

# **2006 Special Education Services in Charter Schools:**

*Surveying Perceptions of Charter School Administrators and  
Special Education Directors*



**February 2007**

**Colorado Department of Education**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2002, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) published a study on charter schools and special education that documented significant unresolved issues between Colorado charter schools and Local Education Agencies (LEAs). This study specifically examined the cost and quality of services, school district/Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)-school communications and support, and school knowledge of and compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Since then, the number of charter schools in Colorado has grown. The state has made regulatory and legislative changes including the creation of a statewide chartering agency – the Colorado Charter School Institute. In accordance with the 2002 recommendations, CDE has sought to increase the capacity of charter schools and districts by providing trainings, guidelines, guidebooks, a sample compliance plan, and other resources.

In light of these developments, new research was deemed necessary. Building on the 2002 study, this study provides 1) updated information on charter school demographics, special education services, funding mechanisms, and satisfaction levels; 2) details on the progress made on the implementation of the 2002 recommendations; and 3) a comprehensive set of new recommendations based on findings presented in these data.

Drawn from 178 survey responses and 21 interviews, the data shows a growing level of support through CDE guidance and training as well as district/BOCES provided technical support, more cooperation between schools and LEAs, and some improvement in their relationship. This progress notwithstanding, there are still gaps in cooperation and information – particularly in the area of finance, institutional capacity, and support and guidance materials.

These gaps can be filled in part with information shared through guidance materials and training for school administrators and LEA personnel. As noted in the recommendations, planning and engagement are essential. School founders should engage in comprehensive planning for special education before the school opens its doors. With clear information about finance models and costs provided by the LEA, the school and the district/BOCES would be able to better negotiate a plan that best serves the students. Once open, the school should be able to draw upon the district/BOCES, the state, and outside organizations for training, guidance, mentoring, and technical assistance. The data gathered for this study suggests that many of these activities are presently being conducted at schools across the state but they are far from the standard.

As the number of charter schools continues to grow, it is essential that capacity building activities become fully integrated into the education system. Colorado parents benefit from being able to choose among traditional and charter public schools. Building the capacity in charter schools to serve students with special needs will ensure that their families have full access to Colorado's school choice opportunities.

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## **PART I**

### Introduction

First authorized in 1991 in Minnesota, charter schools are independently managed public schools that enjoy varying degrees (depending on state law) of freedom from state and local regulation. Today, according to the Center for Education Reform (2006), nearly 4,000 public charter schools educate an estimated 1.15 million children in 40 states and the District of Columbia.

As public schools, charter schools are open to all students, including those with disabilities. Under federal law, the Local Education Agency (LEA) is obligated to provide services to students with disabilities enrolled in charter schools in the same manner as they do such children in their traditional public schools. When a charter school is its own LEA, it is solely responsible for special education. Charter schools that are part of LEAs, as they are in Colorado, must work with the LEA in the provision of services. In Colorado, there are three types of LEAs – school districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and the Charter School Institute (CSI), a statewide chartering authority. For the purposes of this study, “LEA” includes all three agencies and “district” includes the CSI.

Cooperation between LEAs and schools can be challenging. Project SEARCH (Rhim, 2001), a national study that included a Colorado case study, identified the challenges inherent in this cooperative arrangement: “Districts and charter schools must negotiate to determine how to deliver special education in charter schools. There are inherent tensions underlying the negotiations stemming from districts’ legal obligations due to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the charter schools’ desire for autonomy” (p.10). She recommended districts and charter schools work out many of the essential details during the application process and for districts to build charter school capacity through technical assistance. Finance issues, the study accurately predicted, would continue to be a challenge in Colorado.

### Background

#### *Charter Schools and Colorado*

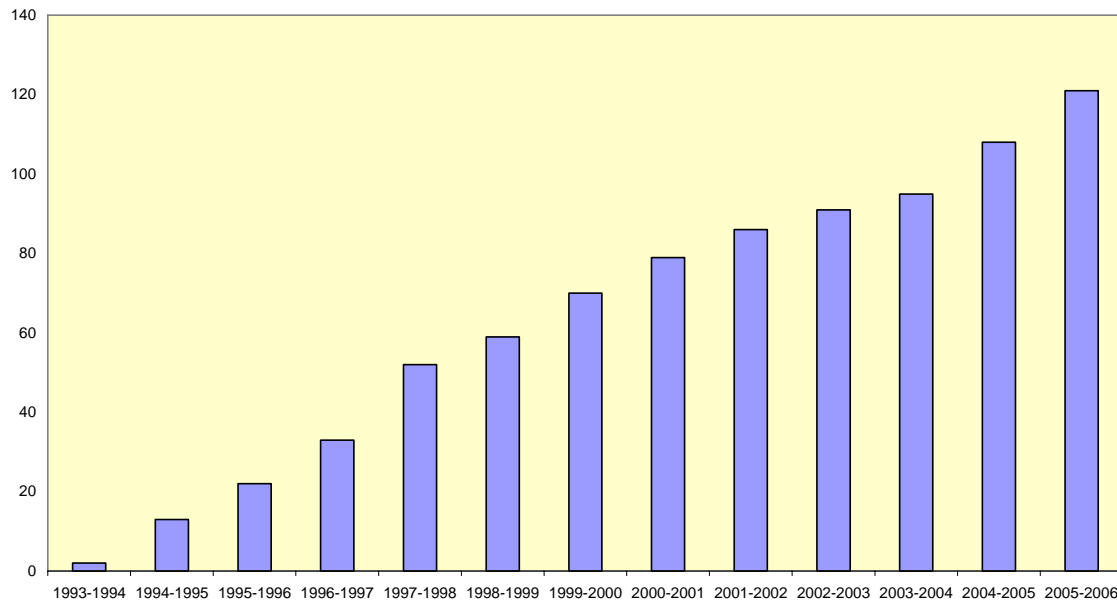
Enacted in 1993, Colorado’s charter school law has led to the creation of 121 schools (as of 2005) or over six percent of the total number of schools. These charter schools enroll 44,254 students while another 25,195 are wait-listed (Charter School Enrollment by Grade, 2005; and DeSchryver, 2006). Students with disabilities represented 6.8% of their enrollment in the 2004-2005 school year. While the percentage has grown, it remains less than the state average of 11.1% (DeSchryver, 2006).

As of the 2004-2005 school year, 45 of the 181 school districts have chartered schools (DeSchryver, 2006). Complementing Colorado’s public school open enrollment laws and district-run choice schools (option schools), charter schools have increasingly become a valued part of the education landscape. As Graph 1

illustrates, the number of charter schools has grown significantly from two schools to 121 schools in just 13 years.

Enrollment has also grown significantly. According to Ziebarth (2005), Colorado has added an average of nine schools a year. He also noted that Colorado has more suburban charter schools than any other state. The Colorado Department of Education has published significant rates of growth (DeSchryver, 2006). See Graph 2.

**Graph 1: Charter School Growth Between 1993-2005**



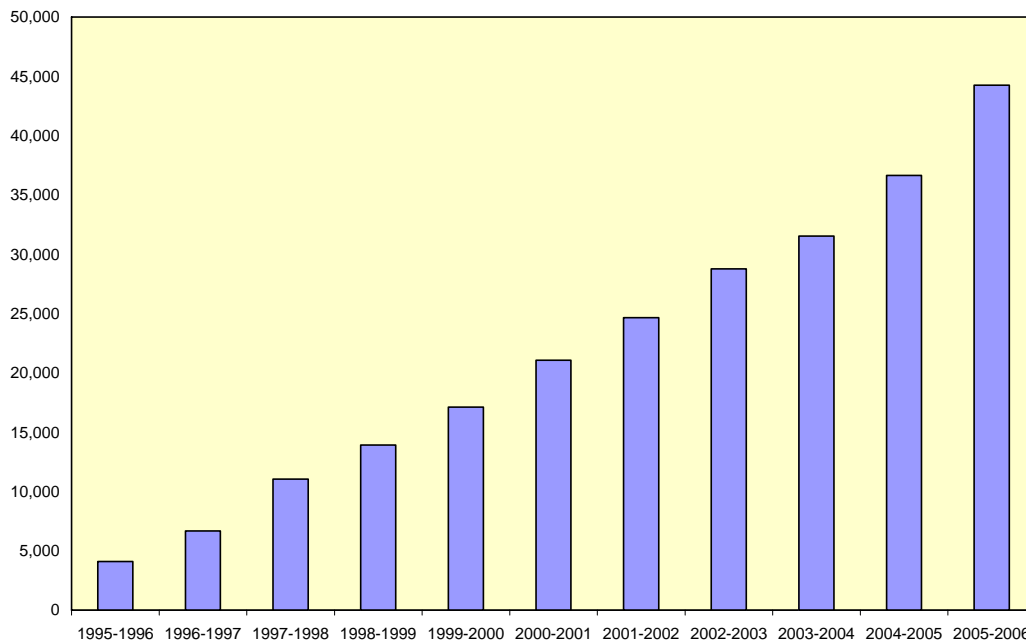
Source: Todd Ziebarth, "Peaks and Valleys," and Colorado Department of Education.

### *Colorado Charter School & Special Education Funding*

The Colorado Public School Finance Act of 1994 governs most funding for Colorado's public schools. In that document, as part of the funding formula, CDE defines the "Total Program" formula as a base amount derived from the annual pupil count adjusted for district-by-district variances in cost of living, personnel, district size, and number of at-risk students (Freppel, n.d. and Understanding Colorado School Finance and Categorical Program Funding, 2006).

Each school district is guaranteed a minimum Total Program amount of \$5,865.00 (for 2006-2007) per child. Local monies derived from specific ownership (such as vehicle registration) and local property taxes fund most of the Total Program. However, when the local share is insufficient to fund the minimum Total Program, state tax funds pay the remainder. A district's Total Program amount

**Graph 2: Charter School Enrollment from 1995-2006**



Source: Colorado Department of Education.

divided by the number of students equals the district's per-pupil revenue (PPR). The district may also receive "categorical program" funds for English language proficiency, gifted and talented, small attendance centers, special education, transportation, and vocational education.

Colorado law, House Bill 04-1362 (2004), mandates that each charter school receive 100% of the PPR for each student except that the district may choose to retain the actual amount of the charter school's per pupil share of the central administrative overhead costs for services actually provided to the charter school, up to a maximum of 5% of the PPR. The district must pass along a proportionate share of categorical aid from the state and federal government including special education. Special education aid may be distributed as cash or services.

In Colorado, special education is funded largely through three sources – federal, state, and local funds. In the 2006-2007 school year, the cost to educate students with disabilities will total \$657 million, or about 7% of the state's total education expenditures (Understanding Colorado School Finance and Categorical Program Funding, 2006). The federal government, through the IDEA, will cover roughly 20% of the cost, with those funds being distributed on a per-pupil basis to LEAs. State funds provide roughly 18% of the cost and are also distributed to LEAs on a per-pupil basis. The remainder is funded through local revenues (Understanding Colorado School Finance and Categorical Program Funding, 2006).

Although the legal responsibility to educate students with disabilities rests ultimately with the LEA, charter schools and districts/BOCES share the responsibility for the provision of services. By federal law, districts must provide special education services

to students in charter schools in the same manner they provide these services to students in traditional schools. The LEA and the charter school negotiate the financial and service obligations under one of four models: contract, insurance, modified insurance, and combination.

#### *Contract Model*

The LEA distributes to the charter school its state and federal special education funds. Drawing from these and the charter school's own general funds, the charter school hires or contracts for its own special education staff and specialists.

#### *Insurance Model*

The charter school pays the LEA a specified amount for every student in the charter school. The per-pupil amount is equal to the LEA's special education expenses divided by the number of students in the district. In this model the LEA is the primary provider of special education services. Insurance fees vary.

#### *Modified Insurance Model*

The charter school hires or contracts for staff and services it can provide independent of the LEA. Additionally, the charter school pays the LEA a per-student amount for services that it does not provide in-house.

#### *Combination Model*

The charter school and the LEA negotiate which services will be provided by the school and which will be provided by the LEA. A contract then outlines which agency is financially and functionally responsible for the quantity and provision of said services.

### Charter School Improvement Efforts

Building capacity within charter schools to meet the needs of all students, including those with special needs, has been a priority of CDE's Schools of Choice Unit (K. Kafer, personal communications, August 6, 2005). Towards that end, in 2001, the Department commissioned a report on the perceptions of charter school administrators and district/BOCES special education directors on the special education services provided by charter schools. The goal of that report was to assess the attitudes and perceptions of charter school administrators and district/BOCES special education directors about charter school services for students in special education, to clarify how charter schools fund special education services, and to make recommendations to improve special education delivery in charter schools.

The final report, published in March 2002 (Scheffel & Revak, 2002), provided new data and laid a foundation for further research. Specifically, the study found that charter schools were enrolling an increasing number and proportion of students with disabilities. In terms of serving these students, districts/BOCES directors perceived 10% of charter schools as "totally adequate," 23% as "adequate," 42% as "somewhat adequate," and 25% as "somewhat inadequate" or "inadequate." There were significant unresolved issues between schools and LEAs related to the cost and quality of services, district/BOCES-school communications and support, and school knowledge of and compliance with IDEA. After examining the data, the researchers recommended

improving district/BOCES-school communications, requiring charter applicants to submit a plan for serving students with disabilities in their charter application, and increasing the availability of informational resources and technical assistance.

### Rationale for the Study

Since 2002, the number of charter schools in Colorado has grown. The state has made regulatory and legislative changes. The legislature created a statewide chartering agency – the Colorado Charter School Institute – (2004) and enacted the Charter School Capital Facilities Financing Act (2002) to assist in facility financing. CDE has developed trainings, guidelines, a charter school special education guidebook, a best practices guidebook, a sample compliance plan for charter schools, and other resources, most of which are available on its Web site. Additionally, CDE’s Schools of Choice Unit and Special Education Services Unit initiated the Charter School Special Education Advisory Committee with representatives from charter schools, school districts, parents, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, the Charter Friends National Network, higher education, and the Office for Civil Rights. The committee collaborates on initiatives for resource development and technical assistance.

