

# Jan\_AGAME\_Webinar\_Charter\_Network

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Charter schools, accountability, support systems, asset mapping, resource alignment, professional networks, high quality schools, governance, transparency, policy intervention, authorizers, student support, strategic framework, ecosystem, responsive goals.

## SPEAKERS

Lisa Bergman, Tamara Shear, Sarah Hackett, Robert Bellafiore, Vashaunta Harris, Aimee Evan

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Lisa Bergman 00:10

In this session support struggling charter schools, we're going to tackle some tough questions surrounding accountability support systems and how to align resources to ensure that schools receive the help they need without compromising that autonomy. Our goal today is to create a shared understanding of the need in the charter ecosystem and explore how asset mapping can be used to strategically match schools with the supports that they require to improve performance and overcome challenges that they're facing. So today, we're looking for each of you to wrestle with what will work in your own context. We come together today in community. We encourage everyone to keep their cameras on, especially during the two breakout sessions that we will do. And it is my pleasure to introduce the a game core team today, not able to be with us, but definitely a key member of our team. Jody Ernst, the Vice President of momentum strategy and research, one of the founding thinkers and lead experts in the a game work around responsive goals. Vashonta Harris is with us, the Vice President of professional networks with the National Charter Schools Institute. You'll hear from vashanta at the end of our convening today. And a chunk of today is dedicated to our colleague and core team member, Amy Evans and her work as the Senior Research Associate at West Ed our she leads our team in this work, and we are going and she's going to engage with us today throughout this session, joining Amy today will be Sarah Hackett, the director of the Wisconsin Resource Center for charter schools, and Tamara shear the chief program officer for opportunity 180. I am going to turn over this discussion and the next hour to Amy, who is joined by one of my favorite colleagues, Bob Bellafiore. Aimee, Bob, take it away.



Aimee Evan 02:10

Thanks, Lisa. And welcome everyone. Thank you for joining and a very warm welcome to Sarah and tam for joining us. Today, we're going to talk about, we spend a lot of time talking about supports for schools. And Sarah and tam have just done an amazing job of setting up a real system of support, which is something that we're going to talk about. We wanted to provide these. There's a lot of similarities in the in the work that the two organizations do. But there's also some divergences as well, and we wanted to provide these as examples to really build

your visions of what these systems of support could look like, could feel like, could be organized like or not. So take this for bed, borrowing and stealing, as we do so well in education, and make it your own. And we're just so excited that Sarah and Tam are here to share more about their journey and the very impactful work that they do. So I'll pass it over to Bob to get us kicked off so we can learn more about these two organizations.

R

Robert Bellafiore 03:24

Well, hi folks. Hi Sarah, hi Tamara, nice to meet you all. I'm a senior fellow at the Institute my first my first chunk of my career was as a newspaper reporter, so I apologize in advance if I ask an obnoxious question, it's just a flashback. So but I've also spent time in my life as a policy maker and running SUNY charter schools Institute in the early days, and struggling with a lot of these questions from the very beginning. So I think what I first want to do is just give you each a chance to describe your organizations briefly and ask a real simple question, why do you exist? Sarah, why don't you go first?

S

Sarah Hackett 04:13

Sounds good. All right. Well, hi everyone. I'm Sarah Hackett, the director of the Wisconsin Resource Center for charter schools. We abbreviate it to WRCCS, which you could pronounce as works. So if I say works, that's I'm talking about our organization. We in Wisconsin, got the CSP grant in 2017 and written into that grant was this idea of creating a state Resource Center, because something like that's never existed before. At the time, there also was no advocacy group. There was just really no associations for authorizers or for charter schools. And so this was an effort to just sort of create something that could support the charters and authorizers. And so that's what we've been doing since 2018 and now we're in our second CSP grant. Um, since the start of works and so that ta money's been supporting us a lot, but we also are do fee for service with schools and authorizers, and we have our own sort of partnerships and things going on in addition to the CSP work, but we're here in, I think, kind of a unique role to some of our counterparts around the country is that we are supporting, like I said, both authorizers and charter schools. And so we have the Center for high quality authorizing housed with our within our organization, and then the Center for high quality charter schools, and then that charter schools, one is really multi faceted with like the governance board, the leaders, classroom supports, family supports, new school supports. You know that design work, so a lot going on there, in addition to the authorizing work. Did I answer your second question, Bob about sort of why we exist existentially?

