPP study seem to reflect differences in interpretation as to what constitutes "significant" change rather than differences in the types and scope of changes that were made by districts (Bulkley & Fisler, 2002).

In a smaller qualitative study of ten California districts, Wells (1998) found that 20 of the 22 non-charter school educators interviewed reported that "they had very little information about what was going on in the charter schools," and "they saw little if any direct impact of charter schools on their school" (p. 55). Both Rofes and Wells reported that one reason there was little interaction between charters and non-charter schools in some districts was because there were no mechanisms in place for them to communicate.

Teske, Schnieder, Buckley and Clark (2001) examined the effects charter schools had on five urban districts facing increasing competition from charter schools: Springfield and Worcester, Massachusetts; Jersey City and Trenton, New Jersey; and the District of Columbia. Overall, they found that charter competition had not led to large changes in district operations, although they did identify several instances where districts responded to charter schools by introducing similar programs in non-charter schools. These changes included introducing new educational programs such as Montessori as well as changes to organizational structures such as grade configurations. Typically, they found that these changes tended to involve adopting a single program or reform rather than any fundamental change in everyday operating procedures on the part of the district.

While each of the studies cited above draws different conclusions about how much effect charter schools have had on the broader public system, they are remarkably consistent in

their findings about the type of practices that are typically adopted by the larger systems. Opening new schools with programs that replicate those available in the local charter school are common responses, as are adding a longer kindergarten day, reconfiguring grade levels, and adopting educational programs that have proven popular in local charter schools, such as a Montessori. Often the programs that are implemented and/or the schools that are opened target their services toward a particular group of students, such as those at risk for school failure or gifted students.

Some scholars believe that charter schools may ultimately have an even larger effect in areas other than school organization. Arsen et al.(1999), for example, argue that in the area of school governance charter schools have introduced several innovations which may ultimately influence the larger public system. These include arrangements where teams of teachers, board members and parents have a significant role in managing the school. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are other areas of influence as well. Charter school innovations in school performance evaluation, for example, are being adopted by larger systems such as Chicago Public Schools and the New York City Department of Education.

Barriers to Dissemination

As noted above, one of the stated purposes of many charter school laws is to positively influence other public schools and public education more broadly. In addition to the constraints inherent in state charter laws that limit the number of charter schools through state caps, there are a number of additional challenges that stand in the way of this happening.

Political Conflict

In examining the effect charter schools have on the larger public school system, many of the researchers cited above found evidence of animosity between charter and non-charter sectors. In districts where there was evidence of hostility, researchers cited multiple reasons that this had occurred.

In their study of 49 districts in five states, RPP International (2001) found that nearly half of the districts they examined reported that charters had had a "negative" impact on the district. This was the case in every district that had declining enrollment, and in approximately half the districts in which the charter had been granted by another entity. The most common reason given was the negative impact of charter schools on the district's budget because of reduced revenue from students who had transferred to charter schools. In these districts, administrators reported laying off staff, closing schools, increasing class sizes, and downsizing their central offices in response to charter schools. In one district, administrators reported that they "hated" and "were against" charter schools "because they exacerbated the district's declining enrollment, negatively affected its budget, heavily affected its operations and educational offerings and created a competitive challenge" (p. 39).

In their study of five districts, Teske, Schneider, Buckley and Clark (2001) found that in one of the districts they examined, Worcester, Massachusetts, district officials were negative towards charters and had actively worked against them. Worcester district administrators argued that parents moved their children out of the regular public schools for racial reasons, that charter schools were negatively affecting resources, and that charter schools did not add any "value" to the education of their students. Overall, these researchers found that officials in several of the districts they examined did not view charter schools as "beacons" of innovation, particularly in terms of curriculum.

In her study of 10 charter districts in California, Wells (1998) reports on several teachers in non-charter schools who talked about the unfair advantage that they believed charter schools had over their schools. They cited several examples of this: 1) charter schools could require parents to be involved in the school; 2) charter schools had enrollment limits and did not have to take students during the year; and 3) charter schools could expel disruptive students more easily. Without attempting to determine if these concerns were justified, it is clear that many teachers she interviewed were more hostile to charter schools because of these perceptions.

Although the hostility noted by these researchers was not universal, it was widespread enough to offer a significant warning that dissemination efforts between charter and non-charter schools in many districts could be difficult to achieve successfully. As Teske, Schneider, Buckley and Clark (2001) noted, many public school officials "may not want to listen" to the lessons learned by charter schools (p. 13).

Variations in Quality

Another barrier that could limit the dissemination of effective practices from charter schools to other schools is the variation in quality within the charter sector. While some of the most successful schools with very disadvantaged populations are charter schools, there are many other charter schools that are not achieving strong academic results.

Several research reports have focused on the question of overall charter school quality — are charter schools overall getting better or worse results than non-charter schools — with very mixed results.[5] The NCSRP review of recent research on the subject concluded that there are so many limitations to conducting research on overall charter school effectiveness that it is difficult to draw meaningful conclusions (Hill, 2005). Examining studies to date, the author found that the different methods and comparison groups chosen for these studies each have their own flaws. The author also suggests that because charter schools serve very different populations and operate in very different policy contexts, it is difficult to generalize about their performance. In fact, one of the only conclusions that the author was able to draw from reviewing the research to date on charter school effectiveness is that charter school quality is variable.

> It should also be noted that whether studies draw positive or negative conclusions about charter school effectiveness, the differences are not strong. This is so for two reasons. First, outcomes for many charter schools are

> virtually identical to the comparison groups. Second, although some charter schools have outstanding results, schools getting poor results statistically offset them. (p. 24)

Variability of results should not, in theory, limit replication of successful practices in charter schools. The fact that some charter schools are performing poorly should not inhibit districts from seeking out best practices in high-performing charter schools. The back-and-forth over charter school achievement, however, tends to concentrate on *aggregate* results, focusing attention on whether charter schools overall are doing well. Since studies provide a mix of answers to this question, it is not surprising that districts do not regard charter schools as places to look generally for examples of good practice.

Time and Capacity Limitations

Interviews with school personnel who work in charter and non-charter schools suggest that limited time and limited capacity are both barriers to effective dissemination. In her interviews with school personnel in California, Wells (1998) found that "most charter schools lacked the time and resources for meaningful collaboration" (p. 5). She also suggested that there are very few "mechanisms" in place for collaboration to occur. Arsen, Plank and Sykes (1999) had a similar finding in Michigan. After several years of evaluating the charter school movement in Michigan, they concluded that "… no effective networks for the diffusion of innovations between PSAs and traditional public schools have been established" (p. 56). Teske, Schneider, Buckley and Clark (2001) also found few mechanisms in place in the five districts they examined for exchanges of information to take place.

Rofes' examination of the effects of charter schools on school districts in 25 school districts in eight states and the District of Columbia (1998) found that there were many barriers to districts' making use of charter schools as educational laboratories. These barriers included the fact that many charter schools were in their first few years of operation and hadn't had time to fully develop their programs, and the fact that both charter and non-charter school personnel did not have the time to visit other classrooms within their own schools, much less in other schools.

More General Barriers to Scaling Up Educational Practices

The challenge of dissemination of successful charter school practices is actually just one example of a broader phenomenon in education, which a long line of research has shown to be severely resistant to "scaling-up" effective approaches.[6] An extensive body of research on school change indicates that core processes of schooling (the teaching and learning that occurs in classrooms) have proven remarkably resistant to change (Elmore, 1996, 1997; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Various aspects of school culture — how students are assigned, what is taught, and how roles are defined — are all entrenched arrangements that require considerable effort to change. Dissemination efforts that involve changes to these "core processes" of schooling are likely to be particularly difficult to implement. There is little oversight, for example, of individual teachers in

their classrooms. For this reason, teachers who do not agree with a particular reform effort can often choose to close their doors and continue teaching in their own way (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Changing this culture would require principals to be willing and able to significantly alter existing school and classroom practices.

Another challenge to effective dissemination of promising practices that emerges from the literature involves barriers that operate outside the specific school context. All school districts are subject to policies and regulations generated at the state and federal level. In many cases, these policies govern multiple aspects of school operations: how teachers are assigned, how time is scheduled, how academic priorities are set, and how roles are defined. Because many of the programs developed by charter schools involve new approaches to these aspects of school operations, it would be difficult for district schools to implement these programs effectively unless school district officials were able or willing to grant the schools greater autonomy over their budget, staffing, scheduling and curriculum. For example, one differentiator of some successful charter schools is a longer school day and a longer school year. In many districts, changes of this magnitude would run afoul of existing collective bargaining agreements or district and state policies. A great deal of research indicates that it is very difficult to implement changes that challenge these types of established bureaucratic norms (Schorr, 1997; Huberman & Miles, 1984; McDermott, 2000; Slavin & Madden, 1999).

The Public Charter Schools Program

To help overcome these barriers, policymakers at the federal level decided that spreading the lessons learned by charter schools to other charter schools and to the larger public school system was an important goal and that federal funds should be allocated to support dissemination. Rather than set up an entirely new grant program, in 2000 Congress chose to fold dissemination into an already existing program, the Charter Schools Program. In addition, Congress made dissemination optional, meaning that states could, if they chose, set aside up to 10 percent of the total PCSP grant for dissemination subgrants to be given to high quality, mature charter schools that wished to share their promising practices with other public schools. Alternatively, states could use all of their funds to support the other goals of the Charter Schools Program, namely encouraging the start-up and development of new charter schools. Because the language in the dissemination statute stipulates that assisting and beneficiary schools need to be independent of each other, the statute does not allow existing charter schools to use dissemination funds for direct replication. At least one state, California, has chosen to spend some of its other Charter Schools Program funds, those targeted toward charter school start-up and development efforts, on new schools based on replicable models.

Administered by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE), the Public Charter Schools Program (later named the Charter Schools Program) was enacted in 1995 to support the planning, development and initial implementation of charter schools. In the years since 1995, it has become a key resource for many charter schools in the early years of their existence. The federal Charter Schools Program provides a substantial amount of money to support charter school start-up and development across the country. When it was

initially authorized in 1995, the program provided $6 million dollars in funding. Over the years, that appropriation has substantially increased to $218 million in 2005.[7] According to a recent evaluation of the program by SRI International (2004), 61 percent of charter school directors surveyed in 2001–2002 reported receiving CSP start-up funds at some point in time.

States, specifically State Education Agencies (SEAs), are eligible to compete for grants provided they have a charter school law in place. If an eligible SEA chooses not to participate in the Charter Schools Program, schools can apply directly to the DOE. Schools in four states (Arizona, Wyoming, Mississippi, and New Hampshire) currently apply directly to the DOE for funds.[8]

In awarding grants, the DOE gives competitive preference to states that: 1) have multiple authorizers (or an appeals process for schools that are denied a charter by a single agency); 2) ensure that authorizers review and evaluate public charter schools at least once every five years, unless required more frequently by state law, to determine if schools are reaching clear and measurable objectives; 3) give public charter schools a high degree of autonomy over their budgets and expenditures; and 4) have demonstrated progress increasing the number of high-quality charter schools.

Dissemination Grant Program

Purpose of the Grant

The Dissemination Subgrant Section 5204(f)(6) of the Charter Schools Program (CSP) was created in an effort to provide further financial support to developing charter schools while assisting them in their role as laboratories for new and innovative practices.

Federal Guidelines

Any eligible SEA can apply to use up to 10 percent of its overall CSP award for the purpose of dissemination subgrants to individual charter schools. Any state that wishes to reserve more than the allotted 10 percent must apply for a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education. If they receive funding, state agencies are then responsible for distributing the award money to eligible charter schools through a competitive process.