In light of these developments, new research was deemed necessary to provide up-to-date data on charter school special education services, as well as to follow-up on the 2002 recommendations, and to propose new measures. Building on the 2002 study, this study provides 1) updated information on charter school demographics, special education services, funding mechanisms, and satisfaction levels; 2) details on the progress made on the implementation of the 2002 recommendations; and 3) a comprehensive set of new recommendations based on findings presented in these data.

Demographically, the study tracks the number of students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) who are educated in Colorado charter schools and their primary disability category; the length of charter school operations; the number of charter schools in the LEA; the experience and type of certification of charter school administrators and LEA Directors of Special Education; and the number of full time equivalent regular education, paraprofessionals, and special education service providers employed by the charter school and LEA.

Special Education Services queries include information related to the methods schools use to attract new students, the percentage of schools whose charters specify how students with disabilities will be served, and details on how students with disabilities will be served as outlined in the schools’ charter authorization documentation. Additionally, the types of services provided and available technical assistance are explored.

The study also reveals information on the funding mechanisms and their various models of service provision (full insurance, modified insurance, direct contracting, or combination), the dollar amounts (or percentages) passed from the LEA to charter schools for special education, the format of those funds (funds or services), annual school and LEA special education budgets, per-pupil insurance costs, how those costs are calculated, how the insurance cost is allocated to specific services, and a breakdown of contracted costs. Cross categorical comparisons are also included.

This study also evaluates the knowledge, comfort, and satisfaction of LEA special education directors and charter school administrators regarding key issues such as control

over personnel decisions, the IEP process, technical assistance, the funding process, adequacy of service provision, compliance, and the overall quality of the relationship between the school and the LEA.

Additionally, the study provides findings on the implementations and actions to date based on the 2002 study recommendations and makes new recommendations based on the data. In particular, the study examines the frequency and quality of district/BOCES-charter school communications, the degree of special education planning in the chartering and renewal processes, and the availability and quality of informational resources, and technical support.

### Delimitations of the Study

This study has several delimiting factors;

1. All respondents were from only one state, Colorado.
2. All aspects of the survey were self-reported and no attempt was made to validate the respondents' opinions and/or data provided.
3. This study was conducted as a "single point in time." No longitudinal data were collected.

## PART II

### Project Methodology

The primary purpose of this project was to collect, analyze, and distribute information on the current state of special education funding in Colorado charter schools. A secondary purpose was to examine the progress made on the recommendations posed in the 2002, baseline, study.

A complete list of both charter schools and public school LEAs operating in Colorado was extracted from the Colorado Department of Education's website in March and April, 2006. These lists yielded 119 charter schools and 58 school districts/BOCES. Desired participants were charter school administrators and Directors of Special Education in both public school districts and BOCES. Each entry was found to be complete with school and/or district name, primary contact names, and email addresses. As the extracted information was a complete list of all authorized charter schools and LEAs, the survey was not biased by geographical location or school district. The entire survey also received Educational Data Advisory Committee (EDAC) approval. Potential participants were emailed an Invitation to Participate, assurance of confidentiality, directions for survey completion, and the survey.

One reminder email and one phone call were placed as a follow up to all potential participants who had not responded in the requested timeframe. Participants were not asked to provide any identifying, private, or sensitive information, however, their responses were cross checked against the master list of school/LEA names so as to track response rates and allow for targeted follow up phone calls designed to elicit responses from non-participants. Once responses were received, the respondents' names were detached from the data.

The Schools of Choice Unit at the Colorado Department of Education distributed the surveys electronically and was responsible for making phone calls to individual schools and LEAs in an effort to increase participation. Data from these sources was triangulated (as appropriate) to produce a holistic representation of special education services offered in Colorado charter schools.

### Instrumentation

#### *Surveys*

This two-part query consisted of a web-based survey questionnaire and follow up individual discussions. Part one asked the participants to answer demographic information about the administrator or director (e.g. licensure, time in position). The remaining questions focused on service models, student and teacher demographics, satisfaction levels, finance issues, and charter-LEA relationships. Response formats consisted of multiple choice, short answer, and Likert-type ratings.

The entire survey underwent a trial run prior to distribution to the target audience. This group of professionals acted as a mock advisory committee and was asked to provide information on the length of time necessary to complete the entire

survey, clarity of the directions, and user friendliness of the format. This information resulted in minor wording changes and no structural changes to the survey form.

Of the 119 charter school administrators to whom the survey was sent, 60 responded generating a 50.4% response rate. Of the 58 special education directors, 29 responded generating a 50.0% response rate.

### *Interviews*

In addition to the surveys, Part two consisted of two sets of confidential interviews. These participants provided qualitative commentary in support and expansion of the survey indicators. This included 16 charter school principals and five special education directors. A diverse group of charter schools were selected with regard to location, grades served, and school model. Notes from the interviews were sent to the individuals to confirm the accuracy of their responses and all interview participants had the opportunity to offer rebuttal on the notes taken. Three participants replied with a request to amend the documentation of his/her responses and those consisted on minor changes or clarification; there were no substantive changes requested.



## PART III

### Survey Analysis And Results

In 2002, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) released a study that identified the perceptions of charter school administrators and LEA special education directors on the special education services provided by charter schools. Building on the 2002 study, this study provides updated information on charter school and administrator demographics, special education services, funding mechanisms, satisfaction levels and quality of relationships.

#### Charter School and LEA Demographics

The survey asked charter school administrators about the date of initial chartering, their experience and professional licensure, the number of teachers employed by their charter school, and their efforts to attract students with disabilities. Data on length of service and number of charter schools in the LEA was also captured from directors of special education.

##### *Date of Initial Charter*

The respondents indicated the newest charter school was a year old, established in 2005, while the oldest had been in existence since 1993. The average date of chartering was 1998.

##### *Number of Schools per LEA*

Respondents in the positions of District and BOCES Special Education Director indicated that they collectively provided oversight to 116 charter schools. The greatest number of schools chartered in a single LEA was reported as 27 and the lowest as zero. The average number of charter schools sponsored by an LEA was four.

##### *Charter School Administrator Length of Service*

Charter school administrators indicated the length of time in which they held the position at their school. Eight percent indicated they had been an administrator at their current position less than one year. Nearly half, 45%, of the charter school administrator respondents indicated they had been an administrator at their current school between one and three years. Thirty-two percent had been at their current school four to six years, and 15% stated more than six years in their current position.

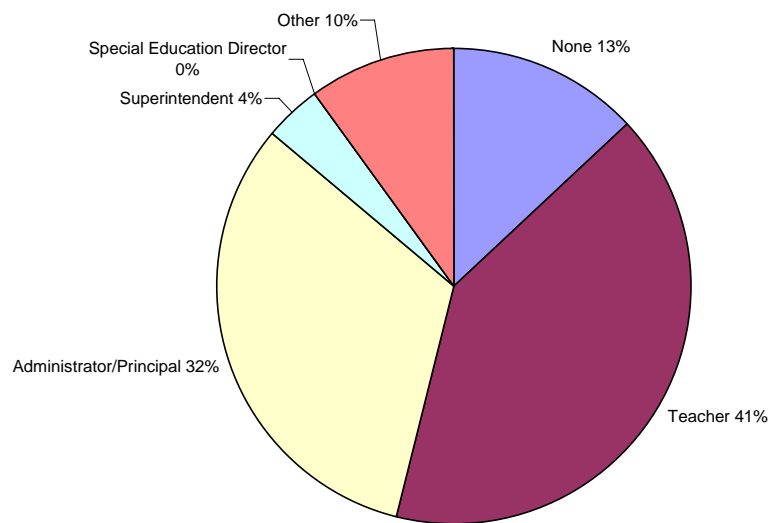
These same charter school administrators also indicated the length of time they had served as a comparable level administrator in any educational setting. Responses showed four percent had been in service less than a year in any educational setting. Twenty-seven percent had between one and three years administrative experience in a comparable setting. The largest group, 37%, indicated between four and six years experience and the balance, 32%, indicated six or more year of experience as an administrator in a comparable educational setting.

These charter school administrators appeared to be gaining the bulk of their long-term experiences in other settings and bringing that into their current setting. The 45% of administrators with one to three years experience in their current setting is quite in line with national findings published by the National Center for Educational Statistics (n.d.).

### *Charter School Administrator Licensure*

Many respondents held more than one level of license. Only the highest certification was considered for these analyses. Nearly half of the respondents, 41%, held a teacher's license as their highest license. Approximately a third, 32%, held an administrator/principal's license as their highest degree, and just 4% of the respondents held a superintendent's license. Ten percent of the respondents indicated their license was classified as "other" and 13% indicated they held no license. See Graph 3. The majority of all respondents, 70%, held professional licenses; 26% held initial licensure, and just 4% held emergency licensure.

**Graph 3: Highest Certification of Charter School Administrators**



Source: 2006 Charter School Administrator Survey.

### *LEA Directors of Special Education Length of Service*

In this group, a minority of respondents indicated they were new to the office of director in their current setting, with 19% having served in a director setting less than a

year. Slightly less than half of the respondents, 40%, had been in their current setting between one and three years. Fifteen percent of special education directors said they have been in their current setting between four and six years. And the final group, 26%, indicated more than 6 years in the position. In contrast, 48% of respondents indicated they had served as a director in any comparable educational setting six or more years.

Interestingly, in both the charter school administrators and the directors groups, with six or more years of service, the time served in any comparable position, is nearly double the time served in their current location. See Table 1.

Table 1

*Experience of Survey Respondents*

	Special Education Directors		Charter School Administrators	
	Current Position	Comparable Position to Date	Current Position	Comparable Position to Date
<1 year	19%	7%	8%	4%
1-3 years	40%	26%	45%	27%
4-6 years	15%	19%	32%	37%
6 or more years	26%	48%	15%	32%

*Charter School General and Special Education Staff*

The survey asked charter school administrators about the number of general education teachers employed at their school. Fifty-eight percent of the total respondents answered this question. The range was two to 230 teachers, with an average of 20.3 teachers.

Also queried were the number of special education staff members who serve the students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in the charter school. On average, the LEA provided charter schools with three-quarters of a full time equivalent (FTE) teacher while the charter school paid for 2.86 FTEs. The LEA also provided 1.28 FTEs of related services such as speech or occupational therapy and one paraprofessional or teacher's aide. The average school secured for itself 1.56 FTE personnel for special services and over two paraprofessionals. See Table 2.

Table 2

*FTEs for Teachers and Other Service Providers Serving Students with IEPs*

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	FTE Teachers	FTE Related Service Providers (Speech, OT, etc)	FTE Paraprofessionals
LEA Provided	.76	1.28	1.08
Charter School Provided	2.86	1.56	2.31

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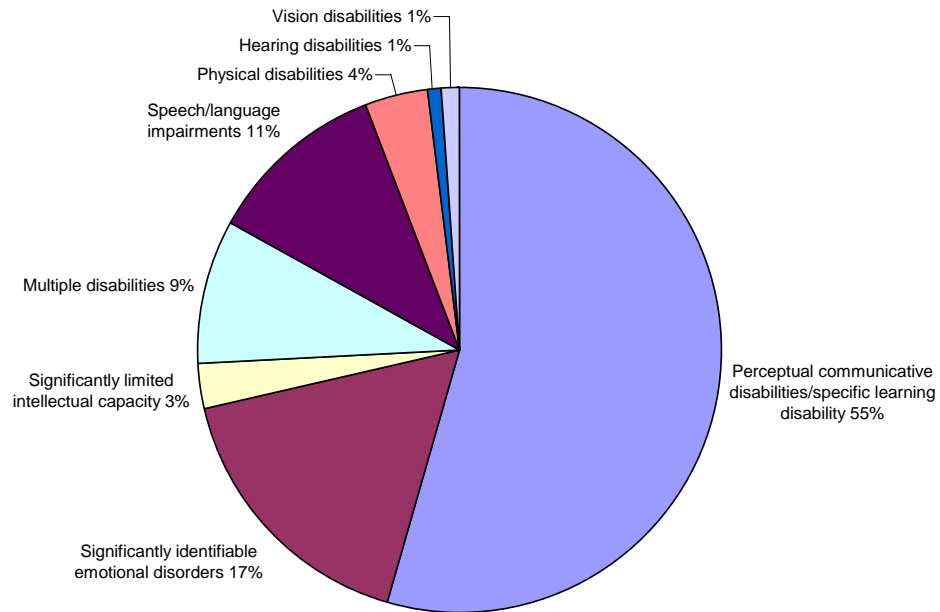
*Outreach to Recruit Special Education Students*

The majority, more than two-thirds, of charter school respondents indicated they do not specifically reach out to parents of students with disabilities. The exceptions are those schools that specialize in the education of students with particular learning needs associated with certain disabilities, such as developmental delays. The respondents clearly indicated that they reach out to parents who would be interested in the educational aspect that makes that charter school unique such as an emphasis on performing arts, alternative education, or gifted/creative/talented. In other words, the charter school respondents do not specifically advertise their ability to meet the needs of special education students, but they do identify how such a student would be served if he/she were to enroll. The primary advertising mediums included word of mouth and teacher/LEA/and specialty fields referrals. Secondary methods include school literature/brochures, direct mailings, community meetings, and open houses. The majority, 78%, of respondents indicated there is a place on the students' enrollment application where parents indicate the existence of their child's disability.

*Student Demographics*

Charter school administrators identified how many students who receive special education services fell into each of the following categories based on primary disability. Through these responses a total of 996 students were identified. Over half of these students, 55%, had a perceptual communicative or specific learning disability. The next most common disability categories were emotional disorders (17%), speech/language impairments (11%), and multiple disabilities (9%). Disabilities in vision, hearing, physical, and limited intellectual capacity made up the remaining 9%. See Graph 4.

**Graph 4: Categories of Primary Disability for Students in Charter Schools**



Source: 2006 Charter School Administrator Survey.

### *Summary*

In terms of the experience of respondents, when the data is collapsed into two groups – less than or equal to three years of experience and four or more years of experience, both groups of respondents had similar levels of experience in their current office and in their historical positions to date. There are two main differences in the overall range; more special education directors had less than a year of experience in their current setting compared to charter school principals (19% vs. 8%), and more special education directors had six or more years in their current position and in the position in general than the principals. Although most charter school administrators have professional education licenses, only 36% of respondents held a principal, superintendent, or director of special education license.