R

Robert Bellafiore 06:01

Not yet, but I have a follow up. So just for those of us who aren't in Wisconsin, how many authorizers Do you with and how many schools?

S

Sarah Hackett 06:10

So many so we have, all of our school districts and all of our public universities can authorize about a quarter of them do. So that's like 100 ish active authorizers, but then another 400 potential authorizers. So it's a lot of educating. And then of those you know kind of spread

potential authorizers. So it's a lot of educating. And then of those, you know, kind of spread among those 100 authorizers were at like 240 ish charter schools. So school to authorize the ratio is really different here.

R

Robert Bellafiore 06:43

All right. Well, that's great. Let's we'll get we'll get back to you on some of the other existential stuff. Tim, how about you tell us about opportunity 180

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Tamara Shear 06:53

Yeah. Thanks. Tam shear, if I call it similarly, we call it o1 80 sometimes. So if you hear me say o1 80, it's just a way to not have to say the full opportunity 180. But we were founded in 2016 as a standard Harbor Master. Charters were in mostly more fluent areas in Clark County, in Las Vegas, and hadn't historically existed where, where kids had been most underserved. And so we, we, we were founded originally to kind of be a Harbor Master, to support charter schools opening in historically underserved areas and supporting that community. We were, we redid our strategic framework in 2019 to really be an eco, to really help catalyze an ecosystem around great schools so that all kids graduate high school, college and career ready, prepared to live the life they dream. And we studied five major metropolitan cities to come up with five key strategic levers that we use to drive catalyzing that ecosystem. I can go into what those are later, if helpful, but I can use good data, engaged community, good governance, great ideas and schools, and so we do a lot of different work in those but I think what makes us pretty unique is that we are set to sunset in 2031 and so we will evaluate the ecosystem that we believe we help catalyze, and then fundamentally re envision who we are as an organization to ideally having catalyzed a stronger ecosystem to really support great schools. So we are governance agnostic. We believe in high quality public schools, but we work with the state. We work with the local school districts, we work with the State Public Charter School authority, and we work with all public charter schools. We're also the seat. We also won the CSP grant in 2020 we're reapplying this year, so Sarah, I'm gonna have to reach out to you on some tips for reapplication of the of the CSP grant. But, but we're reapplying this year, and so we have really heavily leaned into the charter landscape with the CSP grant. And given the need for high quality schools, we believe that charters will help raise the bar for our district schools as well and in Nevada. So that is a little bit about us and why we exist. I don't know if there's any additional questions, no, but I think you both sort of answered the second existential question, which is, I think why we're all here on this call is that the reason we're here is because kids need great schools so they can have opportunities and live better lives. And from a more policy perspective, you might think, well, you know, parent choice is a question of equity, but, but really, I think I would now speak for everybody, but we all sort of, we're all here sort of for the same thing, great start and sustain high quality schools that provide learning for kids so they can have opportunities, right? So that's pretty much it. So how does it work with you guys? Okay? Because you know from the beginning the deep philosophical one of the deep philosophical questions in Chartering and in authorizing was, Are you the district? Are you not the district?

R

Robert Bellafiore 10:00

Are you the umpire? Are you the batting coach? Right? Are you supposed to help schools do better? Or just like, no, you lost the bat. You missed it. Off. You're right? And then, based on

better? Or just like, go up, I set the bar. You missed it. Off. You go right? And then, based on that, what your stance is as an authorizer? Well, then, how can you then, if you want to get involved, how can you then sort of be the nasty word the regulator, and say, Well, I know I told you to do all these things, but you still stink at it, so you're out right? You guys are neither school nor authorizer. So are you like the person with one foot on the dock and one foot on the boat, and as they separate, you just get wet. How does this work?

T

Tamara Shear 10:46

I try to think we're like the life raft, but like, as as they separate, we try to be the life raft for both. I don't know Sarah about you, but like, if they're separating, we try and figure out, okay, well, what needs to happen to the dock to bring or does they need a rope? Do they need? What kind of a rope, right? So I think we try, my opinion would be, we try and bring them back together towards the common goal, which we know they both have, which is that providing high quality school options for kids.