Dissemination funds are ultimately awarded to individual charter schools that wish to share their successful practices with other public schools, including public charter schools, in an effort to help open new schools or improve existing ones. The following activities are listed in the 1998 statute as appropriate uses of dissemination funds:

1. assisting other individuals with the planning and start-up of one or more new public schools, including charter schools, that are independent of the assisting charter school and the assisting charter school's developers, and that agree to be held to at least as high a level of accountability as the assisting charter school;

2. developing partnerships with other public schools, including charter schools, designed to improve student academic achievement in each of the schools participating in the partnership;
3. developing curriculum materials, assessments, and other materials that promote increased student achievement and are based on successful practices within the assisting charter school; and
4. conducting evaluations and developing materials that document the successful practices of the assisting charter school and that are designed to improve student performance in other schools. (Charter School Expansion Act, P.L. 105-278)

When a charter school receives a dissemination award, it has up to two years to use the money to disseminate lessons and best practices to other public schools. Individual charter schools may apply to the SEA for dissemination subgrants whether or not they have applied for or received implementation or start-up grants in the past. Schools are, however, required to meet the following criteria, as laid out by the U.S. Department of Education:

The charter school has been in operation for at least three consecutive years and has demonstrated overall success, including

1. Substantial progress in improving students' achievement;
2. High levels of parent satisfaction; and
3. The management and leadership necessary to overcome initial start-up problems and establish a thriving, financially viable charter school. (Charter School Expansion Act, P.L.105-278)[9]

Methodology

This evaluation had two major components: a national review of CSP grant applications and performance reports submitted by states to DOE; and case studies of dissemination grant programs in five states.

National review. The primary data sources for the national review stage of this study were the CSP program files from 2000–2005. These files contained all the successful CSP grant applications and a number of annual reports. The study team recognized that one limitation of this study would be that analyzing the state applications would only yield information about what the state applicants planned to do, not what the applicants actually did once they received the funds. In order to determine how much money was awarded to individual states and how these funds were spent, the study team intended to analyze the annual reports that were submitted to the DOE during this time period.

Examining the program files, the study team found that they did not include all of the annual reports, either because they were not submitted by states or because they were not provided to the study team. Given the number of CSP applicants that were awarded a grant between 2000 and 2005, there should have been 76 annual reports included in the program files; there were 55. The difficulty the study team had analyzing the data was

compounded by the fact that the information provided in these annual reports was inconsistent on such issues as the amount of money that was awarded, the recipients of funds, and the individual school projects that were supported with dissemination grants. For example, some states reported on the total amount they spent on subgrants per year, while others reported on the cumulative amount they awarded across multiple years. Some reported on the amount they spent per individual charter school per year, others reported on the cumulative amount they awarded to individual charter schools over the course of the grant. The limitations of the program files have been reported elsewhere. According to a recent Office of Management and Budget evaluation of the CSP program (2005), the data submitted annually in program performance reports "are often inconsistent with other reports, and fail to provide adequate information to manage and improve the program." The authors of this report note that DOE is taking steps to ensure that the data collected are credible and timely.

The inconsistencies noted in the data included in the state annual reports proved equally true for the state applications. In order for a state to receive funding for the dissemination grant program, the state must indicate on its CSP application that it would like to reserve 10 percent (or more if it requests a waiver) of the overall award for dissemination purposes. The state is not required to submit a separate application for dissemination funding. In practice, this meant that dissemination received minimal attention in the overall grant application. The majority of the information that the applicants provided was about how they planned to spend the 90 percent of the funding intended for start-up and development.

Prior to the 2005–2006 grant cycle, there were two questions on the application that referred to dissemination. The first question was included in Application Requirement D, which asked states to "Describe how the SEA will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each local educational agency in the State." Applicants responded to this first requirement in different ways. Some chose to describe the dissemination grant program; others focused on their own internal efforts to disseminate best or promising practices and did not mention the dissemination program at all, even if they planned to participate. The second question included in Selection Criteria (sic) H referred specifically to those applicants that wished to participate in the dissemination grant program. Selection Criteria H asked states to describe "the quality of the dissemination activities and the likelihood that those activities will improve student achievement." Because Selection Criteria H was worded somewhat vaguely, there was considerable variation in the level of detail states provided about their intentions under this grant.

In 2005, the U.S. Department of Education added additional wording to the CSP grant application to encourage applicants to provide more specific information about their intentions. A few of these changes affected the dissemination grant program. Selection Criteria A, which asked applicants to describe how the grant program would assist educationally disadvantaged students to reach state standards, included a note encouraging applicants to provide a description of how the SEA "will disseminate best or promising practices of charter schools to each LEA in the State." Another reference to

dissemination was included in a new note under Selection Criteria E: "The Secretary encourages applicants to provide a description of the steps to be taken by the SEA to award these funds to eligible applicants, including descriptions about the peer review process to review applications for dissemination, the timelines for awarding such funds, and how the SEA will assess the quality of the applications." As a result of these changes, the ten successful applications submitted during the 2005 grant cycle did include more specific information about the grant review process in their state.

In order to answer the overall questions guiding this evaluation, the study team reviewed all of the program files and entered information about specific aspects of the dissemination grant program into a database. Once the data were entered, two members of the study team independently analyzed and coded each data point. When coding responses were not consistent, a third team member was asked to provide additional input.[10]

Case studies. Following the national review stage of the evaluation, the study team selected five states for in-depth review. These case study sites were chosen because of their experience with the dissemination grant and because they represented a variety of approaches to administering this grant. Study team members interviewed a variety of stakeholders in each state, including state-level grant administrators, school-level grantees, and representatives from statewide charter support organizations. Semi-structured interviews were designed to collect information about current and past grant activities as well as lessons learned and recommendations for improvement.

Chapter 2: State Participation in Dissemination Grant Program

Evaluation questions for this chapter:

- How widespread is the dissemination grant program at the state level?
- How much money is spent on the dissemination grant program?

Finding: Between 2000 and 2005, there were 60 successful CSP grant applications. Fifty of these 60 successful grant applicants chose to set aside some of their funds to participate in the dissemination grant program.

As noted earlier, in order for a state to receive funding for the dissemination grant program, the state must simply indicate on its CSP application that they would like to reserve a percentage of its overall award for dissemination purposes. Over the past six years, 60 CSP grants have been awarded, and 50 state applicants have made a request to use a fraction of their award for dissemination. Several of these applicants applied for their second or third CSP grant during the time period studied. For more information about state grantees in each of the years studied, see Table 2.

Three of the 10 grant applicants who did not chose to participate in the dissemination grant program explained their reason for not participating — none of their schools met the three-year eligibility requirement. The remaining seven grantees did not explain their reasoning in the CSP application.

Table 2. State CSP Awards for the Entire Grant Cycle (Usually Three Years) and Participation in Dissemination Grant, 2000-2005

Grantee Name	CSP Award	Participating in Dissemination Grant?
2000		
South Carolina Department of Education	$6,158,026	yes
Kansas State Department of Education	$7,000,000	yes
New Mexico State Department of Education	$14,875,000	yes
Pennsylvania Department of Education	$12,410,000	yes
2001		
Massachusetts Department of Education	$9,617,865	yes
Colorado Department of Education	$18,750,000	yes
Missouri Department of Education	$1,260,594	yes
Michigan Department of Education	$16,420,000	yes
Georgia State Board of Education	$10,210,626	yes
Louisiana Department of Education	$3,330,626	no
Ohio Department of Education	$62,100,000	yes
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning	$22,000,000	yes
Texas Education Agency	$32,944,649	yes
Nevada Department of Education	$7,357,907	yes
Indiana Department of Education	$8,942,374	no
Rhode Island Department of Education	$2,389,583	yes
California Department of Education	$70,328,684	yes
2002		
State of Florida, Department of Education	$66,616,513	yes
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	$27,709,827	yes
New York State Education Department	$15,031,691	yes
North Carolina State Board of Education	$15,283,894	yes
Illinois State Board of Education	$4,070,650	yes
Connecticut Department of Education	$959,366	yes
Oklahoma State Department of Education	$3,176,470	no
Arkansas Department of Education	$6,784,071	no
Utah State Office of Education	$10,855,347	yes
Oregon Department of Education	$17,500,000	yes
Hawaii State Department of Education	$4,368,621	yes
Idaho State Department of Education	$4,244,050	yes
District of Columbia Public Schools	$9,031,120	yes
Tennessee Department of Education	$7,789,474	no
Delaware Department of Education	$2,200,100	yes
New Jersey Department of Education	$9,631,578	yes
2003		
South Carolina Department of Education *	$6,110,000	yes
New Mexico State Department of Public Education *	$17,960,526	yes
State of New Hampshire Department of Education	$7,732,779	no
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development	$6,575,000	yes
Kansas State Department of Education *	$77,117,647	yes
Iowa Department of Education	$4,240,000	no
Pennsylvania Department of Education*	$11,400,000	yes
2004**		
Michigan Department of Education*	$14,226,459	yes
Texas Education Agency*	$14,886,376	yes

Grantee Name	CSP Award	Participating in Dissemination Grant?
Maryland State Department of Education	$9,117,620	no
California Department of Education*	$55,986,969	yes
Colorado Department of Education*	$12,574,622	yes
Missouri Department of Education*	$284,132	no
Georgia Department of Education*	$7,412,052	yes
Massachusetts Department of Education*	$5,191,097	yes
Indiana Department of Education*	$6,083,573	yes
Ohio Department of Education*	$33,623,962	yes
2005		
Delaware Department of Education*	$6,157,895	yes
District of Columbia Public Schools*	$5,434,386	yes
State of Florida, Department of Education*	$53,000,000	yes
Idaho State Department of Education*	$7,025,069	no
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning*	$45,000,000	yes
Nevada Department of Education*	$7,500,000	yes
New York State Education Department*	$25,262,476	yes
Oregon Department of Education*	$22,500,000	yes
Utah State Office of Education*	$7,600,000	yes
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*	$52,529,412	yes

* Indicates a renewal grant

**The number reported for 2004 CSP awards is the total obligated for two years of the three year grant cycle.

Finding: Since 2000, states intended to set aside approximately $110,000,000 for dissemination grants. Rough estimates suggest states actually awarded far less, around $73,000,000, in actual dissemination grants, about two-thirds of the intended total.

It was difficult for the study team to draw conclusions about the amount of money that states set aside and then distributed for dissemination between 2000 and 2005. This difficulty arose for a number of reasons, primarily the uneven quality of the data as described in the methodology section above.

Of the 60 applicants who received a CSP grant between 2000 and 2005, 50 chose to set aside money for dissemination. Thirty-three of these applicants stated in their application that they intended to reserve 10 percent of their funds for dissemination, two requested less than the 10 percent allowed, and nine requested a waiver to set aside more than 10 percent for dissemination. The waiver requests ranged from 15 percent to 30 percent of the total CSP award. The remaining six applicants did not indicate how much they intended to set aside, so for the purposes of calculating the total the study team assumed they intended to set aside 10 percent.

Altogether, the 50 state applicants intended to set aside approximately $110,000,000 for dissemination grants during this period. In a given grant cycle, states received dissemination awards ranging from $22,000 to $5,400,000, with the average award being nearly $1,600,000.

Annual reports suggest that state applicants actually awarded far less than $110,000,000 to schools. For several reasons, it was difficult to determine the exact amount that states

awarded in dissemination grants. The study team based their findings on the numbers that were reported in the annual reports included in the program files. As noted earlier, some annual reports were not included in the program files, so this number may not reflect all three years of some states' funding. In addition, some states may not have indicated in their annual reports that they spent less than expected and rolled the remaining funds back into start-up and development grants to new schools. Given these limitations, best estimates suggest state applicants awarded approximately $73,000,000 to schools during this time period. If this number is accurate, states spent approximately $37,000,000 less than they intended on dissemination grants, disbursing about two-thirds of their intended funding. For more information about the amount of funding states requested and spent on dissemination, see Table 3. It is important to note that in spending less than their set-aside amounts, states were not violating their grant agreements; the set-aside *allows* states to use funds for dissemination, but does not *require* them to do so.