In terms of staffing for special education, on average, charter schools paid for most of the costs for teacher and paraprofessionals with the LEA providing less than a third of the costs. Most LEAs and schools split the costs of specialty services.

Finally, by way of marketing, charter schools are more likely to reach out to families by marketing their specific instructional program rather than marketing their special educational program. The exception is those schools that target students with special needs.

## Funding Mechanisms

Both charter school and LEA participants were asked about how special education was funded and delivered. Data collected included the type of model used (contract, insurance, modified insurance, and combination models), total school special education budget, the format of funds (funds or services) passed to school, per-pupil insurance costs, how those costs were calculated, and how the insurance cost was allocated to specific services.

As described in the background section, Part I, there are essentially four methods by which LEAs and schools share the responsibility of special education service provision. Under the contract model, the school assumes the vast majority of the responsibility and under the insurance model the LEA has the primary responsibility. Provision is shared under the other two models. See Graph 5.

Virtually all, 93%, charter school administrators responded to the question inquiring about the model under which they receive special education funds/services. Just less than half, 48%, of special education directors answered this series of questions. It should be remembered that respondents provided detail only for their model. Consequently, response percentages indicated reflect only the participants who subscribe to the particular model rather than the total number of respondents.

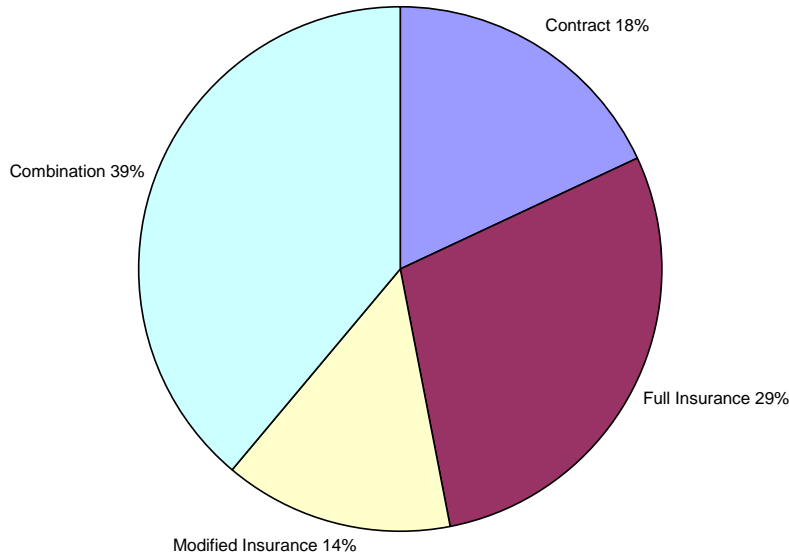
### *Contracted Model*

In the contract model, the LEA distributes to the charter schools its state and federal special education funds. Drawing from these and the charter school's own general funds, the charter school hires or contracts for its own special education staff and specialists. Seven percent of total charter school administrators responded and eight percent of total special education directors provided input pertaining to the contracted model.

Charter school administrators were asked how much they paid last fiscal year for special education staff salaries and benefits. Answers ranged between \$30,000 and \$600,000, with an average of \$203,054. The average number of FTEs for schools and LEAs using the contract model was 6.73. This, divided by the average cost of \$203,054 equals \$30,171—a cost not unrealistic for one part-time person's salary/contracted payment and benefits. Using similar calculations, these schools on average pay approximately \$50 an hour for related service providers.

Respondents identified the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-2006 as between \$6,000 to \$630,000 with an average of \$216,804. Due to the final, approved survey questions, no data could be obtained which would have allowed for detailed categorical spending. Therefore, it is

**Graph 5: Service Procurement Models**



Source: 2006 Charter School Administrator Survey.

unclear whether these figures represent spending including or independent of the above salary/contracted payments expenditures.

Special education directors supported the conceptual aspects of the contract model in their responses. These respondents consistently indicated they provided no payments or support of any kind outside direct flow through of funds.

#### *Insurance Model*

In this model, the charter school pays the LEA a specified amount for every student in the charter school. The per-pupil amount is equal to the LEA's special education expenses divided by the number of students in the district/BOCES. Here, the LEA is the primary provider of special education services and insurance fees vary. Twenty-one percent of the total number of charter school administrator respondents and 10% of special education director respondents replied to this section.

#### *Per pupil insurance calculations*

Special education directors were asked how their special education per pupil insurance cost was calculated. Three-quarters stated it was assigned by the district. Thirteen percent said it was negotiated in charter/contract with the district, and 12% said they did not know.

*Cost of services*

Charter school administrators indicated the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-2006. The range was \$6,625 to \$321,914 with an average of \$106,393. For reasons stated above, the exact categorical breakdown of these figures remains unclear.

Both charter school administrators and directors of special education provided monetary detail for the question, “how much per student do you pay for special education services?” The charter school administrators believed they were paying the LEA an average of \$528 per student whereas the special education directors believed the districts were paying \$432 per student – on average \$95.68 less.

Respondents in the two groups also had differing answers to the question, “are there other special education costs paid by the district.” Seventy-eight percent of charter school administrators said “no” while only 37% of the district directors replied “no.” All respondents stated that the money was used for student materials and supplies. Special education directors, who stated they do provide additional funds indicated, a range of \$5,500 to \$13,713. See Table 3.

Table 3

*Cost of Services Under the Full Insurance Model*

	Charter School Administrators	Special Education Directors
How much per student do you pay for special education services?	Range: \$250 to \$929. Average: \$527.55	Range: \$102 to \$650. Average: \$431.87
Are there other special education costs paid by the district?	No: 78% Yes: 22% Funds used for student materials and supplies	No: 37% Yes: 63% If yes, range: \$5,500 to \$13,713

*Covered services*

Special education directors indicated a variety of services that were covered in their insurance model. Respondents were allowed to include any service. Their replies were analyzed and grouped by like items. Two-thirds of LEA respondents, indicated they covered professional development, initial evaluation, the IEP process, service delivery, the hiring of full time and itinerant staff, related services, and transportation. Less common services, those identified by less than two-thirds of the respondents, were also identified. See Table 4.



Table 4

*Services Covered in Full Insurance Model*

---

Most Common Services	Lesser Common Services
Professional development	Legal counsel
Initial evaluations	Interventions
IEP process	Day treatment placements
Service delivery	Residential treatment placements
Hiring special education teachers	Homebound services
Hiring itinerant teachers	Computerized IEP program
Related services	
Transportation	

---

*Modified Insurance Model*

The charter school hires or contracts for staff and services it can provide independent of the LEA. Additionally, the charter school pays the LEA a per student amount for services that it does not provide in-house. Fourteen percent of charter school administrator respondents and 17% of special education director respondents answered this section.

*Cost of services*

Charter school administrators indicated they pay between \$10,000 and \$340,000 for special education staff. Conversely, the special education directors reported figures from \$0 to \$20,000 on staff. When evaluating the costs paid per student, rather than summative amounts, charter school administrators said they paid on average \$295.80 – slightly more than the LEA given average of \$259.67. Additionally, school administrators indicated they spent between \$5,000 and \$40,000 on service providers, or an average of \$20,167 last year. Altogether, they spent between \$40,000 and \$492,004 or an average of \$186,681 for special education in 2005-2006.

Concerning additional costs (beyond staff and service providers), two-thirds of school administrators indicated that the school covered additional costs such as equipment, materials, and curriculum supplies. Two-thirds of special education directors said the LEA covered additional expenses such as salaries, benefits, extended school year, transportation, and excess cost billing. See Table 5.

Table 5

*Cost of Services Under the Modified Insurance Model*

	Charter School Administrators	Special Education Directors
How much do you pay for special education staff including benefits?	Range: \$10,000 to \$340,000	Range: 0 to \$20,000
How much per student do you pay the school district/BOCES for special education services?	Range: \$108 to \$386 Average: \$296	Range: \$101 to \$343 Average: \$220
Are there other special education costs paid by the school?	No: 33% Yes: 67% Costs included equipment and materials, curriculum supplies, and one respondent said facilities.	N/A
Are there other charter school special education costs paid by the district/BOCES?	N/A	No: 66% Yes: 33% Costs include salaries, benefits, extended school year, transportation, and excess cost billing.
What is the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-06?	Range: \$40,000 to \$492,004 Average: \$186,681	N/A
How much do you pay for related service providers?	Range: \$5,000 to \$40,000 Average: 20,167	N/A

*Calculation of per pupil insurance costs*

Special education directors indicated how they calculated their per pupil insurance costs: 67% responded that it was negotiated in the charter/contract with the district. The remaining 33% replied this formula was calculated by the district. In contrast to the full insurance respondents, none of the respondents selected the “don’t know” answer option.

*Covered services*

Special education directors indicated a variety of services that were covered in this model. Again, respondents were allowed to include any service. Replies were analyzed and grouped by like items. Responses considered most common were those indicated by at least two-thirds of the respondents. The most commonly covered services in the modified insurance model were professional development, legal counsel, the IEP process, transportation, and day treatment placements. See Table 6.

Table 6

*Services Covered by the Modified Insurance Model*

---

Most Common Services	Lesser Common Services
Professional development	Initial evaluations
Legal counsel	Interventions
IEP process	Service delivery
Transportation	Hiring special education teachers
Day treatment placements	Hiring itinerant teachers
	Related services
	Residential treatment placements

---

*Combination Model*

The charter school and the LEA negotiate which services are to be provided by the school and which are to be provided by the LEA. A contract then outlines which agency is financially and functionally responsible for the quantity and provision of said services. Seventeen percent of charter school administrator respondents and 28% of special education director respondents answered this set of questions.

*Cost of services*

Charter school administrators said that they paid between \$7,500 and \$87,000, or an average \$39,692 last school year for staff. Special education directors consistently replied they did not know the answer to this question and did not give any figures for school staffing costs.

Additionally, charter school administrators indicated they spent between \$2,500 and \$60,000, or an average \$20,125 on service providers during the last school year. Altogether, schools spent between \$850 and \$250,000, or an average of \$91,043 for special education in 2005-2006. See Table 7.

Table 7

*Cost of Services Under the Combination Model*

	Charter School Administrators	Special Education Directors
How much do you pay for special education staff including benefits?	Range: \$7,500 to \$87,000 Average: \$39,692	Included in the membership for chartering in the district or charter schools receive an allocation per identified student to support any contracted services.
How much per student do you pay the school district/BOCES for special education services?	Range: \$250 to \$533 Average: \$377.57	Each charter school receives a proportionate share of federal and state money depending on previous year's Dec 1 count.
Are there other special education costs paid by the school?	No: 58% Yes: 42% Used for software and educational materials	No: 63% Yes: 37% Used for administrative support
What is the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-06?	Range: 850 to \$250,000 Average: \$91,043	N/A
How much do you pay for related service providers?	Range: \$2,500 to \$60,000 Average: \$20,125	N/A

Concerning additional costs (beyond staff and service providers), 42% of charter school administrators indicated the school covers additional costs such as software and educational materials. Over a third, 37%, of special education directors said the district covered additional expenses such as administrative support.

*Covered services*

In a fashion identical to the previous models, special education directors indicated what services were covered by their modified insurance model. Most commonly, the LEA provided professional development, legal counsel, related services, and management of the IEP process. See Table 8.

Table 8

*Services Covered under the Combination Model*

---

Most Common Services	Lesser Common Services
Professional development	Initial evaluations
Legal counsel	Interventions
IEP process	Service delivery
Related services	Hiring special education teachers
	Hiring itinerant teachers
	Transportation
	Day treatment placements
	Residential treatment placements

---

*Provision of services*

Also queried for the combination model: “who primarily pays for these services?” The directors’ answers were so diverse that only on a few categories did the majority (<60%) indicate that the district/BOCES or the school provided the service. Categories predominately provided by the school were service delivery, counseling, professional development, initial evaluations, management of the IEP process, and transportation. Conversely, slightly more respondents said that districts were more likely than schools to provide related services such as speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, and physical therapy. See Table 9.

Table 9

*Provision of Service Between LEAs and Schools Using the Combination Model*

	District/BOCES	School	Don't Know/ Never used
Prof. Development for special ed teachers	45%	52%	3%
Legal counsel	43%	43%	14%
Student's initial evaluation	44%	56%	0%
IEP process	38%	62%	0%
Service delivery with students	24%	76%	0%
Provision of related services	60%	25%	15%
Braille services	7%	19%	74%
Sign language interpreters	12%	19%	69%
Speech/language therapy	59%	37%	4%
Occupational therapy	50%	32%	18%
Physical therapy	36%	32%	32%
Assistive technology	30%	33%	37%
Counseling	21%	72%	7%
Orientation/mobility	19%	30%	52%
Transportation	14%	30%	56%

*Multiple Models in LEAs*

Some LEAs used multiple models. Of the LEAs that had more than one charter school (14), seven responded that they had schools using a model other than the standard. In other words, if most of the schools used one model, at least one had another arrangement with the district. The remaining seven LEAs used one model for all of their

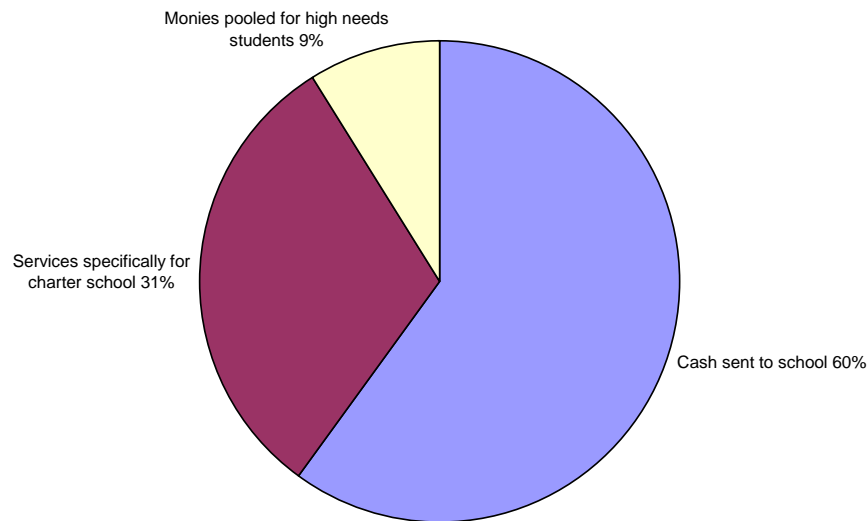
charter schools. Among the LEAs with the largest number charter schools, only one school, on average, uses an alternative model. LEAs with four to five schools were more likely to use multiple models.