S

Sarah Hackett 11:13

Yeah, I think focusing on like, what has to happen here in order to make a good experience for kids. And so, you know, is it that neither of you are following the contract? You both have veered off. You both have misunderstandings. How do we bring it back and refine that contract? Or, you know, however you call it in your states, to to really say, this is what we're doing, and this is how we're going to hold ourselves accountable, but it is awkward conversations sometimes, because everyone wants you to be on their side. And I'm like, There's no sides, right? It's about like a good school. And so what do we all need to do? So certainly, that can be a struggle, but you're right. I mean, we've really been focusing as we build out our Center for high quality authorizing to really think about it as a supportive partnership with really clear parameters and clear transparency throughout, so that everyone is on the same page at all times about what the expectation is, how the school is meeting it, and what the school might need in order to be successful. And if we can have that kind of clear plan and transparency throughout, then there's no surprises, and you don't stray away from the dock, or however you phrased it, you know, like you, you stay on that together.

T

Tamara Shear 12:32

So yeah, and I would add to that, I think some of the other things we're trying to do is make sure policy also reflects like best practices. So how are authorizers being evaluated, how currently they were not in our state, and so like, we worked with the Department of Ed to think about like, what is an authorizer evaluation and support look like, to make sure that they are they are being high quality. And then to your point, Sarah, what does transparency look like for the schools? And are the schools very transparent on what they are being held accountable to, and given some flexibility to be taught to have their autonomy, that the reason they started the public charter school was to have the autonomy right, and so like with that transparency, do they also have some autonomy? And there is a lot of what we spend our conversations around at the policy level and making sure that can still happen in addition to what Sarah shared.



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**R** Robert Bellafiore 13:26

Okay, I'm going to torture another metaphor, when the bell rings and you have to slide down the pole and get on the truck and go to a fire. Who pulls the box the authorizer or the school.

**S** Sarah Hackett 13:39

Wait, what about the box. I think you lost me in the old firehouse.

**R** Robert Bellafiore 13:43

Sorry, sorry, what? How do you How is it that that, oh, 180 and works, gets involved in a case, right? Does the authorizer call you? Does the school call you? Right? And then, so, like, just, how do you know? How do you get? How do you get engaged? If the authorizer calls, you do. They then say, Hey, you got to get them to do these three things. But I can't tell them, because I'm the authorizer, and then I can't bust them on it when they don't do it. Or does the school say the authorizers being such a jerk, they just don't understand what a good job we're doing, right? Just how do you get? How do you get? How do you get hired in a different, different term.

**T** Tamara Shear 14:22

I can start if that's okay. So we are not a so we are not a fees based association. So we actually make investments in our schools without any. With philanth, we raise philanthropy to make investments in additional to the CSP grant that we have. So every school in our portfolio, we like to say that they're like their bat we're like their bat phone. They like literally call us for a million different things. For better or worse, we're working to, like, be more strategic with that, with having relationship managers, etc, but so schools will call us as a bat phone. We also work with authorizers, so I would say it's all of the above, plus a local news outlet will call us if we try to be the ecosystem. System that really supports strong messaging for charters as a whole, the govs department will call their gov office will call us, then the bad department bed will call us, right? So people will call us, so we will answer anybody's call to the case and take on the case, as long as it's a school that we we believe is capable of providing high quality options for kids and needs our support. So we will, and oftentimes we get lots of complaints from schools about the authorizer, but that's a different case to take on, but we will take on the case of any struggling school, and various people will call us the school, the authorizer. We meet monthly with all the active authorizers, and so we align on all schools monthly with them that they have, like, any red flags, and then we bat phone for a lot of people,