Table 3. Amount of Funding States Requested and Spent for Dissemination, 2000–2005

Grantee Name	CSP Award	% of Funds Set Aside for Dissemination	Estimated $ Amount Set Aside for Dissemination	Estimated $ Amount Spent on Dissemination Activities**
2000				
South Carolina Department of Education	$6,158,026	10%	$615,803	$200,000
Kansas State Department of Education	$7,000,000	10%	$700,000	$33,000
New Mexico State Department of Education	$14,875,000	10%	$1,487,500	$875,000
Pennsylvania Department of Education	$12,410,000	10%	$1,241,000	$850,000
2001				
Massachusetts Department of Education	$9,617,865	15%	$1,442,680	$1,328,062
Colorado Department of Education	$18,750,000	15%	$2,812,500	$3,037,500
Missouri Department of Education	$1,260,594	N/A	$126,059	$375,000
Michigan Department of Education	$16,420,000	10%	$1,642,000	$1,263,084
Georgia State Board of Education	$10,210,626	10%	$1,021,063	$900,000
Louisiana Department of Education	$3,330,626	Did not participate		
Ohio Department of Education	$62,100,000	10%	$6,210,000	$5,400,000
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning	$22,000,000	20%	$4,400,000	$898,851
Texas Education Agency	$32,944,649	15%	$4,941,697	N/A
Nevada Department of Education	$7,357,907	10%	$735,791	$580,000
Indiana Department of Education	$8,942,374	Did not participate		
Rhode Island Department of Education	$2,389,583	N/A	$238,958	$0
California Department of Education	$70,328,684	10%	$7,032,868	$200,000
2002				
State of Florida, Department of Education	$66,616,513	10%	$6,661,651	$2,900,000
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	$27,709,827	10%	$2,770,983	$2,400,000
New York State Education Department	$15,031,691	N/A	$1,503,169	$1,800,000
North Carolina State Board of Education	$15,283,894	10%	$1,528,389	$1,410,000
Illinois State Board of Education	$4,070,650	10%	$407,065	$403,000
Connecticut Department of Education	$959,366	10%	$95,937	$174,826
Oklahoma State Department of Education	$3,176,470	Did not participate		
Arkansas Department of Education	$6,784,071	Did not participate		

Grantee Name	CSP Award	% of Funds Set Aside for Dissemination	Estimated $ Amount Set Aside for Dissemination	Estimated $ Amount Spent on Dissemination Activities**
Utah State Office of Education	$10,855,347	10%	$1,085,535	$795,000
Oregon Department of Education	$17,500,000	10%	$1,750,000	$750,000
Hawaii State Department of Education	$4,368,621	20%	$873,724	$3,060,000
Idaho State Department of Education	$4,244,050	10%	$424,405	$276,000
District of Columbia Public Schools	$9,031,120	10%	$903,112	$376,520
Tennessee Department of Education	$7,789,474	Did not participate		
Delaware Department of Education	$2,200,100	25%	$550,025	$1,035,714
New Jersey Department of Education	$9,631,578	30%	$2,889,473	$2,970,000
2003				
South Carolina Department of Education *	$6,110,000	10%	$611,000	$1,100,000
New Mexico State Department of Public Education *	$17,960,526	25%	$4,490,132	$3,600,000
State of New Hampshire Department of Education	$7,732,779	Did not participate		
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development	$6,575,000	10%	$657,500	N/A
Kansas State Department of Education *	$77,117,647	N/A	$7,711,765	$22,000
Iowa Department of Education	$4,240,000	Did not participate		
Pennsylvania Department of Education*	$11,400,000	10%	$1,140,000	$250,000
2004* **				
Michigan Department of Education*	$14,226,459	10%	$1,422,646	N/A
Texas Education Agency*	$14,886,376	N/A	$1,488,638	$3,100,000
Maryland State Department of Education	$9,117,620	Did not participate		
California Department of Education*	$55,986,969	10%	$5,598,697	$2,476,723
Colorado Department of Education*	$12,574,622	22%	$2,766,417	N/A
Missouri Department of Education*	$284,132	Did not participate		
Georgia Department of Education*	$7,412,052	10%	$741,205	$600,000
Massachusetts Department of Education*	$5,191,097	10%	$519,110	$519,110
Indiana Department of Education*	$6,083,573	10%	$608,357	$600,000
Ohio Department of Education*	$33,623,962	10%	$3,362,396	$5,400,000
2005				
Delaware Department of Education*	$6,157,895	25%	$1,539,474	$500,000
District of Columbia Public Schools*	$5,434,386	10%	$543,439	$3,000,000
State of Florida, Department of Education*	$53,000,000	10%	$5,300,000	$5,300,000
Idaho State Department of Education*	$7,025,069	Did not participate		
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning*	$45,000,000	10%	$4,500,000	$3,000,000
Nevada Department of Education*	$7,500,000	10%	$750,000	$750,000
New York State Education Department*	$25,262,476	10%	$2,526,248	$2,526,247
Oregon Department of Education*	$22,500,000	10%	$2,250,000	$200,000
Utah State Office of Education*	$7,600,000	10%	$760,000	$400,000
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction*	$52,529,412	10%	$5,252,941	$5,252,941
TOTAL	**$1,033,880,758**	-	**$110,631,352**	**$72,888,578**

* Indicates a renewal grant.

** These figures are based on the information included in annual reports and grant applications. States often request more than they receive, so these numbers may overestimate the amounts spent.. As noted earlier, not all of these reports were included in the program files and many that were included did not provide detailed or complete information about how much had been spent on dissemination. For these reasons these numbers should be read as tentative estimates.

***The number reported for 2004 CSP awards is the total obligated for two years of the three year grant cycle.

Finding: Many states struggled to find qualified schools interested in applying for dissemination grant funds.

Applicants who explained why they did not award the expected amount in dissemination funds typically cited two reasons: 1) they did not get the expected number of applicants; or 2) applicants did not get high enough scores during the application review process to be eligible for an award.

Interviews with state officials and representatives of charter support organizations familiar with the dissemination grant program provided more detailed information about the struggle some states had encouraging qualified applicants to apply for dissemination grant funds. In Michigan, California and Florida, several interviewees commented that they did not believe there was sufficient incentive for schools to participate in the dissemination grant program. Because schools are required to use grant funds to disseminate already developed ideas, they cannot use the money to invest in their own programs. In practice, this means that schools must set aside a significant amount of staff time and effort in order to help other schools without substantial benefit to themselves. Interviewees acknowledged that there were some schools willing to do this, but felt that many schools would not compromise their own success for this purpose. Several interviewees also commented on the limited capacity of many charter schools to commit staff resources, even those schools that met the quality requirements and were in their fourth year or beyond.

Although state officials in Massachusetts made similar comments about the difficulty they had finding qualified applicants for dissemination grant funds, they acknowledged that they had the advantage of having a charter law that requires all fifth-year charter schools that are up for renewal to disseminate their best practices to other schools. This had given them a steady pool of potential applicants who were already required to disseminate. Even in Massachusetts, though, many schools still reported not applying for the grant to fund their dissemination efforts because of the amount of paperwork and effort required.

Officials in Wisconsin offered a different perspective. They had less difficulty encouraging qualified applicants to apply and reported that an incentive for the charter schools in their state to apply for the dissemination award was that it provided a "seal of approval" from the state that they were a high-quality school.

Finding: Almost half of the states that chose to reapply for the CSP grant between 2000–2005 planned to decrease funding or not participate in the dissemination grant program at all.

Between 2000 and 2005, 23 of the states in the data set applied for a second CSP grant (see Table 4 below). Most of these states did not include information in their annual reports about the number of schools receiving dissemination subgrants; therefore, it is impossible to determine if there were trends in the number of schools that received funding across the two separate grant cycles. However, the study team was able to assess

whether these states planned to use more or less funding for dissemination in their second (or third) three-year grant cycle. Because states are allowed to set aside up to 10 percent of their total grant award for dissemination (unless they request a waiver), in many cases state requests for dissemination funds were driven by their total CSP requests; they planned to spend 10 percent of their overall awards on dissemination. But in other cases, states referenced specific circumstances that influenced how much they expected to spend on dissemination.

Ten states planned to increase dissemination funding in their second CSP grant; nine planned to decrease funding or chose not to participate the second time around; and one planned to spend the same amount of money in both grant cycles. Three states did not disclose the amount of money they planned to spend on dissemination in one of the two grant cycles, so no conclusions could be drawn about these states.

For those states that planned to spend more on dissemination during their second (or third) grant cycle, the most common reasons given were that: 1) three years had passed and more charter schools had opened; and/or 2) more schools had met the three-year eligibility requirement for dissemination. For example, when Indiana state officials applied for their first CSP grant in 2001, they had not yet opened any charter schools, but in their 2004 application officials indicated they would have 11 eligible schools in 2005–2006 and six more eligible schools in 2006–2007. None of the states that requested less funding specified why they were doing so.

Table 4. First and Second Round CSP Awards and Dissemination Grants by State, 2000–2005

Grantee Name	1st CSP Award	Dissemination Grant?	2nd CSP Award	Dissemination Grant?
2000				
South Carolina Department of Education	2000	yes	2003	yes
Kansas State Department of Education	2000	yes	2003	yes
New Mexico State Department of Education	2000	yes	2003	yes
Pennsylvania Department of Education	2000	yes	2003	yes
2001				
Massachusetts Department of Education	2001	yes	2004	yes
Colorado Department of Education	2001	yes	2004	yes
Missouri Department of Education	2001	yes	2004	no
Michigan Department of Education	2001	yes	2004	yes
Georgia State Board of Education	2001	yes	2004	yes
Louisiana Department of Education	2001	no		
Ohio Department of Education	2001	yes	2004	yes
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning	2001	yes	2005	yes
Texas Education Agency	2001	yes	2004	yes
Nevada Department of Education	2001	yes	2005	yes
Indiana Department of Education	2001	no	2004	yes
Rhode Island Department of Education	2001	yes		
California Department of Education	2001	yes	2004	yes
2002				
State of Florida, Department of Education	2002	yes	2005	yes
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	2002	yes	2005	yes

Grantee Name	1st CSP Award	Dissemination Grant?	2nd CSP Award	Dissemination Grant?
New York State Education Department	2002	yes	2005	yes
North Carolina State Board of Education	2002	yes		
Illinois State Board of Education	2002	yes		
Connecticut Department of Education	2002	yes		
Oklahoma State Department of Education	2002	no		
Arkansas Department of Education	2002	no		
Utah State Office of Education	2002	yes	2005	yes
Oregon Department of Education	2002	yes	2005	yes
Hawaii State Department of Education	2002	yes		
Idaho State Department of Education	2002	yes	2005	no
District of Columbia Public Schools	2002	yes	2005	yes
Tennessee Department of Education	2002	no		
Delaware Department of Education	2002	yes	2005	yes
New Jersey Department of Education	2002	yes		
2003				
State of New Hampshire Department of Education	2003	no		
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development	2003	yes		
Iowa Department of Education	2003	no		
2004				
Maryland State Department of Education	2004	no		

Chapter 3: Overview of Individual State Programs

Evaluation questions for this chapter:

- At the individual state level, what is the stated purpose of funding dissemination grants?
- What state-based criteria do states use in awarding funds?
- How do states ensure that schools meet high-quality requirements?
- How widespread is the dissemination grant program at the school level?
- Who reviews school project applications at the state level?
- Does the state encourage applicants to use partnerships with external organizations to facilitate dissemination?
- To what extent are states measuring the impact of dissemination grant funds?