### *Federal and State Funds*

Federal and state funds cover roughly 38% of the cost to educate students with disabilities. Funds are sent to LEAs to distribute to schools in the form of cash or services or both. In terms of funding or services, the district/BOCES must treat students with disabilities enrolled in charter schools in the same manner as they do such children in traditional public schools.

There were differences in how each of the two groups responded to questions about federal and state funds. See Table 10. It is interesting to note that some LEAs state that they are not providing federal or state funds to their charter schools. When asked if they received state or federal funds, roughly half of the charter school administrators (52% and 48% respectively) said they did. A slightly higher percentage of directors of special education said they provided state or federal funds (64% and 69% respectively). About two-thirds of each groups said the funds were disbursed in the form of cash, a third indicating it was given in the form of services, and 9% said it was pooled for use by high needs students. See Graph 6. LEAs indicated that they determine the amount of pass-through funds based on current year December 1 counts (31%), prior year December 1 counts (31%), or a prorated formula (38%).

**Graph 6: Forms of State and Federal Aid from District**



Source: 2006 Charter School Administrator Survey.

Table 10

*Federal and State Funds Available for Students with Disabilities*

	Charter School Administrators	Special Education Directors
Do the schools receive state funds from the district?	Yes: 53% No: 14% Don't know: 11%	Yes: 64% No: 32% Don't know: 4%
Do the charter schools receive federal special education funds from the district?	Yes: 48% No: 36% Don't know: 16%	Yes: 69% No: 31% Don't know: 0%
If your school receives state or federal funds from the district, in which form are those funds?	60% cash sent to charter school 31% services specifically for the charter school 9% money is pooled for use by high needs students in any school in the district	65% cash sent to charter school 28% services specifically for the charter school 7% money pooled for use by high needs students in any school in the district
If the district/BOCES passes along funds, how are the funds determined?	N/A	31% current year Dec 1 counts 31% prior year Dec 1 counts 38% prorated based on per pupil counts but no details on year or month

There were also differences in responses among schools depending on the model they used. Of those who responded that they knew – which was the vast majority of those who responded to the question, all, 100%, of schools on the contract model received state and federal funds. Over half, 67%, of those on the modified insurance model said they received state and federal funds. A higher percentage (90% and 80% respectively) of schools on the combination model indicated that they received state and federal funds. In contrast most (87% and 85% respectively) of schools on the full insurance model said they did not receive state and federal funds.

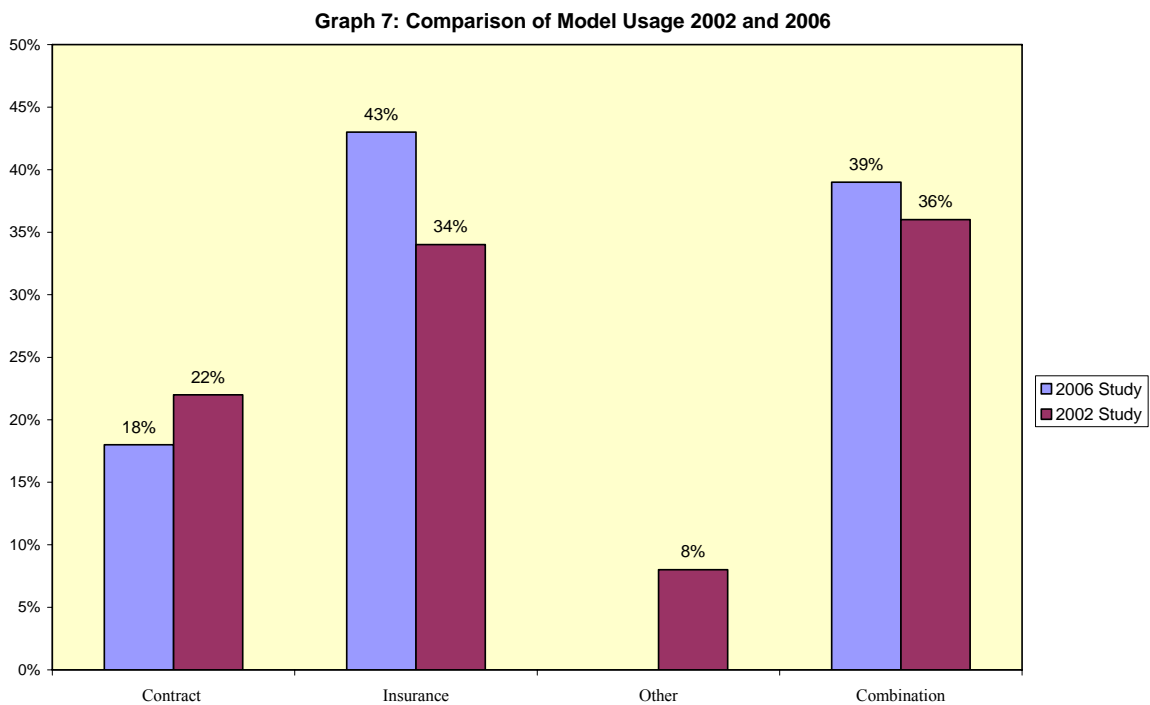
*Other Funds*



A small percentage (13%) of charter school respondents indicated that they seek, independent of the district, federal or private grants for special education. These respondents indicated they use these funds for staff professional development (28%), facilities (12%), additional materials (28%), technology (28%), and general operating costs (4%).

### *Summary of the Funding Mechanism*

The combination and full insurance models were the most commonly used. Comparing survey answers between 2002 and 2006, it appears that more schools are using insurance (full or modified) and the combination models than in the past. See Graph 7.



Source: 2002 and 2006 Surveys.

Of the LEAs that had opportunity to use more than one model, about half chose to do so. LEAs with four to five schools were more likely to use multiple models than large districts.

Each model differs in terms of per-pupil fees, whether the LEA pays additional costs, and the receipt of federal and state funds. Used by 18% of schools (8% by the LEA's count), schools on the contract model receive their federal and state funds and direct them as needed. The full insurance model accounts for 29% (31% by the LEAs' count). Schools pay their LEAs between \$250 and \$929 or an average \$527.55 per student and receive from the LEA most of the special education services. Charter school administrators say, in general, that they do not receive state or federal funds. Schools on the modified insurance model account for 14% (19% by the LEAs' count). They pay the

LEA a per-pupil amount of \$108 to \$386 or an average of \$295.83 and receive some services. Over half indicated that they receive state and federal funds. Schools on the combination model account for 39% of the total (42% by the LEAs' count). They pay the LEA a per-pupil amount of \$250 to \$533 with an average of \$377.57 for services. Most said that they receive state and federal funds. See Table 11.

When special education directors were asked how the per-pupil fees were calculated, the respondents said the full insurance amount was typically calculated and assigned by the district/BOCES while the amount was more to be negotiated between LEAs and schools under the other models.

Concerning services provided by the LEA, respondents provided a diversity of answers for each model. The full insurance model, however, clearly provided the most services. Under the combination model, respondents also provided a variety of answers regarding which services were provided by the LEA and which were provided by the school.

LEAs and schools gave divergent answers when they were asked to provide data regarding the per-pupil amount paid by the school to the district/BOCES, whether the LEA provided additional funding, or whether the school received state and federal funds. In general, schools indicated they were paying more for services than the LEA indicated. Special Education directors believed they were giving schools more in terms of additional LEA funds/services and state and federal funds. Unfortunately, the number of questions answered "don't know" or left blank were higher in the Funding Mechanisms section than in other sections of the survey.

Finally, only a small percentage, 13%, of charter school respondents indicated that they seek federal or private grants for special education independent of the LEA.

Table 11

*Comparison of Special Education Funding Models*

	Contracted	Full Insurance	Modified Ins.	Combination
Percent using model as indicated by school/district	18%/8%	29%/31%	14%/19%	39%/42%
Total spent on special education in 2005-2006	Range: \$30,000-\$600,000 Average: \$216,804	Range: \$6,625 to \$321,914 Average: \$106,393	Range: \$40,000 to \$492,004 Average: \$186,681	Range: \$850 to \$250,000 Average: \$91,043
School pays district a per-student cost for services	N/A	Range: \$250 to \$929 Average: \$527.55	Range: \$108 to \$386 Average: \$295.83	Range: \$250 to \$533 Average: \$377.57
District pays additional costs	N/A	In some cases	In some cases	In some cases
School receives state education funds from district (those who indicated they knew)	No: 0% Yes: 100%	No: 87% Yes: 13%	No: 33% Yes: 67%	No: 10% Yes: 90%
School receives federal funds from district (those who indicated they knew)	No: 0% Yes: 100%	No: 85% Yes: 15%	No: 33% Yes: 67%	No: 12% Yes: 88%

The survey queried the level of satisfaction of special education directors and charter school administrators regarding key issues such as control over staffing decisions, provision and cost of services, and the overall quality of services.

*Control of Staffing Selection and Decisions*

This survey queried the level of satisfaction of special education directors and charter school administrators regarding key issues such as control over staffing decisions, provision and cost of services, and the overall quality of services. The survey also measured knowledge/comfort levels for both groups concerning these and other issues.

When evaluating simply the overall level of control in staffing use and decisions, half of the school administrators indicated that they had control over at least half of the decisions related to special education staff. Over one-third indicated that they have no control. See Table 12.

Table 12

*Level of School Administrator Control over Staffing Decisions*

Level of Control	Schools
Full	26%
51-99% (substantial)	9%
50%	15%
1-49% (limited)	12%
None	38%

Looking specifically at respondents who used the full insurance model, which would appear to allow the least flexibility, there is significant diversity with regard to their level of control. While none said they had 100% control, a fourth indicated 51-99% control, a third said they control half of the hiring, another fourth indicated 1-49%, and the small remainder said they had no control.

In the 2002 study, 62% of charter school respondents stated that they had “total control” (19%) or “partial control” (43%) over hiring decisions. Thirty-eight percent indicated they had “no control” (24%) or “minimal control” (14%). Since the question is worded differently an exact comparison is not possible. However, by comparing “total control” and “partial control” percentages from the 2002 study with those who indicated in 2006 at least 50% control, it appears schools had less control in 2006 than they did in 2002 (50% compared to 62%).

The 2006 survey also asked charter school administrators whether they were satisfied with the level of control over the staff decisions. Nearly two-thirds indicated they were satisfied (47%) or “somewhat satisfied” (22%). Thirty-one percent were not satisfied with the level of control over staffing. Of those using the contracted model 80%

were satisfied and 20% were somewhat satisfied. Of those using the full insurance model 45% indicated dissatisfaction, 36% indicated a moderate level of satisfaction and 18% indicated satisfaction.

### *Comfort with the Process*

Using a 1-5 Likert type scale where 1=strongly disagree; 2=somewhat disagree; 3=neither agree or disagree; 4=somewhat agree; and 5=strongly agree, charter school administrators and special education directors were asked the same questions for comparative purposes on their comfort levels and knowledge of special education processes and funding.

### *The IEP Process*

Both groups of respondents were asked about their comfort levels regarding the IEP process and their knowledge of that process. Two interesting trends were noted. First, the special education directors' responses indicated they were more comfortable with how the IEP process unfolded at charter schools than the charter school administrators. And yet, second, when asked about their comfort with their own knowledge levels, the charter school administrator's average was considerably higher than the directors' comfort level of the school administrator's knowledge. In other words, charter school administrators perceived their comfort level of their knowledge as greater than the directors perceived it. While charter school administrators said they "somewhat agree" with the statement "I am comfortable with my knowledge of the IEP process," directors averaged in the "somewhat disagree" category, indicating they were much less comfortable with the administrators' knowledge. Details can be found in Table 13.

The charter school administrators were also asked to rate their comfort level of their teachers' knowledge of the IEP process. Their average answer indicates a higher level of comfort with their own knowledge of the IEP process than that of their teachers'.

### *The Funding Process*

Using the same one to five scale, charter school administrators were asked to rate their comfort levels of their own knowledge of the charter school and special education funding processes. Their responses averaged 4.05. When asked about their comfort with their own knowledge of the special education funding process, their average dropped to 3.37. Clearly, the charter school administrators were more comfortable in their knowledge of the general charter school funding process than the special education funding process.

Table 13

*Average Rating of Comfort with the IEP Process*

	Charter School Administrators	Special Education Directors
I am comfortable with how the IEP process unfolds at my school/in charter schools.	3.27	4.11
I am comfortable with my knowledge/my charter school administrator’s knowledge of the IEP process.	4.16	2.48
I am comfortable with the teachers’ knowledge of the IEP process.	3.86	N/A

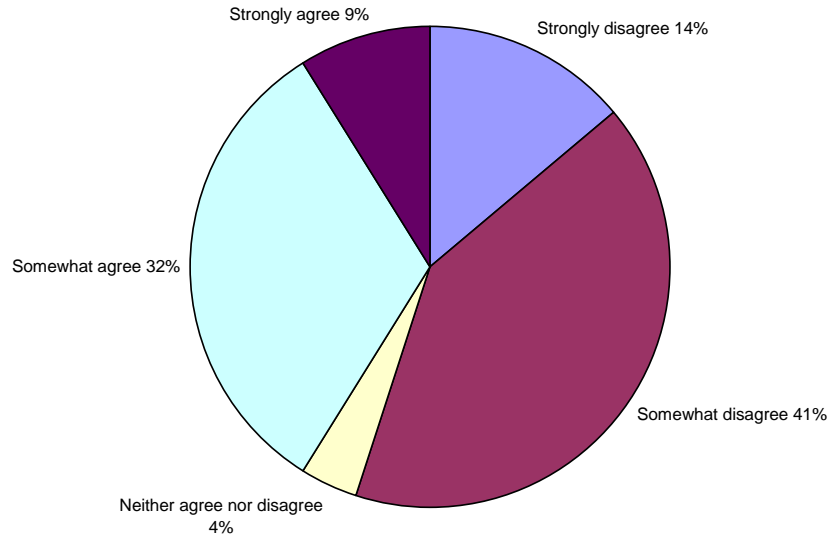
*Compliance*

As the LEA is ultimately responsible for maintaining compliance with special education laws and policy, among many other things, the directors were asked to rate (using the same one to five scale) their knowledge level of problems in charter schools in the area of compliance. The directors’ responses averaged 4.00, indicating they “somewhat agree” they would know if there were problems in charter schools’ compliance with special education. That is, the special education directors are fairly confident that will know if compliance problems arise.