**S** Sarah Hackett 15:51

yeah, yeah, that phone's Great. Yeah,

**R** Robert Bellafiore 15:54

we fire house. Thank you. I'm an old guy. Yeah,

S

Sarah Hackett 15:59

we get calls yes from the authorizer and the school and a parent all in the same morning, all about their own take on, you know, some meeting that had blown up the night before. But no, I like to think that we're kind of multi faceted. So yes, we're the bat phone, but also we're trying to do a lot of proactive and preventative work as well. And so we're trying to have these relationships where we are helping create, you know, better bylaws, better policies, better enrollment procedures. You know, all these things as they're just small problems or even not problems yet, and then, you know, fewer of those emergency calls hopefully will come, although it feels like it just never slows down. You do all the proactive work, and then there's still so much. But yes, I think we we get calls, we get we get brought in when there's conflict and corrective action plans and things like that. Some of it, we can use the grant TA to support. And then other things we say, well, that's going to be like a 10 day project where we can't really afford to use the TA funds for that. So then that's where the school or the authorizer would have to pay for additional services. But the other piece of it, in line with all that proactive work, is we try to give them as much as they can through the monthly networks that we do, through our website, all the videos we put out, you know, try to really layer on as much as we can and catch things before their issues.

R

Robert Bellafiore 17:42

Okay, great. I just got the two minute warning so you each have one thing you want to leave the group with. It's not an elevator speech, it's an elevator door closing. Speech, Right? The elevator door is closing. We're all leaving. What's the one thing you want to make sure we know before we leave?

T

Tamara Shear 17:56

Great. I would just say that I think relationship managers and transparency and targeted supports have been like instrumental in driving ecosystem change for us.

S

Sarah Hackett 18:13

That's awesome. Mine's very different. It's just like a resource I want to share quick. We have something called the charter school competencies, which have been like the backbone of all of our work for years, and so I just put them in the chat, but it's our way to triage with folks when they are feeling like, Well, I'm not doing anything wrong, and I say, Okay, well, let's just take a look at what all the best practices are and what are all these structures. And then they start to have some of those aha moments. So it's really like, you know, non biased. I'm not picking on you. I'm just saying this is the backbone of all of our supports, all of our conversations, all of our events, are surrounded around these competencies. So take a look if you're looking for something you know to build off of. That sounds great. You guys are total, total heroes,

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Robert Bellafiore 19:04

so thank you for everything that you're doing. I will hand this back to Amv and Bucha and look

forward to more great things happening in Wisconsin and Nevada. Thank you.

A

Aimee Evan 19:19

Thank you, and probably lots of questions swirling. We know that this work has a lot of intentionality. You heard it in both Sarah and Tam's answers, how they approach things, how they go about providing support, and it's really about trust, transparency and mutual understanding when we partner with schools. So I just want to pause and give another shout out to oh 180 to works for the key. You roles that they've played in improving school quality, strengthening institutional capacity and advocating for policies that support charter schools. Your work has really ensured the evolution and improvement of the charter sector in both your states and as we know, having a national audience will be impactful to us nationally as we continue to unpack and really wrestle with some of these questions. So we've been talking here at a game quite a bit about systems of support, about providing support. One of the colleagues, one of my colleagues in our breakout session indicated, don't ignore the tension amongst the different players in the ecosystem. It's there for a reason, but let's not ignore it or downplay it, or indicate that schools don't need support either, because that's not helpful either. Just because there's tension doesn't mean that there's, you know, a fire. So that dovetails really well into what we call asset mapping. So asset mapping has been around for a while, actually, for those of you that know a gentleman by the name of Travian shorters, he coined the term asset framing, and it's really about starting with the best before you mention the rest. And it's a word and a framing that we use in building a better scenario rather than fixing the problems. So it's a way of acknowledging that even though a school, a district, a community may need support, doesn't mean that there is nothing good going on in that community, in that family, in that child, in that school. So really, asset mapping is a systemic, systematic process for first and foremost, taking stock of what those assets are in an ecosystem. It's about assessing and mobilizing those assets and those strengths, while simultaneously, one of the things that we've been sharing quite a bit in this session is about building or strengthening the relationships among the various groups or organizations within an ecosystem. We like to say none of us should be doing this work alone, and so how do we leverage and build on the strengths that already exist, while pulling in and leaning on the ways in which we can continuously improve the opportunities and options for kids and families and communities. So let's talk for just a second about what the heck is an asset. So the golden child of asset is really around professional learning and especially coaching. However, as we know, this is probably the most expensive kind of support to provide. It's very labor intensive. It's very cost intensive, and it's very intensive on the part of those receiving the support. It can also be incredibly impactful, but really only if that professional learning and coaching is aligned with what the schools need. So sometimes we have lots of options for webinars and workshops, and because they are expensive and time consuming, we try to get a lot accomplished in those and sometimes miss the forest for the trees. So we have to be careful with professional learning and coaching that it really is aligned to the needs. And then we have network building where peers can connect. We have advocacy and policy intervention, something that TAM mentioned in Nevada, they do a legislative review regularly to make sure that there are no unintended barriers and consequences for charter schools specifically. But then, you know, we can also do things, especially at the authorizer at the state level, around research, data management, research around what are high quality instructional materials that are aligned to standards? Can we provide a vetted list of what those are? Can we streamline our process as an authorizer in terms of all the data that we request from schools so that we're not asking for the same information 20 different ways? Can we just ask for schools to provide it once, and then we use.



