



MCCSA STANDARD: OVERSEEING AND EVALUATING A CHARTER PUBLIC SCHOOL

Recognized Best Practices

Regulatory Framework

[MCL 380.502](#) 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

A comprehensive oversight system is essential to the education ecosystem. MCCSA has adopted Principles and Standards (Standards) that guide authorizers as they develop strong authorizing practices. MCCSA Standards include Overseeing and Evaluating a Charter Public School which states, “Excellence in authorizing means understanding the responsibility of establishing a comprehensive system that monitors and evaluates school performance and compliance. This system should provide the necessary information to oversee, evaluate and periodically report the performance of the charter public school. An authorizer’s oversight system should preserve and protect the autonomy of the school while minimizing its compliance burden.”

What is a Comprehensive Oversight System?

Charter public schools can be a catalyst for change and can provide great educational options for families and students. Charter public schools are granted greater autonomy in exchange for high standards of accountability in the areas of academic performance, financial management and organizational stability. Authorizers are responsible for deciding who can open new schools, setting clear expectations, overseeing charter public school performance, and taking action if a charter public school is not meeting expectations. This responsibility requires clear and consistent oversight practices, evaluation, and transparency with the charter public schools the authorizer oversees. Therefore, it is imperative that authorizers ensure their commitment and capacity by developing practices and organizational structures to fulfill authorizing responsibilities effectively and efficiently.

Oversight and evaluation responsibilities are described in the charter contract and are the responsibility of the authorizer throughout the charter life cycle, from ensuring that new school applicants are ready to

open on day one to ongoing operations at the charter public school. A comprehensive oversight system will include, but is not limited to, monitoring and evaluating the following areas:

Academic Performance

The primary objective of monitoring academic performance is to ensure that students are receiving a quality education and to assure families and community members that public dollars are supporting student learning. In between high stakes charter public school reviews, such as renewals, monitoring of student performance allows the authorizer, school and community to know whether a charter public school is making adequate progress to meet its charter goals and provides the school with the assurance that it is on track or allows time to improve if not. School academic performance should be publicly displayed in a way that families can use the information to make informed choices. The absence of strong academic monitoring could result in a charter public school failing to appropriately serve students for years.

Specifically, authorizers should set clear expectations through the development of educational goals in the charter contract. The authorizer's oversight system should include monitoring on an ongoing and annual basis to determine if the charter public school is on track to meet its student academic expectations outlined in the charter contract. Strong academic monitoring is valuable in informing authorizing decisions and ensures that the charter public school board and leadership are clear regarding how they are doing according to the authorizer's expectations. See the Academic Monitoring for Charter Public Schools best practice guide for more information.

Financial Health and Operations

Financial health and operational stability are important for any school. As stewards of public funds, charter public schools must ensure that all funds are used in the best interest of the school and the students they serve. The authorizer should have clear expectations outlined for charter public schools that reflect financial and operational health and stability. Not only is it important to have clear expectations and metrics to measure this, but the systems and processes must be in place to safeguard against improprieties, misuse, or conflicts of interest. In addition, the authorizer must identify and clearly communicate operational stability expectations across several spectrums of school operations such as student enrollment, special education, teacher certification and facility and health safety. The financial and operational health and stability of each charter public school should be reported through the annual oversight process and made available to the school and public on an annual basis. See the Fiscal Oversight, Budgeting for Charter Public Schools and the Audited Financial Statements of Charter Public Schools best practice guides for more information.

Educational Service Provider Accountability

Authorizers have the legal obligation to carefully review any agreement that the board of a charter public school they authorize plans to enter into with an Educational Service Provider (ESP). Specifically, Michigan law requires authorizers to review and approve or disapprove any agreement between the charter public school board and an ESP before the agreement is finalized and executed. Authorizers may only disapprove an ESP agreement if the agreement violates some portion of the charter contract or Michigan law. Authorizers should establish ESP policies designed to outline requirements that must be satisfied before charter public school boards and ESPs enter into a final agreement. Specifically, policies should address the roles and responsibilities of the ESP and the charter public school board. See the Educational Service Provider Policies for Charter Public Schools best practice guide for more information.

Charter Boards

Each charter public school is governed by an independent team of local leaders who are appointed by the school's authorizer. Charter public school board members are public officials in the state of Michigan and take a statewide constitutional oath of office when appointed. Authorizers have the responsibility to ensure that board members are well vetted and qualified to serve as board members and continue to serve in the best interest of students. Authorizers must establish a clear policy detailing the selection and appointment process for charter public school board members and ensure that board member vacancies are filled in a timely manner. Authorizers are responsible for ensuring that charter public school board members govern by board policy.

Authorizers should provide charter public school board members with professional development opportunities that cover the following topics: academic results, effective governance and leadership, legal compliance, board and charter public school leadership relationships, finance and budgeting. Finally, authorizers should ensure that boards are well informed of the school's performance according to the charter agreement and they are strong stewards of public funds. See the Board Governance for Charter Public Schools best practice guides for additional information.

The monitoring and evaluation should occur on a regular basis, and the authorizer should provide performance reports that are reflective of the academic, financial, and operational expectations of the charter contract to the school and the public.

Why is a Comprehensive Oversight System important?

A comprehensive oversight system will allow the authorizer to monitor and evaluate a charter public school's performance and compliance. This system should provide the necessary information to oversee, evaluate and periodically report the performance of the charter public school. An authorizer's oversight system should preserve and protect the autonomy of the school while minimizing its compliance burden. Ultimately, a comprehensive oversight system will allow the authorizer to answer the following questions during reauthorization:

- 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?

The authorizer shall base reauthorization decisions on the data and information gathered through the oversight and evaluation system as defined by the charter contract. If a charter public school is not making adequate progress toward meeting its performance goals, as defined in the charter contract, the authorizer may decide not to renew the charter contract.

Reflective Questions

Does your organization have strong policies and practices that reflect the oversight and evaluation responsibilities necessary for strong authorizing?

How are the charter public schools made aware of authorizer oversight expectations?

In what way are you providing performance reports to schools and the public that are reflective of the expectations outlined in the charter contract?