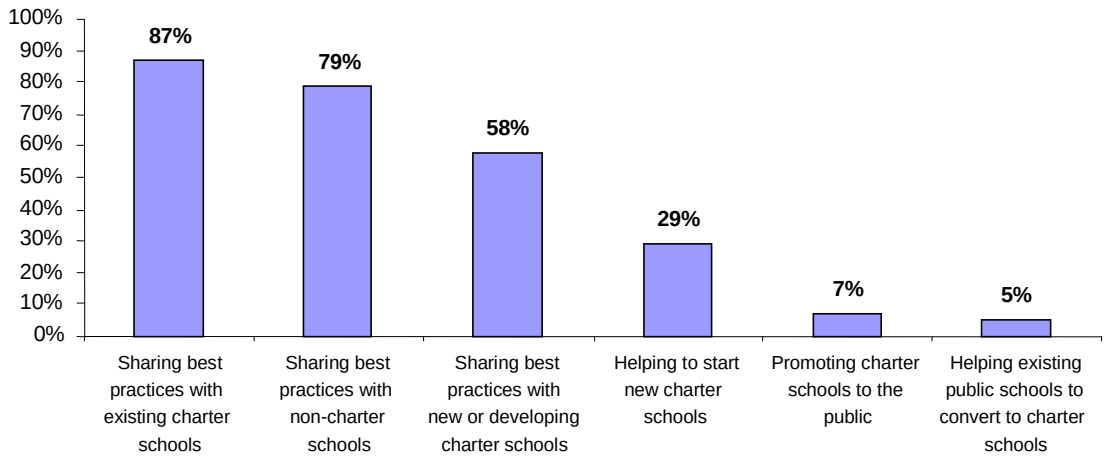
Goal/Objective of Dissemination

Of the 50 CSP applicants that indicated plans to participate in the dissemination grant program between 2000 and 2005, 38 included a general statement about their overall goals or objectives for participating. Because there was not a question in the application that specifically asked applicants to state their overall goals and objectives for dissemination, these responses were culled from general comments made in the course of answering other questions and are therefore suggestive rather than conclusive. These findings are meant to give a very general indication of why states participate in the dissemination grant program and what they hope to achieve by doing so.

Finding: The vast majority of state applicants listed helping existing schools as one of their goals. Helping existing charter schools was the number one goal mentioned, while helping existing non-charter schools was the second most common goal listed. Fewer state applicants listed helping to start new schools as a goal.

Eighty-seven percent of the applicants mentioned sharing best practices with existing charter schools as one of the goals and objectives of the dissemination grant program (33 of 38). A slightly lower percentage (79%) referred to sharing best practices with non-charter schools as one of their goals and objectives (30 of 38). Fifty-eight percent of the applicants referenced sharing best practices with new or developing charter schools and 29 percent referenced helping to start new charter schools. Only 7 percent, mentioned promoting charter schools to the public and even fewer (5%) mentioned helping existing public schools convert to charter schools in their applications.

Figure 1. Stated Goals and Objectives of Charter Schools Program*



*Sum of percentages is greater than 100 because some states listed more than one goal.

Finding: A majority of states that chose to participate in the dissemination grant program did so because they want to disseminate best practices to BOTH charter and non-charter schools.

Almost three in four applicants that included a reference to the goals of the program indicated that their goal was to disseminate best practices to *both* charter and non-charter schools (74%). A small number of states indicated that their goal was to disseminate best practices *only* to other charter schools (21%). A very small number of states (2 out of 38) stated that their goal was to disseminate best practices *only* to non-charter schools.

Finding: Case study sites reported that charter schools had difficulty identifying non-charter schools that were interested in participating in dissemination activities.

Interviews with state officials, grantees and representatives from state charter associations in the case study states confirmed that these five states wanted to fund projects that targeted both charter and non-charter schools. That said, interviewees acknowledged that this was a difficult goal for them to achieve. Interviewees from every state commented on the lack of interest many non-charter schools and districts had in participating in charter school dissemination activities. In many cases, this reflected a climate of hostility between charters and non-charters that was difficult to overcome. Another barrier state officials cited was non-charter schools' inability to make changes related to curriculum. In Massachusetts, state officials described a project that involved a mentoring partnership between a charter school and a non-charter school to implement a new math curriculum in the non-charter school. The partnership came about because of a personal relationship between the principals of the two schools. The charter school leader reported that the mentoring was going quite well — that the traditional school was enthusiastic about the new math curriculum and excited about making changes and improving student achievement. The biggest source of frustration was the district. According to an interview with the charter school leader, the school supported changes to the curriculum, but they were being held back by district regulations. The district did not allow the necessary changes to the curriculum, and so the program was not able to produce the results it did in a charter setting. The frustrated charter school leader expressed doubt about even applying for a second year of funding for this program and suggested that if he had the opportunity to do it again, he would work with a charter school or one of Boston's autonomous non-charter "pilot schools" that had the freedom to make sweeping changes in the structure of their program.

There were some exceptions. In Michigan, a school grantee developed dissemination projects in two schools that each had a unique mission and focus: one was a Montessori school and the other a school designed for highly at-risk students. In both cases, the charter school leader reported that there was a lot of interest in her dissemination activities among non-charter school personnel who were interested in developing similar programs. In California, where districts are often the charter school authorizers, some district officials used their charter schools as model sites where they sent teachers from throughout the district to learn specific instructional approaches.

State officials in Wisconsin commented that there had been an overall shift over the past five years in the type of project they funded. In earlier grant cycles, the goal of dissemination had been to help the general charter school movement by targeting dissemination activities at new and developing charter schools. But in more recent years, the state had aligned the goals of the dissemination grant program more closely with the overall goals of the state and student achievement had become an increased priority. Therefore, the dissemination projects that were now being funded were more likely to target existing schools, including non-charter schools, and involve specific programs that had a high likelihood of improving student achievement.

Additional Criteria Outlined by States

Finding: Within federal guidelines, a high percentage of states awarded dissemination funds to schools based on additional state-determined criteria.

All 50 of the successful CSP applicants that chose to participate in the dissemination grant program said in their applications that they would use federal guidelines in making their awards. According to federal guidelines, eligible schools must have demonstrated overall success. The guidelines define success as: 1) making substantial progress in improving students' achievement; 2) high levels of parent satisfaction; and 3) demonstrating the management and leadership necessary to overcome initial start-up problems and establish a thriving, financially viable charter school. In addition to these federal guidelines, 29 applicants voluntarily mentioned at some point in their applications that they would base their awards decisions on additional *state-determined* criteria. Because applicants were not required to describe these additional criteria, these findings are merely suggestive of the types of additional criteria that applicants considered when making funding decisions. Other states may have had additional funding criteria that they chose not to mention in their applications.

Seventy-five percent of the applicants that mentioned one or more additional criteria (22 of 29) targeted a specific type of school. Of these, more than half (60%) reported that funding priority would be given to grantees that targeted charter schools *and* to grantees that targeted non-charter schools. A smaller percentage of applicants *only* mentioned that they would give funding priority to projects that targeted charter schools (32%) and an even smaller percentage *only* mentioned that they would give priority to schools that targeted non-charter schools (9%).

Sixty-six percent of the applicants that referred to additional criteria reported that dissemination projects that targeted a particular student population would receive funding priority. While applicants used different terms to describe low-performing students (e.g., at-risk, educationally disadvantaged, students from low-performing schools), many of the applicants (19 of 29) gave funding priority to projects that addressed the needs of these students. Three applicants also mentioned that they gave funding priority to projects that targeted students with special needs.

Six of the 29 states that mentioned additional criteria tied their funding decisions to "state priorities." Wisconsin is an example of an applicant that took this approach in its 2002 application. The application indicated that the state was interested in funding projects that addressed the following topics: at-risk students, the achievement gap, building reading skills, promoting early learning opportunities, promoting educator quality, career education, and encouraging parent and community involvement. Similarly, in 2005, Florida wrote that it planned to focus on dissemination activities that address early childhood literacy, increased parent involvement and parent satisfaction, high-quality teachers, and effective partnerships among charter schools, traditional public schools, and other community organizations.

Interviews with state officials in the case study sites suggested that some found state-determined priorities to be of limited value if they became merely a "laundry list" from which schools could choose. Some officials felt that these laundry lists of state priorities were confusing for applicants to sort through and did not help ensure that schools with high-quality projects applied for funds. In contrast to the laundry-list approach, those states with more narrowly targeted goals found these more valuable. In Michigan, for example, a concerted effort to target funds toward projects that would improve outcomes for special education students in charter schools had met with some success, particularly because dissemination funding was only part of a multi-pronged strategy to improve this aspect of charter schooling.

Another approach to establishing state-determined priorities was for states to develop a list of "competitive priority topics." Schools were not required to address these topics in their proposals, but if they did, they were given extra points. In Massachusetts, this list of competitive priorities changed from year to year. Officials in the Charter School Office developed a list of competitive priorities based on the needs of other schools and the strengths of particular charter schools in a given year. According to state officials, they based this information on their own knowledge of the schools as the state authorizer.

Finding: There is some evidence that states funded for more than one grant cycle modified their application criteria to fit the changing needs of the state.

As was previously mentioned, there were 23 states that applied for and received dissemination funding for a second time in the five-year observation period. A side-by-side comparison of these states' CSP applications yielded interesting information about how states chose to modify the process by establishing state-specific eligibility requirements or priorities, and/or by changing the application requirements.

Examining the entire pool of 50 successful CSP applicants that chose to participate in the dissemination grant program, 29 applicants mentioned at some point in their applications that they based their awards on additional state-specific criteria. When looking across states with two dissemination grants during the time period examined in this study, 16 states modified their state-level criteria on their second grant cycle. While five of the states relaxed their criteria for eligibility by not requiring schools to meet previous eligibility requirements, the remaining 11 chose to include additional eligibility requirements.

Applicants added a wide variety of state-specific eligibility requirements when implementing their second three-year grant cycle during our observation period. For example, some additional requirements mandated that grant recipients: 1) partner with non-charter schools; 2) partner with schools designated as in need of improvement or corrective action under No Child Left Behind; 3) address at-risk populations; 4) assist schools in meeting AYP; 5) increase services for students with disabilities; 6) gather letters of interest from partner schools; and 7) present the project at a workshop or state/national conference. Other states refrained from adding project criteria, but were

more specific in their application requirements, requesting documents such as a detailed budget, timeline, and achievement scores.

The following are examples of state-mandated eligibility requirements that were dropped from the requests-for-proposals in the second grant cycle: 1) schools must provide a research base for the programs/activities planned; 2) projects must be based on needs assessments; 3) projects must enhance services to special needs populations; 4) projects must increase the level of community and parent involvement; 5) projects must show evidence of student success; 6) schools must demonstrate sustainability of the project once grant funds run out; 7) projects should be designed to assist new schools in applying for charters; and 8) schools must counsel start-up charter schools.

State Processes for Ensuring That Schools Meet High-Quality Requirements

According to federal law, to receive a dissemination grant, charter schools must be in existence for three years and must have demonstrated "overall success," including progress in improving students' achievement, high levels of parent satisfaction, and the management and leadership necessary to establish a strong, financially viable charter school.

Finding: State achievement tests and AYP were the most common measures used to determine "substantial progress in improving student achievement."

The national data review of the CSP program files between 2000 and 2005 yielded little information about the specific selection criteria states used to award dissemination funds. CSP applicants were not required to provide this information, and only six applicants for dissemination funds chose to comment in their CSP applications on how they would measure "substantial progress in improving student achievement." Four states (CA, TX, FL, OR) mentioned in their applications that they required schools to advance within the state's accountability system to meet eligibility requirements. In California, schools had to make some level of improvement on the state's Academic Performance Index in order to be eligible. In Texas, eligibility required schools to receive at least an "Acceptable" accountability rating for two of the last three years. In Florida and Oregon, improving student achievement was based on each school's Annual Yearly Progress (AYP).

Interviews with case study participants indicated that officials in these five states relied on state test scores as well as other measures that schools provided in their applications to determine if the schools met the student achievement requirement. Rather than review applicants for "improvement" in student achievement, some of the case study sites commented that the review process screened for "high" student achievement as determined by the review committee.

Finding: Very few states report on what they use to measure "high levels of parent satisfaction" in their dissemination applications.

Because very few applicants included specific information about the selection process in their applications, the study team was not able to analyze how states measure "high levels of parent satisfaction" as part of the national review stage of the research project. Only two states (TX and NC) chose to include this information in their application. Both indicated that they would examine parent satisfaction surveys in order to determine if schools met the eligibility requirement. North Carolina took this requirement a step further by establishing a cutoff score. In its 2002 application, NC indicated that only schools with an overall parent approval rating of 90 percent or more would be eligible for funding.