At 20 different ways for our reports, etc. And then the the last kind of category is around pooling or outsourcing. So Indianapolis, for those of you who are from Indy, they outsource and buy back back office support from the district, because the district has a whole human capital and back office system already set up, so the charter schools just buy back that capacity, and the district then helps provide a service to the charter schools themselves, so that the charter schools don't have to do all that work and be an expert in everything. So just a couple of examples of how assets and supports can be brought to bear for schools. And I want you to think about how we can align those to need. So here's an example. Sometimes we see schools struggling in the arena of governance, and maybe that's around capacity. There are many different reasons for that, two of which could be a lack of a pool of governing board members. So you're really, you know, you're you're begging your friends, your acquaintances, your other governing board members. Can you find somebody to help fill the positions? Or there it could be a lack of systems to onboard new members, and that's around training and board members really understanding their role, really understanding the information that's being presented to them. Those can sometimes go hand in hand, but really what we want to try and accomplish is what are supports that can be brought to bear, to address either a lack of a pool of a deep pool of capable board members, or that lack of systems to onboard new members. And sometimes, you know, like I said, these two things work hand in hand, and could require similar supports, like a training or like a screening, if it's lack of systems and you have a deep pool, if you have a lack of a pool, sometimes that training can become even more important. Or thinking about how to task share, if you have another school that has a board member with quite a bit of facilities capacity, and your school is looking to purchase a new facility or mortgage a new facility, perhaps there's some task sharing that could be accomplished there if there's a really a lack of a pool of capable board members. So if you would like more information about asset mapping, we have a series of modules, and they include videos and slide decks and workbooks, etc, to help you get started on asset mapping within your charter network. But we also have additional events coming up that I'm going to pass it over to Bucha to help to talk us through.

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Vashaunta Harris 28:28

Well, friends and family, as you know, we are in the third year of a three year CSP grant, and we are really excited to showcase the work that many of you be at a school, be it an authorizer, our early adopters and so many others have contributed to over the life cycle of this grant. So you've heard us talk about these responsive goals that many of you have created and begun to implement. Well, we're excited to say that we will be launching the official responsive goals directory, and that will happen at our next virtual convening, March 18 of this year, 2025 Can you believe it? One o'clock Eastern, same bad station, just like you joined us today. Come hang out. Check out our brand new directory. Give us feedback, and we'll do a little interaction with that directory at that time. And now everyone knows that I am most pumped. I'm a little bit biased, but I'm most pumped about our time together in May. We have basically two and a half full days together right after Mother's Day. May, 12 through 15th, we are going to be in hot Atlanta, Georgia, at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center and friends. It is going to be bigger and better than ever. We have students coming to hang out and tell us what they need us to do as it relates to how we are governing and leading their schools. We have early adopters who will be leading workshops. We have third parties who will be hanging out sharing their expertise. We have evening events every single night and yes and awards gala to wrap it all up on that Wednesday evening. You will need your dress to impress outfits. They'll be red carpet interviews. It is going to be the time of our lives. Early Bird registration has launched. Please check it out in the link below. We'll be sending you lots of lovely emails and social media posts. We would be so happy for you all to join us. For those of you that have content that is



related, our call for proposals will be going out shortly, so keep your eyes and ears out for that. Well, on behalf of the entire a game crew, from the core team to the early adopters and to our entire community, thank you so much for dedicating an hour and three minutes out of your day to hang out with us today. We are super, super grateful for your time, for your contributions to these conversations, and we will see you in March. Have an awesome afternoon. Everyone.