



# MDE ASSURANCE AND VERIFICATION VISITS

## 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.”

Further, this law states that “If the superintendent of public instruction finds that an authorizing body is not engaging in appropriate continuing oversight of 1 or more public school academies operating under a contract issued by the authorizing body, the superintendent of public instruction may suspend the power of the authorizing body to issue new contracts to organize and operate public school academies. A contract issued by the authorizing body during the suspension is void. A contract issued by the authorizing body before the suspension is not affected by the suspension.”

The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) created and implemented the MDE Assurance and Verification Visit process whereby they assess whether an authorizer is consistently implementing certain authorizing practices. This assessment is not required in the Revised School Code (section 6a) and MDE has consistently recognized that the Assurance and Verification process is a voluntary one designed to support and strengthen authorizing across the state.

### MCCSA Guiding Principles and Standards

MCCSA has adopted Principles and Standards (Standards) that guide authorizers as they develop strong authorizing practices. Focusing on performance and accountability ensures that student success remains paramount to authorizing decisions. 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...”

## What is the MDE Assurance and Verification Visit?

The MDE Assurance and Verification Visit is a voluntary process whereby MDE assesses whether an authorizer is consistently implementing certain authorizing practices and shares best practices and offers technical assistance. The authorizing practices relate to the following domains:

- Overseeing Application, Authorization and Contracting
- Overseeing PSA Governance
- Overseeing Facilities
- Overseeing Quality of Learning and
- Overseeing Financial Accountability

To begin the process, the authorizer must rate themselves on each practice as to how well they have implemented the authorizing practices. The ratings include under development, complete, clear, consistent, or improved. The authorizer then submits the ratings along with evidence to support the ratings to MDE. MDE completes a review of the ratings and evidence then visits (virtually or in-person) the authorizer to discuss the authorizer rating and whether MDE believes it is an appropriate rating based upon the evidence provided. They also discuss and share authorizing best practices, when appropriate. After the review is complete, MDE provides a written report that includes summary comments on the authorizer's implementation of the practices as well as individual MDE ratings and comments for each authorizing practice.

To ensure review of oversight practices that support quality authorizing, MDE aligned the MDE Assurance and Verification Visit requirements to the MCCSA Assurances and Cognia Accreditation requirements. This also allowed MDE to ensure an effective review while streamlining the authorizer efforts for a successful review.

## How often is an MDE Assurance and Verification Visit performed?

MDE performs this review on all authorizers. These reviews occur approximately every three years for authorizers that are not Cognia accredited. For those authorizers that have received Cognia accreditation, MDE seeks to align the visits with the accreditation schedule - every five years. The frequency of review can be adjusted based upon certain indicators and associated risk. For example, if the authorizer is new or has had several recommendations previously, the authorizer is more likely to be reviewed every three years.

## Preparing for a Successful MDE Assurance and Verification Visit

To assist authorizers in preparing for the MDE Assurance and Verification Visit, the MDE provides an introductory letter explaining the process and resource documents. As stated, the process is not an attempt to employ consequences but to document good practices and share resources.

To be successful, the authorizer should:

- review the forms that accompany the MDE introductory letter to ensure an understanding of the oversight responsibilities MDE will be reviewing. If the information is unclear, the authorizer should ask MDE clarifying questions.
- use this opportunity to review all written procedures and processes to ensure they demonstrate best practice oversight.
- gather evidence to support consistent implementation of oversight practices that includes written process, procedures, and examples.
- organize the evidence within the forms provided and through an electronic means, such as Google Docs, to allow the reviewers to easily understand how the documents support the practices under review.

### Reflective Questions

How has your organization consistently implemented authorizing practices that create a comprehensive oversight system?

How does your organization prepare to successfully complete an MDE Assurance and Verification Visit?

If you have previously completed an MDE Assurance and Verification Visit, how have you implemented and recommended improvements?