Case study interviews suggested that in the five states studied, applicants were required to submit information about parent satisfaction as part of their grant applications. Most state officials felt that this information was not difficult for schools to include because they submitted it to their authorizers as part of their accountability reporting. Several interviewees also commented that, in general, parent satisfaction scores in charter schools are high and therefore this requirement was not difficult for schools to meet.

Finding: States, for the most part, did not indicate in their application how they determined the financial viability of a charter school.

Only two states mentioned how financial viability would be measured, Texas and California. In both cases, the state determined the best indicator to be annual audit reports submitted by applicants as part of their application. Case study interviews suggested that this was the preferred method for most states. All five case study sites reported that the burden was on schools to include annual audit reports or other indications of fiscal health in their application. Several interviewees further suggested that they felt they would know in advance if applicants did not have sound financial health, either because of the small number of schools they worked with or because they collected this information for other purposes.

Competitiveness and Reach of Dissemination Grant Program

As previously reported, uneven data quality from the CSP program files led to difficulty in determining how much was spent nationally on dissemination funds at the school level. These same issues made it difficult to determine how widespread and how competitive the dissemination grant program was at the school level (see Table 5). A recent survey of charter schools found that 19 percent of the schools surveyed reported receiving dissemination funds.[11] As part of this report, the study team intended to analyze data from the CSP program files to determine: 1) how many schools in each state funded with dissemination grant funds were eligible to receive these funds in a given year; 2) how many schools applied for these funds; and 3) how many schools received dissemination funds. While uneven data quality prevented the study team from finding clear-cut answers to these questions, there are some preliminary findings. These national findings are supported by the information gathered from the case study sites.

Table 5. Competitiveness of Dissemination Funding by State, 2000–2005*

Grantee Name	# of Schools Eligible to Receive a Dissemination Award	# of Schools that Applied for a Dissemination Award	# of Schools Awarded Funding for a Dissemination Project
2000			
South Carolina Department of Education	10	N/A	5
Kansas State Department of Education	N/A	N/A	0
New Mexico State Department of Education	1	1	1
Pennsylvania Department of Education	47	N/A	Al least 5
2001			
Massachusetts Department of Education	N/A	50	37
Colorado Department of Education	N/A	N/A	At least 7
Missouri Department of Education	9	N/A	N/A
Michigan Department of Education	N/A	25	12
Georgia State Board of Education	2	N/A	N/A
Louisiana Department of Education	Did not participate		
Ohio Department of Education	14	0	0
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning	N/A	At least 7	7
Texas Education Agency	90	N/A	At least 9
Nevada Department of Education	4	1	1
Indiana Department of Education	Did not participate		
Rhode Island Department of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
California Department of Education	N/A	At least 14	At least 21
2002			
State of Florida, Department of Education	Approx 100	N/A	36
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	N/A	44	23
New York State Education Department	N/A	N/A	N/A
North Carolina State Board of Education	30	At least 12	At least 10
Illinois State Board of Education	17	N/A	2
Connecticut Department of Education	12	9	9
Oklahoma State Department of Education	Did not participate		
Arkansas Department of Education	Did not participate		
Utah State Office of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
Oregon Department of Education	28	At least 6	18
Hawaii State Department of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
Idaho State Department of Education	17	N/A	5
District of Columbia Public Schools	21	N/A	At least 2
Tennessee Department of Education	Did not participate		
Delaware Department of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
New Jersey Department of Education	19	N/A	N/A
2003			
South Carolina Department of Education	N/A	N/A	2
New Mexico State Department of Public Education	28	N/A	N/A
State of New Hampshire Department of Education	Did not participate		
Alaska Department of Education and Early Development	6	N/A	N/A
Kansas State Department of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
Iowa Department of Education	Did not participate		
Pennsylvania Department of Education	At least 50	N/A	N/A
2004			
Michigan Department of Education	159	N/A	N/A

Grantee Name	# of Schools Eligible to Receive a Dissemination Award	# of Schools that Applied for a Dissemination Award	# of Schools Awarded Funding for a Dissemination Project
Texas Education Agency	N/A	N/A	N/A
Maryland State Department of Education	Did not participate		
California Department of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
Colorado Department of Education	75	N/A	N/A
Missouri Department of Education	Did not participate		
Georgia Department of Education	N/A	N/A	N/A
Massachusetts Department of Education	N/A	30+	14+
Indiana Department of Education	17	N/A	N/A
Ohio Department of Education	137	N/A	At least 27
2005			
Delaware Department of Education	11		
District of Columbia Public Schools	35		
State of Florida, Department of Education	N/A		
Idaho State Department of Education	Did not participate		
Minnesota Dept. of Children, Families & Learning	Over 60		
Nevada Department of Education	18		
New York State Education Department	N/A		
Oregon Department of Education	34		
Utah State Office of Education	N/A		
Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction	130		

* Data from many of the 2004 and 2005 grant recipients are unavailable because these grant cycles are still underway.

Finding: Between 2000 and 2005, only a few states had a large number of charter schools that met the minimum eligibility requirements to receive a dissemination grant.

Of the 50 applicants who received funding for dissemination between 2000 and 2005, 29 included at least partial information about how many schools would meet federal eligibility requirements to receive these funds. In most cases, state applicants included schools that had met the three-year eligibility requirement in their tally. In other cases, applicants included those schools that had been in existence three years *and* had made Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) under No Child Left Behind or met some other student achievement measure.

Of the 29 state applicants that included information about eligibility in their application, only eight had a relatively large number of schools (greater than 50) that met the three-year eligibility requirement. Not surprisingly, these eight states (CA, TX, FL, MI, CO, OH, MN, and WI) also have some of the oldest charter school laws in the country and are among the states with the largest numbers of charter schools. The largest number of eligible schools listed was in Michigan (159 in 2004), and there were some states (SC, GA, HI) with no schools eligible at the time they received their CSP grant.

Among the five case study sites, three had compiled information about the number of schools that were eligible for dissemination grant funds in at least one of the years studied. In the year 2005, Massachusetts officials reported that 28 schools were eligible

for dissemination funds and 6 actually applied for a dissemination grant. An external grant evaluation in Michigan found that in the year 2004–2005, 168 charter schools were eligible for a dissemination grant, and five were actually given an award. In Wisconsin, 284 schools were eligible for dissemination funds between 2000 and 2005 and 58 actually applied.

Finding: Limited data suggest that between 2000 and 2005, more than half of the charter schools that applied for a dissemination subgrant received funding.

Very few annual reports included information about how many schools applied for a dissemination grant in the previous grant cycle and how many actually received funding. As a result, the following information is suggestive rather than conclusive. Of the 40 state applicants that could potentially have submitted annual reports (not including the 10 states that received funding in 2005), six (NM, MN, NV, CA, NC, OR) included information about how many schools had applied for a grant in a given year *and* how many were awarded funding. In the years for which there are data in these states, 69 percent (73 out of 106) of the schools that applied were given a dissemination subgrant. By far the most subgrants were awarded in California, where 46 of the 70 school subgrant applicants received funding in the years for which there is data.

Because of uneven reporting, it proved equally challenging to determine how many schools in total were awarded with dissemination funds in the years between 2000 and 2004. Of the 40 state applicants that could potentially have submitted annual reports, only half (SC, KS, NM, PA, MA, CO, MI, OH, MN, TX, CA, FL, WI, NC, IL, CT, OR, ID, DC, PA) included information about the individual schools they had funded the previous grant cycle or year. In the years for which there is data from these states, the data indicate that at least 206 projects were funded.

Available data from the case study sites suggest that 56 percent of the schools that applied in these states between 2000 and 2005 received an award. See Table 6 for more detailed information about these five states.

Table 6: Number of Applications and Awards in Case Study States

State	Year	Number of Applications	Number of Awards
California	2000	6*	15
	2001	10	5
	2002	21*	9
	2003	9	2
	2004	No information available	No information available
	2005	24	15
Florida	2000	5	5
	2001	21	16
	2002	30	11
	2003	23	16
	2004	23	13

State	Year	Number of Applications	Number of Awards
	2005	2	2
Massachusetts	2000	15	10
	2001	9	6
	2002	9	8
	2003	22	14
	2004	10	9
	2005	6	4
Michigan	2000	Did not participate	Did not participate
	2001	14	7
	2002	6	3
	2003	5	2
	2004	11	3
	2005	4	1
Wisconsin	2000	5	4
	2001	1	1
	2002	10	8
	2003	12	6
	2004	22	9
	2005	8	5

* Complete numbers not available.

School Application Review Process

Finding: Most state applicants indicated that dissemination subgrant applications would be reviewed by a team that included external reviewers.

The subgrant application process at the state level is intended to be a competitive process for interested schools. For this reason, the state-level review of grant applications is an important factor in determining which schools meet state and federal guidelines. Ideally, all the schools that apply for a dissemination award would meet the state and federal criteria, and the team in charge of reviewing the applications would only select the highest quality projects for funding.

There are no federal guidelines concerning how states should screen and select subgrantees, so each state develops its own application review process. Consequently, states used different methods for reviewing dissemination grant applications and determining which schools to fund. Of the 50 applicants that received funding between 2000 and 2005, 24 included information about who would read the school's dissemination project proposals. Four of the state applicants explained that their review of grant applications would be done by an "internal" team of readers, in most cases, staff members at the state education department. Nine of the applicants said they would use an "external" team. The composition of the external team varied, but the members who were mentioned included charter school developers, former grantees, teachers, school district officials, members of state charter associations, and university faculty familiar with charter schools. Eight of the applicants employed a team of readers composed of both internal and external reviewers. The remaining three indicated that their

dissemination applications would be examined by a "panel," the composition of which was not indicated. In a few cases, the recommendations of the panel were forwarded to the State Board of Education for final approval.

The case study sites varied in whom they selected to review the applications. In Massachusetts, for example, grants were awarded by an internal team. Officials from the Charter School Office first eliminated any applications that did not meet the minimum requirements or did not adhere to the guidelines of the statute. Along with several reviewrs for other divisions of the state department of education, they then reviewed each remaining application and scored them on a scale of 1 to 100. After scoring the applications, the entire review team came together as a discussion group to fully approve, partially approve, or reject each application. Applications were then sent to the Board of Education for final approval.

In the past few years, a team of three people in California has reviewed the dissemination grants. This team included one person from the state charter school office and two external people who had experience with dissemination. The last committee included one state department staff member, one charter school authorizer and a representative from a state charter association.

In Wisconsin, the Advisory Council for Charter Schools, which was formed in August of 2005, recently began reviewing dissemination grants. Council members are appointed by the state superintendent and include charter school directors, teachers, parents, teacher's union representatives, school board members, charter advocates from universities, and members of the state charter school association. A state official in Wisconsin stated that she hoped this new system would give the process more stability and consistency over time.

In the past, Florida used a combination of internal reviewers from the state department of education and several external reviewers to review all the CSP subgrant awards. Starting in the 2005 grant cycle, Florida changed its review process to include national reviewers and local reviewers, but no one from the department. The grant readers included reviewers with charter school experience as well as grant readers with no charter school experience who could provide an outside perspective. In 2005, the state did not accept applications for dissemination grant awards, but readers for the start-up and development grants were flown to Florida for training and the grant review session. Starting next cycle, Florida hopes to move towards an online training and grant review system.

State Role in Using External Organizations to Facilitate Dissemination

Finding: Very few states encouraged schools to partner with external organizations to facilitate dissemination.