*Adequacy of Charter Schools*

On the question of whether directors of special education believed charter schools were adequately meeting the needs of students in special education, the average rating, 2.82, was within the “somewhat disagree” category. It is interesting to note 41% of the respondents “somewhat disagree” and 32% “somewhat agree.” Graph 8 provides detail.

**Graph 8: Special Education Students' Needs are Adequately Met in Charter Schools**



Source: 2006 District/BOCES Special Education Director Survey.

On a related note, by collapsing respondent's answers into simple "agree" and "disagree" categories, the results show 38% of the special education directors perceive charter schools are adequately meeting the needs of students receiving special education services and 57% perceive these students' educational needs are not adequately met. The remaining 5% said "neither agree nor disagree."

In comparison, 33% of the special education director respondents in the 2002 study stated that charter schools were "adequate" (23%) or "totally adequate" (10%) at meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Forty-two percent deemed them "somewhat adequate," 10% said "somewhat inadequate," and 15% said they were "inadequate" (5%) or "totally inadequate" (10%). Because the question was worded differently, a true comparison is impossible. However, if "totally adequate" and "adequate" can be equated to the "agree" category in the 2006 study, then it would appear that special education directors were slightly more confident in their charter school's handling of special education in 2006 than in 2002.

#### *Planning for Special Education in the Chartering Process*

One of the recommendations of the 2002 study was that charter schools specify how they would serve students in special education. At the time, the study reported 29% of charter schools as having such a plan in their initial contract and 47% said it was in their charter renewal. On the 2006 survey, 73% of charter school administrators reported that their contract specified how students with disabilities would be served (the question did not specify whether the plan was in the initial or renewal contract). The special education directors' answers corroborate the information; 77% of special education

directors said all of their charters specify how students with disabilities will be served their charter contracts.

*LEA/School Relationships*

Using the same Likert type 1 to 5 scale, special education directors and charter school administrators were asked if they had a good relationship in several areas. The averages are extremely close, indicating excellent agreement on matters of service provision and technical assistance. Charter schools consistently rated themselves a bit higher than the special education directors in matters of the IEP process and service provision. In other words, the charter school administrators felt like they had a slightly better relationship with the LEA than the other way around. On the other hand, the special education directors viewed their relationship with the schools just a bit higher than the charter schools on professional development and the funding process. Table 14 presents the average ratings of both charter school administrators and directors of special education.

Table 14

*LEA/Charter School Relationships*

	Charter School Administrators	Special Education Directors
The IEP process	4.16	3.77
Service provision	3.45	3.41
Technical assistance	3.66	3.68
The funding process	3.24	3.50
Professional development	3.18	3.59

*Questions about Service Provision*

On the question of who the charter school administrators would contact if they had a question about special education, 70% responded they would contact the district or BOCES. Eleven percent said they would contact the Colorado League of Charter Schools and 15% said they would contact the Colorado Department of Education. The remaining 3% said they would ask special education teachers and 1% said they would consult management agencies. See Graph 9 for a visual representation.

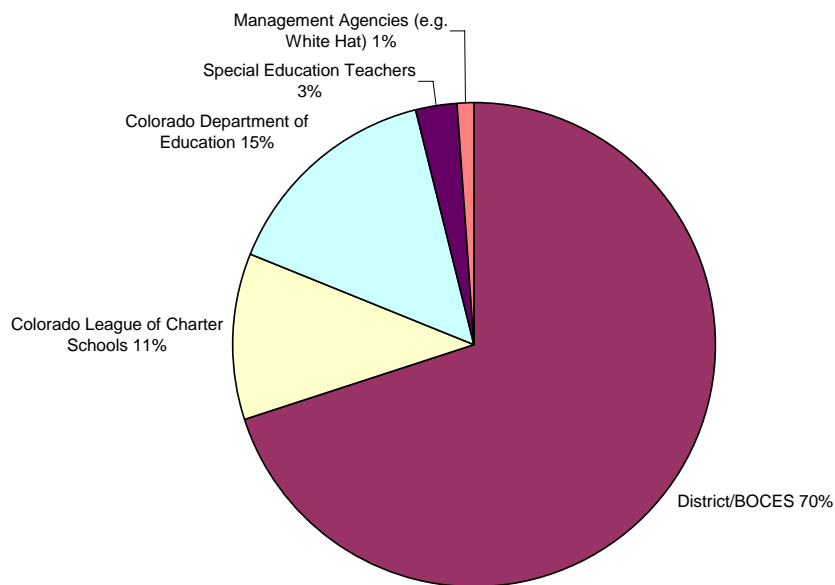
Charter school administrators were asked “If you discover a student with an IEP needs more services than you can provide, what do you do?” Respondents could provide any answer that came to mind. These were then categorized into themes in which 85%



said they would consult with the district/BOCES. Roughly half said they would initiate an IEP meeting. Approximately one quarter said they would refer the student back to the district and remaining seven percent said they would provide the services the student needs in their current charter school placement.

When special education directors were asked the same question, their answers were in these categories: 15% would encourage parents to return to home/zoned school. Over half would hold an IEP meeting to determine appropriate placement and services. Fifteen percent would pursue consultation and coordination between charter school administrators and LEA personnel. The remaining 10% would provide services in charter school by adding additional personnel.

**Graph 9: Agency Contacted When Charter School Has Questions**



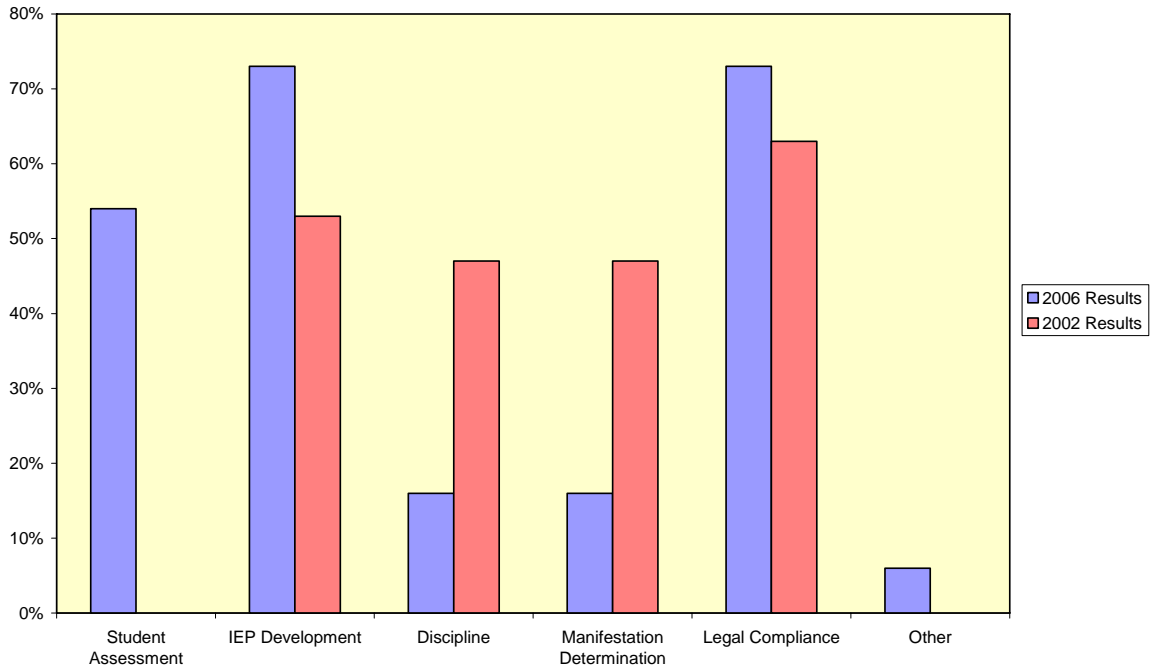
Source: 2006 Charter School Administrator Survey.

### *Technical Assistance*

Special education directors indicated that they offered many types of technical assistance to charter schools. The most common areas of technical assistance provided by the LEA were IEP development, legal compliance, and student assessment.

According to the 2002 baseline study, 66.7% of LEAs offered technical assistance. The assistance provided differed somewhat from what LEAs report they are now providing. On this current survey, 22 of the 28 special education directors (79%) indicated they provided some type of assistance. See Graph 10.

**Graph 10: Percentages of LEAs Offering Types of Technical Assistance**



Source: 2002 and 2006 special education director survey results.

### *Summary*

This section explored the level of satisfaction of special education directors and charter school administrators regarding key issues such as control over personnel, provision and cost of services, and the overall quality of services.

In general, 2006 charter school administrators report they have less control over their staffing decisions than in 2002 (50% compared to 62%). Nevertheless, most of the 2006 respondents were satisfied (47%) or somewhat satisfied (22%) with the level of control.

Concerning comfort levels, special education directors indicated they were more comfortable than charter school administrators regarding how the IEP process unfolded. Likewise charter school administrators have a higher comfort level with their knowledge of the IEP process higher than they do with their teachers' knowledge. The directors indicated moderate comfort levels with their knowledge of the charter school funding process and their ability to know if there were problems in charter schools' compliance with special education.

On the question of whether charter schools were adequately meeting the needs of students in special education, the average directors' rating was within the "somewhat disagree" category. Collapsing the data into simple "agree" and "disagree" categories, 38% perceive charter schools as adequately meeting the needs of special education students and 57% perceiving them as not adequately meeting the needs.

Although the wording between the 2002 and 2006 surveys differed, a rough comparison shows that special education directors were slightly more confident in their charter school's handling of special education in 2006 than in 2002.

Comparisons between the 2002 and 2006 study regarding the LEA-school relationship also show a positive trend. Again, a rough comparison is necessary because of wording differences. In 2002, nearly 80% of charter schools characterized the relationship as “resistant” while 70% of special education directors said it was “supportive.” In the 2006 study, both charter school administrators and special education directors had similar scores in the 3 to 4 range when asked about their relationship regarding the IEP process, service provision, technical assistance, the funding process, and professional development.

The answers to additional questions asking about communications between schools and LEAs showed that schools regarded the district/BOCES as a resource when they had questions or students with high needs. Special education directors indicated that they offered many types of technical assistance to charter schools. More LEAs offered technical assistance in 2006 than in 2002.

Lastly, a similar percentage of charter schools in both survey years planned for special education during their initial charter or renewal process.

## PART IV

### Interview Analysis and Results

In efforts to expand upon the data collected in the quantitative analysis, this study includes data from 21 interviews, comprised of 16 school principals and five districts/BOCES directors of special education. Using the same series of questions with each group, the interviews' responses corroborated data from the survey on some issues while introducing other issues anew. The results are grouped by topic: CDE Materials, Training, and Technical Support; Areas of Improvement for CDE; District/BOCES Training and Technical Support; State's Regulatory/Legal Framework; Charter School-LEA Relationships; and What Should Be Done Differently. To maintain strictest confidentiality, quotes are referenced as LEA 1-5 or CS 1-16 rather than by name.

#### *CDE Materials, Training, and Technical Support*

Overall, the directors of special education described CDE materials as useful and appropriate. LEA 1 considered them as "very positive, information is applicable to all schools." LEA 3 said, "On average, the information is very useful in the areas of compliance and new policies." LEA 5 said, "They tend to publish a lot of stuff, but I can always find what I need."

Directors' impressions of CDE training and technical assistance were also generally positive. LEA 3 said, "Their training classes tend to center around the hot topics in compliance and new policies. I find these helpful in that they tend to explain the rationale behind their new edicts. I've found CDE is always open to my questions by phone..."

#### *Enhancing CDE's Support*

The directors identified ways to enhance CDE support. These include providing additional materials and training and improving existing products. Specifically two directors indicated they would like additional training opportunities on how to provide technical support to their schools. Another said that he would like more training "centered around issues specific to charter schools." Another LEA expressed a desire for "clarity regarding the distinct roles and interrelationship between LEA's and their charter schools especially in matters of cyber or online options."

In terms of materials, directors said they would like to see changes in format and consistency. Specifically, one LEA indicated that there is so much information it can be difficult to find materials. LEA 5 said, "I'd like the information [data] published in a way where I can manipulate it to see what I'm after. I'd like to see all of those tables on the CDE website be interactive so I can set my own filters and get the information that's important to me." LEA 4 said:

I would like a directory about how many students with what kinds of needs are being served where. How are they meeting the student's needs, is the student progressing satisfactorily? Somewhere I can go to find out how other BOCES are handling some of their more unique situations. In these rural districts, we

may have only one or two children with a particular need where larger districts have several hundreds. We just don't have the same resources so I'd like to know how others are handling things.

Another district/BOCES indicated a need for case studies of what others are doing around the state – summaries of “What [approach] works and what doesn't?” This would include information about students and services served by charter schools, especially virtual schools. One director asked, “How do online charters handle special education? Which students are appropriate for online? Who's financially responsible?”

Another LEA indicated a need for greater consistency, saying:

I've also noticed many contradictory materials, especially with our 2006 child count submissions. They held one workshop several months ago but have put out ... five revisions since then. Their materials are helpful, and their emails/notification are good, but I wish they would make sure they have it the way they want it before it's distributed.

In general, directors believed that CDE should continue to provide guidance and training while leaving implementation to the LEAs.

More than half of the school administrators indicated that they did not use the materials or were not aware of them. They preferred to contact the LEA when questions arose. These charter school administrators did not speculate whether the special education director, teachers, and specialists might be accessing them. Schools that contract for services on their own were the most likely to use CDE guidance materials. And, these school administrators said that the materials were very helpful.

#### *LEA Training and Technical Support*

In general, charter school administrators said their LEA's technical assistance and training were of high quality. Most said they were invited to training opportunities. One school in particular was pleased that the district provided a mentor for the special education teacher.

