



AUTHORIZER COMMITMENT AND CAPACITY

Recognized Best Practices

Regulatory Framework

[MCL 380.502\(4\)](#) states “An authorizing body shall oversee... each public school academy operating under a contract issued by the authorizing body. The authorizing body is responsible for overseeing compliance by the board of directors with the contract and all applicable law.”

MCCSA Guiding Principles and Standards

Excellence in authorizing means ensuring commitment and capacity by developing practices and organizational structures to conduct authorizing duties effectively and efficiently. Authorizers have a responsibility to the public to ensure that the charter public school is providing an education that meets the needs of students and families while complying to the terms and expectations set forth in the charter contract and all applicable law. This responsibility includes overseeing the academic, financial and legal compliance of the school. In addition to this responsibility, the authorizer may see their responsibilities expanded further beyond oversight, and find it valuable to support charter public schools with resources and as advocates. The MCCSA standards and NACSA Principles and Standards (Standards) both identify authorizer commitment and capacity as essential quality standards. NACSA’s Principles and Standards state, “A quality authorizer fosters excellent charter schools that need identified community needs. They prioritize a commitment to excellence in education and in authorizing practices, and create organizational structures, including human and financial resources, to conduct their authorizing duties effectively and efficiently.”

In addition to the MCCSA and NACSA standards, Michigan authorizers partnered with Cognia to provide a continuous improvement evaluation for authorizers. This evaluation consists of three aligned domains further outlining what it means for a charter public school authorizer to demonstrate capacity. Those domains are: leadership capacity, learning capacity, and resource capacity.

What is authorizer commitment and capacity?

Charter public schools are a dynamic part of the education landscape and it is the responsibility of the authorizer to ensure that charter public schools are meeting expectations and following all

applicable law. The families and public are relying on the authorizer to ensure that charter public schools are effectively providing a quality education, are strong fiscal stewards, and provide a safe environment for students. From opening new schools, conducting annual oversight functions, to renewing a charter public school, the authorizer needs to ensure that it has the commitment and capacity to fulfill its responsibilities.

Human Resources

To ensure that the authorizer has the capacity to fulfill their responsibilities, the authorizer should ensure that the expertise needed is in place. There are many areas of expertise that an authorizer needs to have including educational leadership, academic, financial, compliance, special populations, facilities, governance, and legal. This expertise can come directly from the team at the charter public school authorizer office or through contractual relationships and from other resources throughout the authorizer's organization.

To ensure internal capacity, the authorizer should employ a competent leader and have the appropriate staffing level that is sufficient for fulfilling the responsibilities of the authorizer according to the MCSAA and national standards. The staffing level at the charter public school office should reflect the size of the portfolio. The authorizer staff should be committed to high quality charter school authorizing and maintain high standards of practice.

Financial Resources

A quality authorizer should maintain the financial resources needed to fulfill its responsibilities according to MCCSA and national standards and best practices. The authorizer must be responsible stewards of public funds and commit funding to the charter school authorizing function. The authorizer budget should reflect this commitment and be allocated in a way that demonstrates the commitment to quality authorizing standards. The authorizer budget should also reflect the scale of the authorizer's portfolio.

In Michigan, an authorizer is funded by a 3% administrative fee. This administrative fee is made up of public funds and designated for the authorizer oversight functions. The authorizer also may use other funding to ensure that it has the capacity to oversee charter schools. Not only should this fee and other funding be used for the authorizer oversight functions, but all budgeted funding and spending should be free of conflict of interest, incentives, or disincentives that may compromise the charter authorizer's judgment.

Structures and Processes

A quality authorizer should have structures and processes in place to ensure its duties are fulfilled effectively and efficiently. The authorizer should have structures and processes that ensure effective practices are used for new school applications, ongoing annual oversight, and renewal. A detailed structure for all areas including staffing, expertise, written processes, and communication is key to ensuring effective practice. The authorizer is most effective when these structures are transparent and communicated with schools so that they know what to expect and can meet the expectations of the authorizer.

To help fulfill these responsibilities, many authorizers use technology to streamline and create efficiencies for both their staff and the school. Technology also helps to ensure that all documents that show evidence of compliance and data that demonstrates meeting expectations

are submitted, reviewed and stored. Many authorizers in Michigan utilize Epicenter, a nationally recognized tool, to ensure that they are meeting their duties as an authorizer.

An authorizer should also provide annual reports for schools so that performance is communicated to the school and to the public. These reports should include performance expectations and outcomes, and communicate how the school is doing according to the expectations in the charter school contract.

Support and Advocacy

A strong educational ecosystem includes parental choice and charter school authorizers can play a role in supporting and advocating for charter public schools and families. Strong authorizers are committed to the students and families that are impacted by charter public schools. Committed authorizers not only oversee charter public schools, but they also support schools. This support can be demonstrated in several ways including, providing resources, convening leaders, providing professional development and governance training, conducting support school visits, and answering any questions a charter public school may have.

In addition to support, a charter public school authorizer can serve as an advocate ensuring organizational commitment, advocating for families at the local and state level, and ensuring state regulatory efforts are reasonable.

Why is authorizer commitment and capacity important?

Families, communities, and the general public expect that authorizers are fulfilling their responsibilities. Students deserve to be in a quality educational environment that meets their needs. The public taxpayers trust that authorizers are ensuring that charter public schools are meeting federal and state regulations as well as the authorizer expectations. This responsibility requires that the authorizer has the people and resources in place to answer the critical questions:

- Is the charter public school achieving its academic goals as stated in the charter contract? All groups of pupils should be considered.
- Is the charter public school organizationally, educationally, and financially viable?
- Is the charter public school demonstrating good faith compliance in following the terms of its charter contract and applicable law?

Reflective Questions:

Does your organization have the staffing and/or external expertise needed in all areas of charter public school oversight?

How is your authorizing budget reflective of your authorizing responsibilities? Does it reflect the size of your portfolio?

What structures and processes does your organization have in place to fulfill a high level of charter public school authorizing? How are processes documented and made transparent to schools?

How do you demonstrate your commitment to charter public schools through support and advocacy?

Resources:

[NACSA Standards](#)