Of the 50 applications for dissemination grant funding that were funded between 2000 and 2005, only two mentioned that they intended to support partnerships or other collaborations with external organizations in order to facilitate dissemination. In

California, schools were required to describe how they might use statewide technical assistance organizations to help with dissemination, especially if these organizations would aid in reaching traditional public schools. In New Jersey's 2002 application, the state indicated that all three grantees would need to collaborate with each other and jointly provide technical assistance to a minimum of five schools.
Many of the state officials, grantees, and representatives from state charter support organizations in the five case study states who were interviewed found the issue of leveraging external support to be among the more controversial and least understood aspects of this grant program. While some states felt wary of funding projects that relied heavily or at all on external assistance, other states reported that schools would have a very difficult time implementing these projects without additional assistance. In California, for instance, state officials stated that they were careful during the review process to ensure that this grant program did not become a "pass-through" program that resulted in significant funding going to organizations other than schools. Officials in other states echoed similar concerns, particularly about funds going to "commercial" programs or organizations with their own "agendas."

That said, officials in Michigan, Massachusetts and Florida all expressed the view that many schools did not have the capacity to develop and implement dissemination projects on their own, both because of their other responsibilities and because they did not have the skills to produce videos, plan events, market their activities, etc. For this reason, state officials allowed schools to spend a percentage of their funds subcontracting with other organizations to help with some aspects of their project. These officials were mindful that the schools not contract with organizations they deemed inappropriate, but they did allow subcontracting with well-regarded organizations they felt could provide valuable assistance.

In Michigan, schools typically contracted with either an independent consultant or with the state charter support organization, the Michigan Association of Public School Academies. These external organizations provided help with grant writing, project development and marketing, and conference planning. In Massachusetts, the assistance often came from the state charter school association, along with a non-profit organization created for the purpose of disseminating best practices. This assistance came in the form of administrative services, help with identifying partner schools, distributing dissemination materials, facilitating workshops, and/or assisting with the application process.

In a few cases in various states, an outside organization played a more central role in the project. In Massachusetts, for example, a charter school recently used its dissemination funds (along with other funds it raised) to join with Harvard Graduate School of Education's Project Zero. The goal of the project was to foster cooperative relationships between charter and traditional public schools to examine the usefulness of a group learning model. School representatives and state officials said in interviews that the successful relationship building that happened between charter schools and traditional district schools was entirely due to the leverage of the Project Zero (PZ) group. Because of PZ's reputation for high-quality research and well-established relationships with

traditional public schools, the charter school running the project had no trouble finding interest among district schools. Officials pointed to this as an example of how an outside organization's capacity was successfully leveraged to maximize the success and impact of one school's dissemination project.

State-Level Program Evaluation

Finding: Very few states conducted evaluations of their statewide dissemination grant programs during the time period studied, but case study interviews found that some state directors questioned whether the dissemination grant program was having the desired level of impact.

During the years studied, the CSP application did not specify that each state needed to have a clearly defined plan to measure the impact of dissemination grant funds at the state level. In the application guidelines, the first of the competitive preferences (questions that could earn the applicants up to 40 additional points) encouraged applicants to describe a process of evaluation, but it was not required. In the annual reports, the Department of Education was more explicit in its expectations for evaluation. In the first Management Objective, states were required to report on how they had "established procedures for planning and evaluation of project activities to assure attainment of project goals, objectives, and outcomes." Also in the annual reports were Implementation Objectives, the last of which was "To establish an evaluation system at the organizational, program, and learner levels to document program and learner outcomes." Interviews with state officials and data from program files indicated that states were not clear about their responsibilities with regard to evaluation. The majority of states interpreted their role to be to ensure that school-level projects were evaluated against the outcomes included in the original subgrant applications. Very few states interpreted this wording to mean that the state office should conduct a statewide evaluation of the overall impact of the dissemination grant program.

Twenty-four of the state applicants mentioned a plan for evaluation in their application or their annual reports. Of these 24, half (12) referred to project-level evaluations. In each of these cases, the state required the schools themselves to evaluate the dissemination projects they developed and implemented. Most of these applicants required schools to include information about their evaluation plans in their applications. For example, in Nevada, "applicants need to indicate in their application how they will assess their success in dissemination." A few of the applicants mentioned that schools would be required to submit reports demonstrating progress toward achieving their proposed objectives and outcomes in their annual reports to the state department.

Seven of the 24 applicants conducted or planned to conduct some type of statewide evaluation. In Utah, the state office conducted an evaluation that included a report and exit interviews. The New Jersey state office used "multiple sources including school reports, student test results, and improved sustainability through increase in number of charter schools." The remaining five applicants (CT, PA, MI, TX, and IN) mentioned an evaluation plan that included an external evaluator to measure the impact of

dissemination grant activity. While four of these states did not specify whom they used or would use, one mentioned Western Michigan University.

One of the case study sites, Michigan, recently hired an outside evaluator to assess the entire CSP grant program, including dissemination grants. Interviews indicated that state officials in Michigan were concerned that there were no data measuring the impact of the program on student achievement in Michigan. Although this evaluation did not measure the impact dissemination projects had on student achievement, it did generate a list of program improvements that they are currently considering.

Both Massachusetts and Florida have plans to conduct a statewide evaluation of the program in the near future. In Florida, state officials have suspended the dissemination grant application process until they can conduct an evaluation and determine if dissemination funds have had a positive impact on student achievement in Florida. In Massachusetts, the Charter Schools Office hopes to hire an outside organization to examine the results of the dissemination grants in 2007. State officials would like to assess the gains that have been made and what impact the projects have had on MA charter schools.

Chapter 4: Overview of School Projects

Evaluation questions for this chapter:

- How do charter schools use their dissemination grant funds?
- Do charter schools use external organizations to facilitate dissemination?
- To what extent are charter schools measuring the impact of dissemination activities?
- What has been the impact of dissemination activity?
- Do certain kinds of dissemination activity appear more effective than others?

One of the most challenging aspects of this study was collecting information about specific school-level projects that have been funded through the dissemination grant program. The study team intended to review state-level renewal applications and state annual reports from 2000–2005 in order to answer the questions listed above. Unfortunately, the 21 states that applied for a second CSP grant during the observation period and chose to participate in the dissemination grant program a second time as well were not required to provide information about past subgrants to the Department of Education as part of their renewal applications. Some applicants chose to voluntarily include specific information about past subgrants, but most applicants did not. Even in those cases where applicants chose to include information about past subgrantees, in many instances, applicants provided no more than the name of the school and the amount of funding awarded. In a few cases, applicants included information about the type of project that was funded, the nature and purpose of the project, the intended audience, and even, in some rare cases, the means by which the project had been or would be evaluated. States' annual reports, the other source of information about specific school-level projects, proved equally elusive. The study team had access to a full set of annual reports

from only 13 of the 29 states that participated in the dissemination grant program from 2000–2005. States were not required to provide subgrant information to the Department of Education as part of their reporting requirements for these annual reports. Just as with the application, some states chose to voluntarily include specific information about subgrants, but many applicants did not. Overall, the information the study team was able to collect from these two sources was limited to what applicants and states voluntarily chose to provide. For this reason, the analysis included in this section should be considered merely suggestive and in no way definitive.

As a result of these issues, the study team chose to rely heavily on the interview data collected from the five case study sites (California, Florida, Michigan, Wisconsin and Massachusetts) for information about how charter schools use their dissemination grant funds.

Audience

Finding: While the vast majority of schools intended to target both charter and non-charter school teachers and leaders, case study data suggested that a smaller percentage were able to find non-charter school partners.

As mentioned above, the CSP program files did not yield extensive information about individual school projects funded with dissemination funds. Of the 205 projects that were mentioned, about one-third (73) mentioned the target audience for the project. In some cases, it was unclear from the data if the project descriptions described what schools intended to do or what they had done. The majority of these project descriptions (29) targeted both charter and non-charter schools, while 24 focused only on charter schools. None of the project descriptions indicated they would focus only on non-charter schools. In addition to or instead of focusing on school personnel, some projects identified other audiences. These other audiences included charter school authorizers, policymakers, education reform organizations, and the general public.

Interviews with state officials, grantees and representatives of charter support organizations suggested that the majority of the projects funded in their states, though not all, targeted other charter schools. State officials in the case study sites all commented that this was the case in their states. These officials cited the hostile political environment between charter and non-charter schools as the primary reason for this.

In Wisconsin, a state official indicated that the topic of the project had a strong influence on the target audience. She described how the target audience for dissemination projects had changed over time in her state. Although she was not at the State Education Department until fairly recently, her impression is that during the early years, dissemination funds were often awarded to school projects targeted at new and developing charter schools. The primary focus of the program, she believes, was to get more charter schools open and running well. Over time, she has observed a shift toward funding promising school-based instructional programs that target specific student needs.

Because these projects can be implemented more widely, she has observed that project organizers are more likely to include non-charter schools in their target audience.

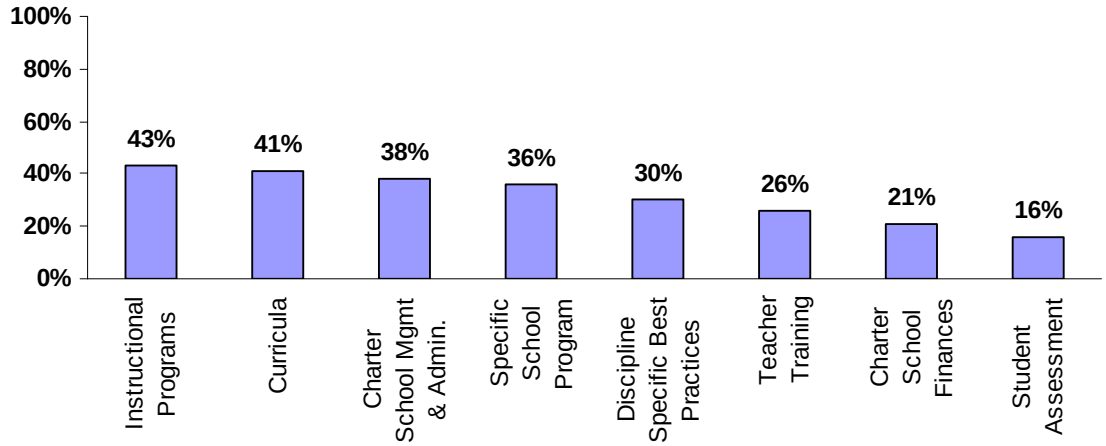
An interview with a school leader in Michigan highlighted another way that a charter school leader attracted non-charter partners for her projects. In two separate dissemination projects, she disseminated information about a unique school design, one targeted at very high-risk students and the other at Montessori schools. In both cases she had a lot of interest from charter and non-charter leaders interested in learning more about her program. By focusing the dissemination project on the narrowly defined needs of a select group of schools, she was able to attract interest.

Topic of Dissemination

Finding: Instructional programs and curriculum material were the most common types of information being disseminated.

In analyzing the CSP applications and annual reports, the study team found references to 206 specific projects. While the amount of information included for each project varied significantly, information about the topic of the dissemination activities was included in about half (110) of the project descriptions. The type of project varied widely in terms of the kind of information disseminated, with many projects addressing more than one topic. The most common topics were instructional programs (43 projects) and curricula (41 projects). Thirty-eight focused on charter school management and administration. Thirty-six schools chose to disseminate information about a specific school program such as the Carver Model of Policy Governance, Core Knowledge, the ACE program, and Horace Mann Charter Schools. Discipline-specific best practices, such as technology; oral, writing, reading and thinking skills; art; and mathematics, were the topic of dissemination for 30 projects and teacher training was covered by about a quarter of all projects (26). Twenty-one schools disseminated information about charter school finances, while 16 focused on student assessment.

Figure 2. Type of Information Disseminated*



* Sum of percentages is greater than 100 because some states listed more than one goal.

Interviews with case study sites did not yield any trends in project topics. Most interviewees responded that their office had funded a variety of topics over the years. That said, several states did report that they funded some of the allowable activities in the statute more than others. For example, in Wisconsin, grant reviewers recently shifted their focus from projects that addressed the needs of start-up charter schools to projects that addressed discipline-specific best practices, curricula, and school-based programs. In Michigan, state officials indicated that they had not tended to fund start-up efforts or evaluation projects but were considering doing so in the future. In Florida, dissemination projects have primarily addressed instructional methodologies, curricula, educational leadership, and classroom management strategies.