Several school representatives said they would like more training and technical assistance. One school administrator said that the district support has not been adequate because there is only one person providing support across the district. It takes weeks to get an appointment.

Another school administrator said that the school special education staff feels isolated and would benefit from networking with other special educators. The school's staff is sometimes, but not always, included in the district's professional development opportunities. Three charter school administrators were not pleased with the district's training. One indicated that the training was of poor quality and repetitive. Another said it was not always relevant and never site-based. CS 15 said that while the training and technical assistance was of high quality, his school was the “low man on the totem pole.”

### *State's Regulatory/Legal Framework*

Directors and principals were asked, "Are current legal and regulatory prescriptions appropriate for what you want to accomplish?" In general, directors and administrators indicated the regulatory framework was adequate. One administrator stated that online schools meet regularly to talk about regulations and other issues. Two schools had concerns about the impact of legal and regulatory prescriptions on their programs. In one case, licensure was a problem. The district approved the school's hire of the special education teacher last year. This year the administrator said the state's licensure regulations prohibit her employment (starting next year) because her special education license does not conform to what is required. Another school identified the greatest regulatory barrier as the short duration of the charter. Because the school must renew its charter every three years, there is little time to implement new ideas and measure their impact. This school administrator believes that successful schools should be allowed more time between renewals.

Also, one school administrator reported feeling as though it has two distinct relationships – one with the district and one with the state. For the "alternative education campus" designation the school used CDE's indicators. It uses other indicators with the district. This administrator would like the state and the district to align their indicators so that the school is not striving to meet two sets of expectations.

### *Charter School/LEA Relationships*

The vast majority of interviewees indicated they have a good relationship with the district/BOCES in general and in relationship to special education. One said the relationship was "okay" and one said it was "fabulous." Some specifically said they enjoyed a good working relationship with district or BOCES special education director or liaison.

Among the directors, who generally have relationships with multiple schools, the response was more complex regarding their relationships with the schools. When asked "How would you characterize your relationship with the charter school?" four responded with positive comments and one was negative. LEA 1 said, "Generally I think it's positive. There is never enough funding." LEA 2 said, "About the same as other traditional schools. We have a good relationship with some and a tolerable relationship with others. The better their administrators and support personnel are, the better our working relationship." LEA 3 said, "I think we generally have a good relationship." Another said, "It's alright I guess. We don't work very closely with them." There is some animosity about our competing for the same students." LEA 4 said:

They're okay. We don't have very many charter schools and sometimes they think they can teach these kids better than we can. Their scores don't show it and it feels like we're losing money—paying so much to the charter schools and not getting a good return. I can understand it if the charter school specialized in serving gifted students, or the arts/science/math, but your basic core knowledge charter school just doesn't out perform us.

And then you can get one student with lots of needs in a charter school and that makes us really struggle as we're ultimately responsible for that student's progress.

Directors were also asked if they were "Comfortable sending students with special needs to charter schools?" LEA 1 agreed, adding that it "has helped having a district coordinator [of Special Education] who routinely interacts with the different charter schools."

LEA 2 said, "I don't think they do as good a job in educating those kids because we have more staff, more materials, more highly trained specialists. Most teachers in charter schools are not highly qualified."

When answering other questions, directors gave additional revealing answers. One said, "I wish the charter schools had more skilled administrators. When they don't know how to run a school, it really strains our relationship... their turnover is so high, about the time we get one trained, he leaves." A couple of directors complained about charter schools "competing" with neighborhood schools for students and money.

Directors were also asked if there were more opportunities to interact between district and charter schools since 2002. All but one said no. The one said:

With the increase in accountability and responsibility, the CDE has had to make sure all of us know the new playing field. I think the interaction has probably changed in recent years—more emphasis on data and how to submit it. On the other hand, I don't see us making solid educational decisions based on the data that we're collecting.

#### *What Should Be Done Differently*

Most schools believe the services they receive are of high quality, but are insufficient. They want more time with specialists or additional staff. One complained that the school has no control over the selection of specialists. Another stated that while the district has competent special education employees, collectively the team has the dysfunctions typical of a large bureaucracy. The rules change often. Communications are less than reliable as the school sometimes receives multiple differing answers. The school finds it difficult to get what they need. Decisions are not always made in the best interest of the students and the processes are needlessly frustrating.

Administrators at the vast majority of schools using the insurance models did not believe they were getting their money's worth. In particular, they wanted more time with specialists. Schools using the insurance model do not (or do not believe) they have the option to try other models. One administrator said that because they receive minimal time from specialists, these individuals are not well integrated into the staff and philosophy of the school. Two others said that specialists were well integrated into their schools. One school administrator said that the school did not know how the funding formulas, the method for selecting specialists, or the amount of time the school received were calculated.

Schools doing direct contracting, in comparison, were pleased with the cost effectiveness and control over their programs. One said the autonomy is "a lot of responsibility but it's also freeing."

One charter school administrator volunteered, without prompting, information about its experience last year. The administrator said that it and three others identified as high performing, participated in a pilot project that enabled the schools to reduce their payment to the district by \$80 per student by pooling their resources to purchase special education services from a university. The pilot project, clearly well received by the schools, allowed the schools to receive more services (PT, OT, and speech) for less money than they had paid in prior years. The pilot was discontinued when the university did not secure a key position for the program this year. The school coined the termination of the pilot a “big blow” and actively expressed an interest in the pilot’s return.

Directors also had several ideas about how things could be done differently. LEA 1 said that isolation among charter schools is a problem because “charter school administrators and staff don’t appear to network amongst themselves as say the schools in each of our feeder systems do.” LEA 2 would like to see more training for administrators and support personnel before they start their jobs.

Directors were asked if charter schools have developed more thorough plans for educating special education students in their applications. Three did not know. One said, “The new schools have had the advantage of building on the experiences and successes of their predecessors.” The other said, “I think they may be putting in more language saying they’ll address the students’ needs but that’s just because the [district charter school application] reviewers won’t give them the go ahead without it. I doubt they’re making any changes like that on their own.”

All of the directors thought the charter school administrators would benefit from knowing more about charter schools and special education. One said, “I only had one finance class in my Superintendency program and I am involved in financial decisions every day. I can imagine how those with a temporary or building level license struggle.” Another indicated how valuable training would be at the district level, “We’ve got people around here who don’t even know what a bond is but they’re responsible for managing their school’s money. Not only do they need more skills in finance, but law—particularly special education law and school district policies—everything from bussing policies to weather-related closures.”

LEA 5 said:

Those young folks come and go so that we’re always training them... Most of them just want to get their foot in the door and then move on to the big cities... To do their jobs right, they need about 10 years experience and they just don’t stick around that long.



## PART V

### Follow-Up on Baseline Study's Recommendations

The 2002 study made eight recommendations. Data from the 2006 survey and interviews showed progress made on most of the recommendations. Detailed below are the original, baseline, study's recommendations, followed by a brief narrative on the progress to date.

#### *2002 Recommendation 1*

\*Improved communication between districts and charter schools, including joint participation in meetings and training sessions and an increased number of visits to the charter schools by district administrators.

Follow-up: Communications and overall relationships between LEAs and charter schools appear to have improved since the 2002 study although more work needs to be done. Comparisons between the 2002 and 2006 study regarding the LEA-school relationship show a positive trend. In 2002, nearly 80% of charter schools characterized the relationship as "resistant" while 70% of the special education directors said it was "supportive." In this current study, both charter schools and districts had similar scores in the 3 to 4 range (on a one to five scale) when asked about their relationship regarding the IEP process, service provision, technical assistance, the funding process, and professional development.

The answers to additional questions asking about communications between schools and LEAs showed that schools regarded districts/BOCES as a resource when they had questions or students with high needs. Special education directors indicated that they offered many types of technical assistance to charter schools. More LEAs offered technical assistance in 2006 than in 2002. Charter school interviews corroborate the survey answers. Interviews with the charter school administrators and three of the district/BOCES special education directors indicate some improvement in communications and the relationship between the two. For example, charter school administrators indicated that they were included in training and mostly found it beneficial. Almost all said they had a good relationship with the district. Interviews with the special education directors, however, reveal a more complex picture. All indicated they had positive or "okay" relationship; however, most had concerns about the quality of services, administrators' knowledge, and the impact of competition.

#### *2002 Recommendation 2*

\*De-emphasize the role of charter schools as the answer to poorly performing traditional public schools. The current perception of the presence of charter schools as an indication of academic failure within a district undermines the relationship between districts and charter schools. The role of charter schools as schools of choice should be emphasized.

Follow-up: On April 6, 2006 the governor signed House Bill 06-1240 that made charter conversion of low performing schools an option rather than a mandatory prescription. Previously, conversion was mandatory for persistently low performing

schools. This mandatory prescription could have created a perception among some that charter schools were an indication of academic failure. The change in the law enables LEAs to use chartering as a tool when they deem appropriate. Charter schools are thus now portrayed in law as “schools of choice” rather than the result of a punitive mandate.

#### *2002 Recommendation 3*

\*Require charter schools to develop a detailed plan for meeting the needs of children with special education needs as part of the initial chartering process. Provide intensive education, training, and support for the development of this plan.

Follow-up: Since the publication of the 2002 study, the state created the Charter School Institute. The Institute’s Request for Applications requires candidates provide a plan for special education. Not all districts and BOCES, however, require such a plan as evidenced by the 2006 survey answers. In fact, a slightly lower percentage of charter schools in the 2006 study as in the 2002 study (73% vs. 76%) indicated that they provided a plan for serving students with disabilities in their charter. One of the district/BOCES interviewees believed that new charters were benefiting from the experience of older schools in terms of planning. Another director, however, voiced skepticism over the substance of these plans. While CDE materials do cover the subject of special education planning at length, it is unclear how well developed new charter plans are overall. One director, for example, said, “I think they may be putting in more language that says they’ll address the students’ needs but that’s just because the [district application] reviewers won’t give them the go ahead without it. I doubt they’re making any changes like that on their own.”

#### *2002 Recommendation 4*

\* Provide the opportunity for interaction between charter school administrators for improved sharing of techniques and strategies.

Follow-up: The League of Charter Schools and CDE both provide opportunities for interaction at their conferences. Online charter schools meet regularly with each other as well. Almost all of the directors of special education made mention of a district/BOCES employed liaison or other specific “go-to” person for questions about charter schools. And, more than half of the directors mentioned regularly scheduled (i.e. monthly) meetings between district/BOCES and charter personnel. It is unclear if the opportunities are sufficient.

#### *2002 Recommendation 5*

\* Provide the opportunity for interaction between special education administrators to discuss special concerns and strategies for working with charter schools.

Follow-up: Since the publication of the 2002 study CDE initiated the Charter School Special Education Advisory Committee with representatives from charter schools, school districts, the parent community, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, the Charter Friends National Network, higher education and the Office for Civil Rights. Each charter school and district/BOCES has established their own guidelines for communications. It is unclear how much of an improvement in communications is a direct result of the recommendations in the 2002 study, however, several participants specifically mentioned having a designated go-to person with whom they had a

satisfactory relationship. Virtually all special education director interviews indicated that communication is a school improvement goal. Penetrating this issue was not the goal of this study but it would be worth further investigation.

#### *2002 Recommendation 6*

\*Provide adequate support materials for charter schools. These materials should specify legal requirements and responsibilities of charter schools in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. A handbook and checklist would be most appropriate.

Follow-up: Since 2002, CDE has developed guidelines, a guidebook, a sample compliance plan for charter schools, and other resources available on its Web site. LEAs and charter schools agree that the materials are of high quality. Special education directors indicated some areas of need. They indicated they would like additional training opportunities on how to provide technical support to their schools. In terms of materials, directors said they would like to see changes in format and more consistency. These changes include making the Web site easy to navigate, enabling the data to be better manipulated, adding more information on virtual charter schools, providing best practices and case studies, and ensuring accuracy when new materials are released. Interviews with some charter school administrators indicated the administrator seemed unaware of the CDE resources.

#### *2002 Recommendation 7*

\*The role of the Colorado Department of Education should be more visible in providing technical assistance and training for legal compliance.

Follow-up: CDE has developed trainings, guidelines, a charter school special education guidebook, a best practices guidebook, a sample compliance plan for charter schools, and other resources, most of which are available on its Web site. While CDE trainings were viewed positively by directors, the directors identified ways to enhance CDE support. These include providing the additional materials and training and improving existing products. Specifically two directors indicated they would like additional training opportunities on how to provide technical support to their schools.

#### *2002 Recommendation 8*

\*Clarify funding issues for all concerned parties, especially the charter schools.

Follow-up: Although the 2006 study has brought substantial clarity to the issue, it has limits. The information gathered about specific models enabled researchers to produce a “snapshot” of the workings of the models but not a definitive picture. Even though this study’s response rate is relatively high, there are still inconsistent answers among special education directors and school administrators. And, many respondents did not know the answers to the questions and/or left them blank. Moreover in each model there is a large range of possibilities both in terms of costs and services.

While LEAs attempt to standardize service provision to some degree to ensure equity, the provision of services is often decided through negotiation. Costs are negotiated in 13% of full insurance model cases, 67% in modified insurance cases and in 38% of combination model cases. Difficulty in the calculation of costs is further exacerbated by the fact that there are so many factors. Consider the contract model, which should be the easiest to calculate. The district/BOCES passes along the proportional federal and state funds to the school. The school combines these funds with

general funds and contracts for services. The discrepancy between the self reported figure of the number of schools using the contract model and the district/BOCES-given total may indicate that some such schools are in fact combination schools that receive some part of the federal and state funds in terms of services (e.g. technical assistance, legal coverage, or training). The discrepancy could also exist because some schools participated in the survey while their LEAs did not participate. In order to determine the exact per pupil cost of those on the contract model one would need to have only true contract schools participate, the total amount of federal and state pass through funds, the number of students, and the school's special education budget.

The contract model is the easiest of the models and yet much of the information is missing, unclear, or inaccurate. In the case of the other three models, it would be essential to know exactly how much of the federal and state funds LEAs pass through in the form of services and well as in terms of cash and this is somewhat subjective figure. Negotiations, which are a substantial part of these models, interject additional variation. For this reason, additional studies are needed to provide greater clarity and precision.