Method of Dissemination

Finding: The vast majority of schools disseminated their promising practices through workshops. Case study interviewees expressed concerns about the impact these workshops had on instructional and other school practices.

Some of the program files contained information about how schools intended to disseminate their promising practices. Frequently, schools used a variety of methods in order to spread their message to the largest audience. The most common method of disseminating best practices was through workshops. Of the 205 projects for which there is data, well over two-thirds (146) of the dissemination projects involved some sort of workshop. In some cases, the description included information about whether the workshop involved ongoing interaction between the participants, or whether there was only a single meeting. In other cases, this information was not provided. Creating some sort of handbook or publication of promising practices was also a popular way to disseminate information; 35 schools chose this tactic. Several of the schools (27) chose to disseminate their best practices through a mentoring relationship or partnership, although again the level of interaction between the partners or mentors was often not specified. Several schools (26) provided video or DVD resources for their partner schools, while others (26) chose to assist schools by providing curriculum materials. Twenty-three schools turned to technology and disseminated information with the help of web resources they created. Funding statewide or regional networks and creating resource centers was the least common method of dissemination, chosen by only 19 schools.

Case study data supported the above findings on the popularity of workshops, followed by handbooks and other descriptive materials. Several states reported that schools had chosen to do web-based projects and several also reported that schools had produced videos. When asked to rate these dissemination methods, several interviewees expressed concern about the impact these activities had on school improvement. While a few respondents thought the videos and other materials had been helpful, the majority of the people interviewed felt that these materials were too often left on shelves and not used. Perhaps in reaction to this, several of the state officials interviewed indicated that they felt the most successful projects involved mentoring or other ongoing, “hands-on”

relationships between schools. Although these projects involved fewer people overall, respondents felt they had more impact on instructional practice.

School Role in Using External Organizations to Facilitate Dissemination

Finding: National data do not include much evidence of schools' use of external partners to facilitate dissemination. In case study states, school use of external organizations varied.

In reviewing the information about specific school projects that was voluntarily included in the renewal applications and the annual performance reports submitted to the Department of Education between 2000 and 2005, only a few of the schools (7 schools in CA, CO, MA, NJ, and WI) mentioned that they intended to form or had formed partnerships with external organizations in order to facilitate their individual dissemination efforts.

In its 2001 application, California included a proposal to provide dissemination funds to five charter schools that wanted to establish regional networks throughout the state based on the highly successful San Diego Charter School Consortium. At the outset of the project, the five schools proposed that the San Diego Charter School Consortium would take the lead in sharing what they had done. They also proposed that a statewide charter association, the California Network of Educational Charters (CANEC), would act as lead facilitator for this project.

In its 2003 annual report, Massachusetts described how grant funds awarded to the Abby Kelley Foster Regional Charter School were used to direct a project in partnership with the Massachusetts Charter School Association. This project involved nine charter school leaders who each contributed a paper outlining the best practices and innovations at their schools.

In its 2003 annual report, New Jersey reported that two charter schools, Hoboken Charter School and Jersey City Community Charter School, worked in partnership with the New Jersey Charter Resource Center to document and disseminate highly effective charter school practices at their school and at other New Jersey charter schools.

As mentioned above, case study interviews indicated that states differed widely in how much they encouraged or allowed schools to contract out particular services related to dissemination. Interviews with school leaders confirmed this variation. In Wisconsin, for example, using dissemination funds to pay for consultant services in carrying out a dissemination project did not appear to be a common practice. One school leader reported that the work was done entirely by teachers, and she felt it was important for her teachers to have this responsibility. Another school leader explained that the state charter school association played a limited but important role helping locate partner schools and distributing web resources, videos and written materials to interested parties.

Alternatively, schools in Massachusetts were very open to assistance from outside organizations and had, in most cases, contracted out parts of their project to private consultants or to a state charter school association. Several of the schools interviewed suggested they could not envision how any school could complete a quality project without the help of an outside organization. One school leader suggested that schools be required in their applications to identify what parts of the project they felt they would need assistance with so that the state department of education could suggest possible resources.

School leaders in Michigan also reported that they had contracted with a consultant and/or with the state charter support association, MAPSA, for support with their dissemination project.

School Project-Level Evaluation

Finding: The majority of state applicants that participated in the dissemination grant program relied on schools to create their own plans for evaluation.

In reviewing the applications from the 29 states that were awarded dissemination grant funds between 2000–2005, and in reviewing the available annual reports from those grantees, the study team was able to identify only three states that chose to include detailed information about their evaluation requirements for schools.

In its 2002 annual performance report to the DOE, California described the charter office's ongoing commitment to evaluating the dissemination grant program. As part of this evaluation, the California Department of Education tied subgrant payments to the performance of specific benchmarks by specific due dates and had a grant-monitoring program that included school-site visits and records reviews. In addition, subgrant recipients were required to submit annual reports that included information about the status of their grant projects.

In Colorado's 2002 annual progress report, the Colorado Department of Education described how grant readers for the dissemination grant program imposed a mandatory program evaluation by an external researcher for projects funded for two years. One of the required elements of this evaluation was an examination of student academic achievement as measured by the state testing program, the CSAP. In its 2004 application, Colorado referred to the results of an earlier evaluation that indicated that there was a correlation between schools that were "highly" or "somewhat" involved in Core Knowledge professional development activities sponsored by dissemination grant funds and students' achievement scores on CSAP.

In their 2002 application for dissemination grant funds, the District of Columbia Government's Office of Research and Analysis described its plan to work in collaboration with the Division of Research and Evaluation to develop an evaluation instrument to measure the effectiveness of dissemination activities. There is no subsequent reference to indicate implementation of this evaluation plan.

Interviews with state officials, grantees, and representatives of state charter support organizations in the five case study states indicated that project-level evaluation was one of the most challenging aspects of grant administration. While all of those interviewed supported the need to evaluate school-level dissemination projects, few interviewees felt that schools had the tools or the capacity to effectively evaluate the projects.

State officials in California cited timing and capacity as the major barriers to project evaluation. One official commented that neither the three-year state grant cycle nor the two-year school grant cycle was long enough to measure results, particularly with respect to student achievement. In California, schools typically spent their first year developing their project and their second year implementing it. Given this time frame, schools did not have time to measure the impact of the project before their funding ended and their reporting was complete.

Another concern cited by the several interviewees was a lack of knowledge about how the state office or the schools could develop reliable and valid evaluation methods, particularly given the varied nature of the projects themselves. Most state officials indicated that the narrative they required schools to submit documenting their progress as part of their annual reporting served as their current evaluation tool. Those schools that did provide more than just a narrative often reported on the number of attendees at an event or results from a survey. Schools did not typically include measures that examined the impact dissemination activities had on student achievement.

Finding: The vast majority of state applicants failed to report on indicators of success.

Very few of the state applicants that mentioned evaluation in either their application or their annual reports (5 of 24) specified what indicators they planned to use or expected schools to use to determine if dissemination projects had met their objectives. Two of these five applicants, California and New York, stated that schools would be responsible for developing their own indicators. The other three states were more specific. In New Mexico, state officials planned to examine the original request for applications, the materials developed, the number of schools including charter schools that utilize dissemination practices, the number of press releases, positive feedback from policymakers, and any increase of charter school representatives on state boards. In Colorado, state officials planned to look at student academic achievement as measured by the Colorado Student Assessment Program. In Utah, the following indicators were mentioned: “were goals met, what feedback have they received, what improvements are suggested.”

Chapter 5: Case Study Findings on Barriers to Effective Dissemination

The following section outlines the barriers to effective dissemination in the current grant program that were noted by interviewees during the case study phase of this evaluation. During these interviews, interviewees were also asked to discuss potential responses to these problems. These responses — which vary from slight modifications to the program as it currently exists to wholesale changes in the structure of the grant program itself — are listed after each problem statement. In some cases, a particular response is listed more than once because it was mentioned as a potential response to more than one problem. In these cases this is noted in parentheses after the response statement.

Current Barriers at the School Level

- Problem: Many charter school personnel lack the capacity (time and skills) to implement a high-quality dissemination project.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Give schools more freedom to contract with outside organizations for project-related services.
        - Fund organizations that have more capacity (statewide charter support organizations, authorizers, state education offices, universities). These organizations could then share a percentage of the funds with participating schools.

- Problem: Schools do not know what types of dissemination activities are likely to have the greatest impact on student achievement.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Enable schools to implement high-quality projects by funding research to determine what types of projects have the most impact on student achievement. Share this research with potential applicants and with state officials in the form of tools that could be used during the selection process.
        - Fund projects for more than two years so that there is sufficient time to evaluate impact.

- Problem: Often difficult for charter schools to find non-charter schools interested in being involved in dissemination projects.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Encourage states to play a role in helping schools identify low-performing schools that could directly benefit from the project the school is planning to develop.
        - Encourage schools to share a large enough percentage of the funding with target schools so they have a strong incentive to participate in project.
        - Award priority points during the application process to projects that have an already identified non-charter school target.

        - Expend more effort to publicize charter schools' successes so districts are more interested in learning from their promising practices.
        - Make program as a whole more collaborative — give grants to networks of schools that want to work together to share promising practices.
        - Award funds to other organizations (exclusively or through contracts) that have leverage over non-charter schools and districts to encourage them to participate.
        - Rethink need to have non-charter school recipients — focus efforts on sharing promising practices with other charter or charter-like schools.

- Problem: Many non-charter schools do not have the flexibility to implement programs charter schools want to disseminate. (New math curriculum, for example)
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Require charter schools to include information about non-charter target schools in their applications, including contracts or guarantees of flexibility from school and district.
        - Rethink need to have non-charter school recipients — focus efforts on sharing promising practices with other charter or charter-like schools that have more freedom to adopt promising practices. (Also mentioned above)

Current Barriers at the State Level

- Problem: Many states struggle to find qualified schools interested in applying for dissemination grant funds.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Allow schools to benefit more directly from participation by offering larger grants to fewer schools or by allowing schools more leeway to invest funds in resources related to project implementation.
        - Allow schools to apply for more than one dissemination grant.
        - Give schools more freedom to contract with outside organizations for project-related services. (Also mentioned above)
        - Make program as a whole more collaborative — give grants to networks of schools that want to work together to share promising practices.
        - Identify grantees publicly and broadly as having a high-quality educational program so schools can leverage the dissemination grant to attract additional resources and to recruit students.
        - Solicit help from charter support organizations and charter school authorizers to identify schools that have promising practices and then market the grant to these schools.

        - Fund organizations that have more capacity (statewide charter support organizations, authorizers, state education offices, universities) and that have an interest in disseminating charter school promising practices. (Also mentioned above)

- Problem: Because some states struggle to find qualified applicants, grant process at the state level is not always highly competitive.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Allow applicants to submit preliminary proposals to the state office to make sure schools are meeting quality and other requirements and have a strong proposal overall.
        - Enable states to fund high-quality projects by funding research to determine what types of projects have the most impact on student achievement. Share this research with potential applicants and with state officials in the form of tools that could be used during the selection process. (Also mentioned above)

- Problem: States lack evidence that dissemination projects are having an impact on target schools, either by improving student achievement or some other measure.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Fund research to determine what types of projects and what dissemination methods have the most impact on student achievement.
        - Provide states and schools with evaluation guidelines and tools to help them evaluate the impact dissemination projects are having on student achievement at the school and state level.

- Problem: Some states struggle with whether and how to develop state-level priorities for the dissemination grant program.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Encourage state directors to share information about the impact state-level priorities have had on various aspects of the grant process (recruitment, selection, quality of projects, etc.).

Current Barriers at the Federal Level

- Problem: Many states are unclear about whether schools can contract with outside providers to help them plan and implement dissemination activities. They also do not know what types of services are allowable.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Provide clear and consistent guidance to states about the amount of contracting that is allowable, which organizations schools are allowed to contract with, and what services these organizations can provide.