#### *2002 Recommendation 9*

\*Use the charter school movement as a means of advocating increased federal funding of special education programs mandated by federal laws.

Follow up: Federal special education funding for Colorado schools has increased from \$105,255,414 in 2002 to \$149,344,090 (Funds for State Formula-Allocated and Selected Student Aid Programs, 2007). It is unclear what part charter schools have played in the change.

## PART VI

### Discussion

Strong trends were noted in the data, in the following areas 1) knowledge of participants, 2) institutional capacity, 3) institutional support, 4) finance, and, 5) LEA-school relationships.

#### *Knowledge*

Knowledge is essential to effective performance in all fields. Education is no different. Data from the survey and the interviews indicated that both groups would benefit from knowing more.

During the interviews, special education directors complained that many administrators lacked basic knowledge about special education, finance, and other aspects. One district/BOCES director expressed interest in more training for administrators and support personnel before they start working at a charter school. Although all charter school administrators served in a professional level capacity, 64% do not have a principal's (or higher) license. These individuals could benefit additional training specific to the skills and knowledge necessary to be an effective instructional and business leader.

During the interviews, all of the directors agreed that school personnel would benefit from knowing more about charter schools and special education. One said, "I only had one finance class in my Superintendency program and I am involved in financial decisions everyday. I can imagine how those with a temporary or building level license struggle." Another indicated how valuable training would be at the LEA level, "We've got people around here who don't even know what a [facility] bond is but they're responsible for managing their school's money, please." "Not only do they need more skills in finance, but law—particularly special education law, and school district policies—everything from bussing policies to weather-related closures."

The survey section on comfort levels was also telling. Special education directors indicated they were more comfortable than charter school administrators in terms of how the IEP process should unfold. Likewise charter school administrators have a higher comfort level with their knowledge of the IEP process than they do with their teachers' knowledge. The directors indicated moderate comfort levels with their knowledge of the charter school funding process and their ability to know if there were problems in charter schools' compliance with special education policy and law.

In essence, directors of special education believed they knew more than the charter school level administrator. And these administrators felt they knew more than the teachers. While this investigation measured perceptions and not actual knowledge, these results, at the very least, indicate all involved would benefit from knowing more about the process that is at the heart of service provision.

### *Institutional Capacity*

Knowledge is one component of institutional capacity. Planning and structure are two more. Schools will have better capacity to provide special education if they plan for it before they open their doors. For this reason, the 2002 study recommended that charters plan for special education in their contracts. At the time, 76% had done so in their initial or renewal contracts. The 2006 survey found 73% had done so. A quarter of schools do not have a plan for special education. Additionally, it is not clear from the limited data whether these plans are in general adequate. When directors were asked if charter schools have developed more thorough plans for educating special education students, three did not know. One said, “The new schools have had the advantage of building on the experiences and successes of their predecessors.” The other said, I think they may be putting in more language that says they’ll address the students’ needs but that’s just because the [district application] reviewers won’t give them the go ahead without it. I doubt they’re making any changes like that on their own.” The quality of planning is a subject for additional inquiry.

Another major change from 2002 is that more than twice as many schools (78% compared to 30%) surveyed indicated they requested information about students’ disability on the application. This may indicate that schools want to be upfront with parents about the types of services they offer.

In terms of marketing, charter schools are more likely to reach out to families in general by marketing their specific instructional program rather than marketing their special educational program. While the charter school respondents do not specifically advertise their ability to meet the needs of special education students, they do identify how such students would be served if they were to enroll.

Perhaps the greatest measure of capacity is how well students with special needs are being served. Because student achievement was beyond the scope of this study, an analysis of perceptions will have to suffice. Based on the survey, it appears in the eyes of the directors, charter schools are doing a slightly better job serving students with special needs.

When asked whether charter schools were adequately meeting the needs of students in special education, the average special education director rating was within the “somewhat disagree” category. Collapsing the data into simple “agree” and “disagree” categories, 38% perceive charter schools as adequately meeting the needs of special education students and 57% perceiving them as not adequately meeting the needs.

Directors were also asked during interviews if they were comfortable sending students with special needs to charter schools. Only one director had confidence in the charter schools. The remainder said they did not believe they were educating students with special needs as well as the traditional public schools.

### *Institutional Support*

CDE, the Colorado League of Charter Schools, and national organizations provide guidance materials, training, and technical assistance available for charter schools and authorizers including districts/BOCES. The 2002 study recommended that CDE increase its support for charter schools.

Since 2002, CDE has developed trainings, guidelines, a charter school special education guidebook, a best practices guidebook, a sample compliance plan for charter schools, and other resources, most of which are available on its Web site. They have also provided training. During the interviews, special education directors agreed CDE provided high quality materials and training.

Special education directors indicated some areas of need. They indicated a desire to increase training opportunities on how to provide technical support their schools. In terms of materials, directors said they would like to see changes in format and more consistency including making the Web site easier to navigate, enabling the data to be better manipulated, adding more information on online charter schools, providing best practices and case studies, and ensuring accuracy when materials are released. Charter school interviews indicated some charter school administrators seemed unaware of the CDE resources.

Although both CDE and League conferences and training provide opportunities to interact, at least two of the directors believed charter schools would benefit from additional opportunities.

### *State's Regulatory/Legal Framework*

The state's legal and regulatory framework impacts charter schools' capacity to provide special education. In most cases, directors and charter schools indicated satisfaction with the state's framework. Two schools had concerns about the impact of legal and regulatory prescriptions on their programs.

In one case, a school identified as the greatest regulatory barrier the short duration of the charter. Because the school must renew its charter every three years, she believes there is little time to implement new ideas and measure their impact. She further believes that successful schools should be allowed more time between renewals. Also, another school administrator said she feels as though she has two exclusive relationships – one with the district and one with the state. For their “alternative education campus” designation the school used CDE's indicators. The school uses other indicators with the district. The school administrator would like the state and the district to align their indicators so that the school is not striving to meet two sets of expectations. Both of these issues warrant additional study.

### *Finance*

This study in part fulfils the 2002 recommendation to provide additional clarity on finance issues. The information gathered about specific models enabled researchers to produce a “snapshot” of the workings of the models but not a definitive picture. Moreover, in each model there is a large range of possibilities, both in terms of costs and services. While LEAs attempt to standardize service provision to some degree to ensure equity, the provision of services is often decided through negotiation. Costs are

negotiated in 13% of full insurance model cases, 67% in modified insurance cases and in 38% of combination model cases.

LEAs and schools gave divergent answers when asked to provide data regarding the per-pupil amount paid by the school to the LEA, whether the district/BOCES provided additional funding, and whether the school received state and federal funds. In general, school administrators said they were paying more for services than the special education directors indicated they were paying. LEAs believed they were giving schools more in terms of additional district/BOCES funds/services and state and federal funds. Given the expressed desire for increased knowledge, it is not surprising to find the number of questions answered “don’t know” or left blank were higher in the Funding Mechanisms section than in other sections of the survey.

Only half of the charter schools indicated they were receiving federal/state pass through funds, which is mandated by law. A third of the directors said they were not sending federal/state funds to charter schools. It is possible that in some of these cases the district/BOCES is passing through funds as services instead of cash. In any case, there is a lack of accurate information.

The combination and full insurance models were the most commonly used. Comparing survey responses between 2002 and 2006, it appears that more schools are using insurance (full or modified) and the combination models than in the past. Each model differs in terms of per-pupil fees, whether the LEA pays additional costs, and the receipt of federal and state funds.

The vast majority of charter school administrators interviewed, who operate with the insurance models, did not believe they were getting their money’s worth. In particular they wanted more time with specialists.

In general, 2006 charter school administrators reported they have less control over their staffing decisions now than in 2002 (50% compared to 62%). Nevertheless, most of the 2006 respondents were satisfied (47%) or somewhat satisfied (22%) with the level of control. Of those using the full insurance model 45% were dissatisfied, 36% were somewhat satisfied and just 18% indicated they were satisfied.

Of those using the contracted model 80% were satisfied and 20% were somewhat satisfied. In the interviews, charter school administrators using the contract model said they were pleased with the cost effectiveness and control over their programs. One said the autonomy is “a lot of responsibility but it’s also freeing.”

Other interviewees said they would like to try other arrangements but they said that they did not have the option. In the survey it was evident that large LEAs generally had all of their schools on one model while districts/BOCES with four to five schools were more likely to use multiple models. It is possible that because LEAs bear the ultimate legal responsibility for the provision of special education, that they are hesitant to try innovative arrangements.



### *Charter-LEA Relationships*

Comparisons between the 2002 and 2006 study regarding the LEA school relationship also show a positive trend. In 2002, nearly 80% of charter school administrators characterized the relationship as “resistant” while 70% of special education directors said it was “supportive.” In the 2006, both charter schools and districts/BOCES had similar scores in the 3 to 4 range when asked about their relationship regarding the IEP process, service provision, technical assistance, the funding process, and professional development. During the interviews, the vast majority of charter school interviewees indicated they have a good relationship with the district/BOCES in general and in relationship to special education. This is a significant improvement from the 2002 study.

When asked “How would you characterize your relationship with the charter school?” four responded with positive or neutral comments and one was negative. For some of the directors, the quality of the relationship varied depending on the school. One director characterized the relationship as, “About the same as other traditional schools. We have a good relationship with some and a tolerable relationship with others. The better their administrators and support personnel are, the better our working relationship.” Another said, “I wish the charter schools had more skilled administrators. When they don’t know how to run a school, it really strains our relationship.” One director said, “It’s [the relationship] alright I guess. We don’t work very closely with them.” These answers seem to indicate a lack of communication and suggest a distant relationship. When special education directors were also asked if they perceived more opportunities to interact between district/BOCES and charter schools since 2002, only one said yes.

Other issues surfaced during the interviews. Most of the directors voiced concern about competition for money and students. All but one did not believe charter schools were doing better or even as well as traditional public schools in terms of student achievement. According to the recent statistics, Colorado charter schools outperform traditional public schools in grades K-8 while falling behind traditional public schools in high school (Ziebarth, 2005).

From the schools’ perspective, communications between districts/BOCES and charter schools appear to have improved since the 2002 study. The answers to additional questions asking about communications between schools and districts/BOCES showed that schools regarded LEAs as a resource when they had questions or students with high needs.

Additionally, special education directors indicated that they offered many types of technical assistance to charter schools. More districts/BOCES offered technical assistance in 2006 than in 2002. In general, charter school administrators said that their LEA’s technical assistance and training were of high quality. Most said they were invited to training opportunities. One school in particular was pleased that the district provided a mentor for the special education teacher. Several schools said they would like more training and technical assistance.

Some charter school administrators indicated that they did not receive enough training or technical assistance because they were not always invited, the district did not have enough personnel, or because of bureaucratic inefficiency. One indicated that the training was of poor quality and repetitive. Another said it was not always relevant and never site-based.

## PART VII

### Recommendations

The 2006 data from the surveys and interviews revealed trends in administrator/director knowledge, institutional capacity and support, finance models, and LEA-school relationships. While the trends showed improvements in some of these areas since 2002, more action is needed to support continued progress. Specifically, the state of Colorado needs to build the capacity within charter schools and their LEAs to effectively cooperate together in serving the needs of students with disabilities. Based on the data collected and analyzed for this report, the following actions are recommended.

1) Provide training for charter schools and their districts/BOCES in areas of critical need. Effective training will increase the knowledge of both administrators and special education directors enabling them to better serve students. To this end:

- provide administrators and LEA special education directors training in matters of special education finance;
- provide training for district/BOCES charter school authorizers in how to critically review charter applications to ensure that adequate planning in special education has been completed;
- provide school district/BOCES personnel training in how to provide technical support to schools and other aspects of effective management of special education;
- provide additional training for new administrators in the area of special education and school management; and,
- continue funding research projects to clarify issues and identify what resources are needed. In particular, a study would be useful on the cost effectiveness, equity/adequacy of special education services, and student achievement in charter schools compared to traditional public schools. Online schools and special education would be another useful topic of study.

2) CDE is currently providing useful resources to LEAs and schools. Interview data indicate areas for augmentation and improvement. In particular, it is recommended CDE consider the following actions:

- enhance its Web site by providing tools to enable users to manipulate the data; add new technologies to enable Web-based meetings/workshops and video streaming to augment printed materials; update existing materials; ensure consistency and accuracy before releasing information;
- provide additional studies and data on online charter schools, models and case studies of successful practices around the state, data regarding how many students with what kinds of needs are being served, where they are served, and how they are progressing;

- enable more schools to participate in the Colorado School Support Team process whereby the state provides a team of experts to comprehensively evaluate schools on 10 standards and resources to implement an improvement plan; and,
- conduct efforts to ensure all stakeholders know about the training and materials.

3) While training is essential, other resources can help schools acquire knowledge and institute sound organizational structures and best practices. To this end stakeholders should consider the following actions:

- encourage voluntary participation in a quality assurance program such as the Baldrige National Quality Program to identify and establish goals (e.g. financial, organizational, relational) and to improve management and business processes at the charter and district/BOCES level;
- establish mentoring programs to build relationships and encourage best practices. Schools receiving LEA mentoring indicated that this was an effective method for improving special education delivery;
- set voluntary expectations for school and district/BOCES personnel to attend additional business and school management workshops/classes/presentations; and,
- increase the distribution of knowledge to the school systems and the public about charter schools.

4) Districts/BOCES can increase charter school knowledge and capacity by providing more information and technical assistance to charter schools. In particular they should:

- clarify to each of their schools, in writing, the type of service model (full insurance, modified insurance, contracting, combination), the amount of per-student fee to the LEA (if applicable), the services provided by the LEA, additional costs paid by the district/BOCES in cash or services, the amount of federal and state pass through funds and the form of those funds (cash or services);
- develop innovative solutions such as the pilot project, discussed in Part IV, that allow schools to cooperate together with other entities such universities in providing special education services;
- adopt standards to evaluate charter school charter applications and charter renewals to ensure effective planning for special education. CDE has provided a guidebook that delineates some of the essential issues and questions for these negotiations (Freppel, 2002). The CSI Request for Proposals special education requirements offers another template; and,
- increase the charter term for high performing schools. Under Colorado law, charter terms must be at least three years. Districts/BOCES could decrease the administrative burden for high performing charter schools by giving them more time between charter renewals.