- Problem: Because 90 percent of CSP funds go toward start-up and development grants, the dissemination grant program is often a low priority for state directors.
    - Possible responses suggested by case study site personnel:
        - Create a separate grant program for dissemination. (Also mentioned above)

- Problem: No evidence about impact of dissemination grant program on student achievement nationwide.
    - Possible responses:
        - Fund large-scale evaluation to determine whether the dissemination grant program has had an impact on student achievement.

Chapter 6: Recommendations

Reviewing the data collected from the program files as well as from case study interviews, the study team developed a series of policy recommendations for state and federal officials. These recommendations include a range of responses that call for increasing levels of change to the current program. Because there is a possibility that the federal statute that governs the Charter Schools Program may be revised in the next few years, the study team thought it worthwhile to put forth a series of recommendations that could guide policymakers both now and in the future. Therefore, we present three sets of options for policymakers to consider: 1) incremental changes that have the potential to improve how the current grant program is administered; 2) substantial changes that would require altering the federal statute governing the program; and 3) elimination of the dissemination grant program while directing more CSP funds toward replication of high-quality charter schools with a proven record of improving student achievement.

Option One: Improve the current program

Leverage capacity. Data from the national review and the case study interviews suggest that many charter school personnel lack the capacity (time and skills) to implement a high-quality dissemination project. Charter school leaders and staff members have multiple demands on their time and energy and many are unable or unwilling to jeopardize their success by implementing a large-scale dissemination project. Although in many cases schools address this problem by hiring outside contractors to take on some of the tasks associated with the project, several state officials expressed uncertainty about the extent to which federal guidelines allow schools to contract with outside providers to help them plan and implement dissemination activities. The following recommendations, many of which were proposed by state officials, could potentially address some of these problems. The entities listed in parentheses indicate whether state-level officials (states) or federal officials (USDOE) would be primarily responsible for implementing the recommendation.

- Give grants to networks of schools that want to work together to share promising practices. (States)

- Give schools more freedom to contract with outside organizations for project-related services. (USDOE)
- Provide clear and consistent guidance to states about the amount of contracting that is allowable, what kinds of organizations schools may contract with, and what services these organizations can provide. (USDOE)
- Allow schools to apply for more than one dissemination grant. Once schools have completed a dissemination project, they will have increased capacity to develop and implement another project. (USDOE)

Bolster participation. Data further suggest that many states struggle to find qualified schools interested in applying for dissemination grant funds. Because some states struggle to find qualified applicants, the grant process at the state level is not always highly competitive.

- Identify grantees publicly and broadly as having high-quality educational programs so schools can leverage dissemination grants to attract additional resources and to recruit students. (States)
- Solicit help from charter support organizations and charter school authorizers to identify schools that have promising practices and then market the grant to these schools. (States)
- Allow applicants to submit preliminary proposals to the state office to make sure schools are meeting quality requirements and have a strong proposal overall. (States)
- Share research about high-quality dissemination practices with potential applicants and with state officials in the form of tools that could be used during the selection process. (USDOE)
- Allow schools to benefit more directly from participation by offering larger grants to fewer schools or by allowing schools more leeway to invest funds internally in project-related resources that will have long-term benefit to the school. (States and USDOE)

Expand current demand. State officials and school-level grantees report that it is often difficult for charter schools to find schools interested in participating in dissemination projects. This is particularly true with efforts to encourage non-charter school participation. In addition, some schools report that many non-charter schools do not have the flexibility to implement programs charter schools want to disseminate.

- Encourage charter schools to share a large enough percentage of the funding with target schools so they have a strong incentive to participate in the project. (States)
- Award priority points during the application process to projects that have an already identified list of charter and/or non-charter school targets. (States)
- Require charter schools to include information about non-charter target schools in their applications, including contracts or guarantees of flexibility from school and district. (States)

- Expend more effort to publicize charter schools' successes so other schools and districts are more interested in learning from their promising practices. (States)
- Encourage states to play a role in helping charter schools identify low-performing schools that could directly benefit from the project the school is planning to develop. (USDOE)
- Rethink need to have non-charter school recipients — allow efforts to focus on sharing promising practices with other charter or charter-like schools. (States and USDOE)

Fund evaluation. Some state officials and schools report that they do not know what types of dissemination activities are likely to have the greatest impact on student achievement. States also struggle to understand if dissemination projects are having an impact on target schools statewide, either by improving student achievement or some other measure. At the federal level, there is no evidence about the impact of the dissemination grant program on student achievement nationwide.

- As the dissemination program moves forward, fund a large-scale national evaluation to determine whether the dissemination grant program is having an impact on student achievement. (USDOE)
- Provide states and schools with evaluation guidelines and tools to help them evaluate the impact dissemination projects are having on student achievement at the school and state level. (USDOE)
- Fund projects for more than two years so that there is sufficient time to evaluate impact. (States and USDOE)
- Fund research to determine what types of projects and what methods of dissemination have the most impact on student achievement. Share this research with potential applicants and with state officials in the form of tools that could be used during the selection process. (States and USDOE)

Improve reporting procedures. In the course of this evaluation, it became clear to the study team that annual performance reports do not provide accurate and consistent information about the amount of funding spent on dissemination, the competitiveness of the grant process, the types of activities that are being funded, or the impact these projects are having on the target schools. This finding is echoed in other reports, including a recent Office of Management and Budget evaluation of the CSP program (2005), as well as an evaluation of the Public Charter Schools Program conducted by SRI International in 2004.

- Improve annual performance reporting process by requiring states to: 1) submit accurate financial information in a consistent format that makes it possible to determine how much states are spending on dissemination; 2) include information about the number of schools that were eligible, that applied, and that were funded on an annual basis; 3) provide information about the types of projects that were funded; and 4) report on state- and project-level evaluation results. (USDOE)

Option Two: Open up the application process

An alternative to making changes to the dissemination program as currently configured would be to significantly alter the program by creating a separate grant program for dissemination that is administered quite differently.

There are several strong reasons for considering this, the primary one being that there is currently very little evidence to suggest that the current program is having an impact on school-level practices in other schools or, ultimately, on student achievement. While some projects that have been implemented under this program may have had an impact, there is little reason to think that, overall, the program is having its desired effect.

In addition, an entirely separate grant program for dissemination would help applicants focus their applications and their performance reporting on the specific purpose of dissemination. Many of the problems with the current dissemination program seem to be a result of it having been folded into a larger, existing program. Therefore, state officials understandably discuss and in some cases treat it as an afterthought relative to the other 90 percent of the CSP funds that are spent on charter school start-up and development. Establishing a separate grant program exclusively to fund dissemination would address this concern.

To address the capacity problems mentioned above, policymakers should also consider establishing a nationwide RFP process to allocate dissemination funds in place of the current practice of directing all dissemination funds to individual charter schools via SEAs. While some states and individual charter schools are well equipped to manage dissemination efforts, many lack the capacity and incentive to focus on this work. Opening up the process to a wider range of organizations with the capabilities and will to disseminate best practices effectively would inject a new level of quality and energy into the work of spreading charter schools' success more broadly.

In such a process, multiple organizations would be eligible for dissemination funding in addition to states. Eligible organizations could include individual charter schools, consortia of charter schools, districts, states, and nonprofit organizations. Applicants could propose to work within a single city or state, or to work more broadly. In order to direct funds to organizations with the potential to have a significant impact, federal officials could offer fewer awards for larger amounts of money. Currently, states collectively can spend up to $20 million on dissemination annually. If these numbers remain constant, the federal government could plan to award 10 grants averaging $2 million annually, for example. Organizations could propose a range of dissemination activities to conduct with this grant funding, including replication of a successful school design in new schools, through a charter management organization or other network structure, as well as consulting or training designed to help existing schools adopt an effective practice.

The criteria for awarding dissemination grants nationally could be relatively straightforward and include:

- **The overall quality of the project.** Is the project based on a proven approach to improving student achievement developed or executed primarily within one or more public charter schools? Is there evidence that the proposed method of dissemination or replication is likely to be successful in spreading the effective charter school approach? Only methods with the potential to have real and lasting effects, either through the creation of new schools or transforming existing schools significantly, would be considered.
- **The capacity of the organization.** Does the applicant have the capacity to execute the plan?
- **Level of impact.** How many schools and ultimately how many students would realistically be affected by this project? What types of outcomes are likely? Are project outcomes tied to improved student achievement?

Option Three: Eliminate the dissemination grant program and direct more CSP funds to replication

A final option is to consider eliminating the option for states to participate in the dissemination grant program altogether. This would not require substantial changes to the existing CSP grant structure — state charter school offices would still be the only entities eligible to apply for funds — but these offices would no longer have the option to spend 10 percent of their funds on school-based dissemination projects. In place of dissemination, the statute could require states to spend a percentage of their grant funds on replicating successful charter school models in new schools. In this way, dissemination funds would be redirected toward an alternative form of "dissemination," scaling up existing charter school models that have a proven record of improving student achievement, rather than the existing program that forces schools to tackle all of the barriers associated with disseminating successful programs and practices to other schools.

In the past few years there has been growing national interest in the "replication" strategy. Advocates of replication argue that the best way to improve student achievement is to identify the most successful charter school models and replicate those models on a regional or even national scale. The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Walton Family Foundations, and intermediate organizations such as NewSchools Venture Fund and the Charter Growth Fund, have made significant grants in support of replication. They have also begun to identify the major barriers to successful scale-up and worked to develop strategies and tools to overcome these challenges. NewSchools Venture Fund, for example, provides management support in the form of board membership, strategic planning, and results monitoring to its grantees.

Each of these funders has already developed tools for screening potential schools and school leaders that could be more widely shared, but at a minimum, states would need to develop replication funding criteria that include:

- **A proven record of academic success.** Schools considered for replication funding would need to have demonstrated dramatic, measurable gains in student achievement, particularly among underserved or marginalized student populations.
- **Strong entrepreneurial leadership.** The success of any replication effort will depend in large part on the ability of the leadership team to execute a complex scale-up effort. For this reason, the leadership team should have not only educational expertise, but also financial and management experience or the ability to access that experience.
- **The potential to have an impact on large numbers of students.** In addition to being academically successful, the school model should address the identified needs of large numbers of students. While some excellent charter schools serve relatively small student populations, programs that address the challenges that are common to large numbers of students (urban students, at-risk students, etc.) who live in diverse geographic regions are the best candidates for replication.

These three options present very different levels of change in the current structure of this program. Regardless of the specific steps that policymakers decide to take with regard to improving how charter schools disseminate their promising practices, one thing that is clear from the existing program is the need for rigorous evaluation that will inform future development.

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[1] Nathan, J. (1996). *Charter schools: Creating hope and opportunity for American education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, p. 205.
[2] Finn, C., Manno, B., & Vanourek, G. (2000). *Charter schools in action*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, p. 204.
[3] Andy Smarnik.
[4] Education Policy Institute, 2005; http://www.educationalpolicy.org/pdf/KIPP.pdf)
[5] For example, a study by the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) that analyzed data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress concluded that on a national scale, charter school students had lower achievement, both in fourth and eighth grade, than other public school students. These findings were supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute for Educational Statistics in 2005, but strongly refuted by a third prominent study by Caroline Hoxby at Harvard University who found that charter school students were more likely to be proficient in reading and math on state tests than students who attended similar non-charter public schools.
[6] Steiner, L. (2000). *A review of the research literature on scaling-up in education.* Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. Available at: http://www.ncrel.org/csri/resources/scaling/review.htm
[7] Funding in excess of $200 million directed to per-pupil facilities matching program.
[8] There are four states in which schools apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education for a CSP grant, instead of going through a state agency. These states are Arizona, Mississippi, New Hampshire, and

Wyoming. See Chapter 2: State Participation in Dissemination Grant Program, for more detail. If a state chooses not to apply for CSP funding or is not awarded grant money, individual schools may apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education for a CSP grant, provided they meet the eligibility requirements.

[9] For more details, see the law at www.uscharterschools.org/pdf/fr/expansion_act.pdf.

[10] Coding rubrics and the full dataset are available upon request.

[11] OMB evaluation.

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