## Limitations of the Study

All studies have unintentional and unavoidable limitations. There were several such limitations in this study.

- Since the survey was taken voluntarily, the results cannot be considered random or representative.
- There may be a difference between those who did respond and those who did not. These potential differences would limit the generalizability of this project.
- All aspects of the survey were self-reported and no attempt was made to validate the respondents' opinions and/or data provided. Some of the self-reported data may have been in error. For example, one district indicated 27 charter schools in the district, however, all other data sources (such as CDE and the district's website) indicate the same district has only four.
- This study surveyed only charter school administrators and district/BOCES directors of special education in Colorado.
- Not all respondents answered all of the questions. For example, the percentage of respondents who answered demographic and opinion type questions was very high, where as the number of respondents who answered the more specific and detailed funding questions were relatively fewer.

## **PART VIII**

### **Conclusion**

Drawn from 178 survey responses and 21 interviews, the data analyzed for this study reveals the efforts made since 2002 to improve services for students with disabilities who are being educated in Colorado's charter schools—a responsibility shared by LEAs and charter schools. Specifically, the data shows a growing level of support through CDE guidance and training as well as district/BOCES provided technical support, more cooperation between schools and LEAs, and some improvement in their relationship. This progress, notwithstanding, there are still gaps in cooperation, information, particularly in the area of finance, institutional capacity, and support and guidance materials. These gaps can be filled in part through information provided through guidance materials and training for school administrators and LEA personnel.

Planning and engagement are essential as well. School founders should engage in comprehensive planning for special education before the school opens its doors. With clear information about finance models and costs provided by the LEA, the school and the district/BOCES would be able to better negotiate a plan that best serves the students. Once open, the school should be able to draw upon the district/BOCES, the state, and outside organizations for training, guidance, mentoring, and technical assistance. If the school begins to struggle, the Colorado School Support Team process can provide assistance. The data gathered for this study suggests that many of these activities are presently being conducted at schools across the state but they are far from universal.

As the number of charter schools continues to grow, it is essential that capacity building activities become more fully integrated into the education system. Colorado parents benefit from being able to choose among traditional and charter public schools. Building the capacity of charter schools to serve students with special needs will ensure that their families have full access to Colorado's school choice opportunities.

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**Special Education Services in Colorado Charter Schools:  
Surveying Perceptions of Charter School Administrators and Special Education  
Directors**

Charter School Administrator Response Form

Respondent's name \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_

Charter school name \_\_\_\_\_ District name \_\_\_\_\_

1. What year was your school issued its first charter? \_\_\_\_\_
2. How long have you been an administrator at this charter school?
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1 – 3 years
  - 4 – 6 years
  - More than 6 years
3. How long have you been a school administrator in any setting?
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1 – 3 years
  - 4 – 6 years
  - More than 6 years
4. What is your professional certification/licensure? (Select all that apply.)
  - None
  - Teacher
  - Administrator/Principal
  - Superintendent
  - Special Education Director
  - Other
5. Is this certification/licensure:
  - Emergency
  - Initial
  - Professional
6. Does the charter contract with your school district/authorizer specify how students with disabilities will be served?
  - Yes
  - No
  - Don't know

7. How are your special education services provided and paid for?
- Contracted model (entirely by the charter school's own staff/contractors)
  - Full insurance model (entirely by the school district or BOCES)
  - Modified insurance model (services primarily provided by the charter school's own staff/contractors with an additional per student dollar amount paid to the school district or BOCES to cover services needed that the charter school can not provide)
  - Combination model (some services provided by the charter school's own staff/contractors and some services provided by the school district or BOCES)

**If you use the contracted model:**

How much do you pay for special education staff (including benefits)? \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you pay for related service providers? \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you pay for special education insurance? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other special education costs paid by the school? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-06?

\_\_\_\_\_

**If you use the full insurance model:**

How much per student do you pay for special education services? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this amount per all students or per students with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other special education costs paid by the school? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-06?

\_\_\_\_\_

**If you use the modified insurance model:**

How much do you pay for special education staff (including benefits)? \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you pay for related service providers? \_\_\_\_\_

How much per student do you pay the school district/BOCES for special education services? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this amount per all students or per students with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other special education costs paid by the school? \_\_\_\_\_



What is the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-06?

\_\_\_\_\_

**If you use the combination model:**

How much do you pay for special education staff (including benefits)? \_\_\_\_\_

How much do you pay for related service providers? \_\_\_\_\_

How much per student do you pay the school district/BOCES for special education services? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this amount per all students or per students with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other special education costs paid by the school? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the total dollar amount spent for special education in fiscal year 2005-06?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Of the currently enrolled students with an IEP, how many students fall into each of the following categories (based on the primary disability)? Please type a number for each category.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Perceptual communicative disabilities/Specific Learning Disability
- \_\_\_\_\_ Significantly Identifiable Emotional Disorders
- \_\_\_\_\_ significantly limited intellectual capacity
- \_\_\_\_\_ Multiple disabilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Speech-Language Impairment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Physical disabilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Hearing disabilities
- \_\_\_\_\_ Vision disabilities

9. How many FTE general education teachers do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many special education staff serve students with IEPs in your charter school? (Provide a number in each category in the chart below.)

Number of FTEs	FTE Teachers	FTE Related Service Providers (Speech, OT, etc)	FTE Paraprofessionals
District/BOCES Provided			
Charter School Provided			

11. How does your school reach out to parents of students with disabilities who might want to enroll their child in your school? (Check all that apply.)

- Advertising
- Community meetings
- District referrals
- School literature/brochures
- Other. Please specify \_\_\_\_\_

12. Is there a place on the students' enrollment application where parents indicate the existence of their child's disability?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

13. If your school uses a combination model, who primarily pays for these services? (Check the appropriate boxes.)

	District/BOCES	Your School	Don't Know/ Never used
Prof. Development for special ed teachers			
Legal counsel			
Student's initial evaluation			
IEP process			
Service delivery with students			
Provision of related services			
Braille services			
Sign language interpreters			
Speech/Language therapy			
Occupational therapy			
Physical therapy			
Assistive technology			
Counseling			
Orientation/mobility			
Transportation			
Other			

14. If your school obtains these services from the district/BOCES (the insurance or combination model), what level of control do you have over staff selection?
- 100%
  - 51% - 99%
  - 50%
  - 1% - 49%
  - 0%
15. Are you satisfied with the level of control you have over staff selection and use?
- Yes
  - No
  - Somewhat
16. Do you receive state special education funds from your district?
- Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
17. Do you receive federal special education funds from your district?
- Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
18. If your school receives state or federal special education funds from the district, in which form are those funds?
- Cash sent to the charter school
  - Services specifically for the charter school
  - Monies are pooled for use by high needs students in any school in the district
  - Other. Please describe. \_\_\_\_\_
19. Do you seek, independent of the district, federal or private grants for special education?
- Yes
  - No
  - Don't know
20. If you seek private grants, what is your intended use for those funds? (Check all that apply.)
- Staff Professional Development
  - Building/facilities
  - Purchasing additional materials/resources
  - Technology improvements
  - General operating costs
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_
21. If you received special education revenue from any source described above, what is the total dollar amount received in fiscal year 2005-06? \_\_\_\_\_

22. If you, or the staff, discover a student with an IEP needs more services than you can provide, what do you do?

- Consult with district/BOCES
- Initiate an IEP meeting
- Refer the child back to the district
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

23. Who do you contact if you have a question about special education? (Check all that apply.)

- District
- BOCES
- Colorado League of Charter Schools
- Colorado Department of Education
- Colorado Association of School Executives
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

24. Please rate the following statements.

Mark the "1" for "strongly disagree"  
Mark the "2" for "somewhat disagree"  
Mark the "3" for "neither agree nor disagree"  
Mark the "4" for "somewhat agree"  
Mark the "5" for "strongly agree"

	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with how the IEP process unfolds at my school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with my knowledge of the IEP process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with the teachers' knowledge of the IEP process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with my knowledge of the charter school funding process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with my knowledge of the special education funding process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our charter school has a good relationship with the district/BOCES in matters of:					
The IEP process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service provision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technical assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The funding process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Special Education Services in Colorado Charter Schools:  
Surveying Perceptions of Charter School Administrators and Special Education Directors**

School District/BOCES Special Education Director Response Form

Special Education Director's name \_\_\_\_\_

School District/BOCES name \_\_\_\_\_

1. How long have you been a Special Education Director with this School District/BOCES?
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1 – 3 years
  - 4 – 6 years
  - More than 6 years
  
2. How long have you been a Special Education Director in any setting?
  - Less than 1 year
  - 1 – 3 years
  - 4 – 6 years
  - More than 6 years
  
3. How many charter schools do you serve in your school district/service area? \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. How do your charter schools provide/pay for special education services?
  - Contracted model (entirely by the charter school's own staff/contractors)
  - Full insurance model (entirely by the school district or BOCES)
  - Modified insurance model (services primarily provided by the charter school's own staff/contractors with an additional per student dollar amount paid to the school district or BOCES to cover services needed that the charter school can not provide)
  - Combination model (some services provided by the charter school's own staff/contractors and some services provided by the school district or BOCES)
  
5. If not all charter schools in your school district/service area use the same model, how many charter schools participate in: (Please write in a number.)
  - The contracted model \_\_\_\_\_
  - The full insurance model \_\_\_\_\_
  - The modified insurance model \_\_\_\_\_
  - A combination model \_\_\_\_\_

**If the charter schools use the contracted model:**

Are there other charter school special education costs paid by the school district/BOCES?  
Y or N

If yes, what is the total dollar amount the school district/BOCES spent for special education services in charter schools in fiscal year 2005-06?

---

**If the charter schools use the full insurance model:**

How much per student do the charter schools pay for special education services?

---

Is this amount per all students or per students with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other charter school special education costs paid by the school district/BOCES?  
Y or N

If yes, what is the total dollar amount the school district/BOCES spent for special education services in charter schools in fiscal year 2005-06?

---

How is this special education per pupil insurance cost figured?

- Calculated and assigned by the district
- Negotiated in charter/contract with the district
- Calculated by the charter school
- Don't know

Which of the following services is covered by your School District/BOCES insurance model?

- Professional development for special education teachers
- Legal counsel
- Initial evaluations
- Interventions
- IEP process
- Service delivery
- Hiring a special education teacher
- Hiring an itinerant teacher
- Related services
- Transportation
- Day treatment placements
- Residential treatment placements
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If the charter schools use the modified insurance model:**

How much does the school district/BOCES pay for special education instructional staff providing services in the charter schools (including benefits)? \_\_\_\_\_

How much does the school district/BOCES pay for related service providers in the charter schools? \_\_\_\_\_

How much per student do the charter schools pay for special education services?  
\_\_\_\_\_

Is this amount per all students or per students with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other charter school special education costs paid by the school district/BOCES?  
Y or N

If yes, what is the total dollar amount the school district/BOCES spent for special education services in charter schools in fiscal year 2005-06?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How is this special education per pupil insurance cost figured?

- Calculated and assigned by the district
- Negotiated in charter/contract with the district
- Calculated by the charter school
- Don't know

Which of the following services is covered by your School District/BOCES insurance model?

- Professional development for special education teachers
- Legal counsel
- Initial evaluations
- Interventions
- IEP process
- Service delivery
- Hiring a special education teacher
- Hiring an itinerant teacher
- Related services
- Transportation
- Day treatment placements
- Residential treatment placements
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**If the charter schools use the combination model:**

How much does the school district/BOCES pay for special education instructional staff providing services in the charter schools (including benefits)? \_\_\_\_\_

How much does the school district/BOCES pay for related service providers in the charter schools? \_\_\_\_\_

How much per student do the charter schools pay for special education services? \_\_\_\_\_

Is this amount per all students or per students with IEPs? \_\_\_\_\_

Are there other charter school special education costs paid by the school district/BOCES? Y or N

If yes, what is the total dollar amount the school district/BOCES spent for special education services in charter schools in fiscal year 2005-06?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How is this special education per pupil insurance cost figured?

- Calculated and assigned by the district
- Negotiated in charter/contract with the district
- Calculated by the charter school
- Don't know

Which of the following services is covered by your School District/BOCES insurance model?

- Professional development for special education teachers
- Legal counsel
- Initial evaluations
- Interventions
- IEP process
- Service delivery
- Hiring a special education teacher
- Hiring an itinerant teacher
- Related services
- Transportation
- Day treatment placements
- Residential treatment placements
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you pass along state special education funds to your charter schools?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know



7. Do you pass along federal special education funds to your charter schools?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

8. If your school district/BOCES passes along state and/or federal special education funds to the charter schools, in which form are those funds passed along?

- Cash sent to the charter school
- Services specifically for the charter school
- Monies are pooled for use by high needs students in any school in the district
- Other. Please describe. \_\_\_\_\_

9. If your school district/BOCES passes along state and/or federal special education funds to charter schools, how are those amounts determined?

- Current December 1 counts in the charter schools
- Prior year December 1 counts in the charter schools
- Other. Please describe. \_\_\_\_\_

10. How many charter schools in your school district/service area specify in their charter contract how students with disabilities will be served?

- All
- Most
- Some
- None
- Don't know

11. In which of the following areas does your School District/BOCES offer specialized technical assistance to charter schools:

- Student assessment
- IEP development
- Discipline
- Manifestation determinations
- Legal compliance
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

12. If you or the staff discovers a student with an IEP in a charter school needs more services than the charter school can provide, what do you do?

---

---

13. Please rate the following statements. Mark the “1” for “strongly disagree”  
Mark the “2” for “somewhat disagree”  
Mark the “3” for “neither agree nor disagree”  
Mark the “4” for “somewhat agree”  
Mark the “5” for “strongly agree”

	1	2	3	4	5
I am satisfied with how the IEP process unfolds in charter schools.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with the charter administrators’ knowledge of the IEP process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with my knowledge of the charter school funding process.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In the charter schools, special education students’ needs are meet adequately.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know if there are problems in charter schools’ special education compliance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Our district has a good relationship with the charter schools in matters of:					
The IEP process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Service provision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Technical assistance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The funding process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>