

OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS:
Advancing Education in Michigan through Quality Authorizing





MCCSA

Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers

201 Townsend, Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933 | (517) 487-4848

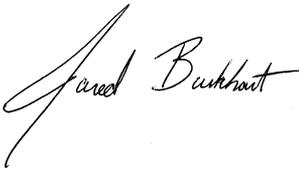
OVERSIGHT AND ACCOUNTABILITY STANDARDS: Advancing Education in Michigan through Quality Authorizing

The members of the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers (The Council) believe choice is a necessary element in public education. They endeavor to build strong, accountable educational options by authorizing and overseeing high-quality schools in neighborhoods across the state. The decisions made by Michigan authorizers help shape the leading edge of Michigan's educational landscape, making sound, consistent authorizer judgment essential. To support effective decision-making, the Council has developed a set of thoughtful, rigorous oversight and accountability standards to help guide Authorizers work and communicate what matters most.

The standards reflect the ideals of the Council's diverse array of members. In essence, their adoption reflects a shared pledge to one another and to the public that quality authorizing is paramount. The standards can be used as a resource for policymakers and the public seeking to learn about authorizing. They may also help charter school developers in Michigan and nationally as they seek to understand how authorizing determinations are made in our state. Finally, these standards support students and families as they seek to understand the factors constituting real educational quality.

The Council's initial Oversight and Accountability Standards, adopted in 2005, have served to inform and improve authorizer practices across the United States. Moreover, they have provided valuable ideas to state-level policymakers interested in expanding educational choice without sacrificing quality. Many of the Council's ideas relative to supporting excellence in Michigan public schools have found their way into our shared public discourse.

During the past year, Council members have come together to advance a shared discussion of school and authorizer excellence. The 2013 edition of the Council's Oversight and Accountability Standards reflect careful dialogue and the latest advancements in authorizer practice.



THE PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE 1: Excellence must remain the central focus of every Michigan authorizer and school.

Council authorizers will:

- Maintain a rigorous process for vetting applicants.
- Establish high academic and operational performance standards.
- Impose appropriate consequences – up to and including school closure – if a charter school fails to achieve adequate results pursuant to the terms of its charter.
- Ensure compliance with all applicable laws and the terms of each charter contract.

PRINCIPLE 2: Autonomy and innovation are essential to ensure the promise of Michigan’s charter school movement and contribute to the success of K-12 education.

Council authorizers will:

- Preserve and protect autonomy for each charter school board of directors to render visioning, programming and budgeting decisions without outside interference.
- Encourage innovation that supports high academic achievement.
- Emphasize the measurement of outcomes, not processes.
- Minimize each school’s compliance burden.

PRINCIPLE 3: Accountability is crucial.

Council authorizers will:

- Demand that quantifiable, data-driven results be achieved and supported at all levels of K-12 public education.
- Require schools to utilize a common, recognized growth to standard assessment to demonstrate improved academic progress and achievement for all student groups.

PRINCIPLE 4: Authorizers have a responsibility to provide input, advocacy and support for public discourse on K-12 education issues.

Council authorizers will:

- Put students first for every action and decision.
- Hold schools accountable for fulfilling fundamental public education obligations to all students.

THE STANDARDS

Michigan's charter public schools require nothing less than high quality, efficient and effective authorization. To support these essential aims, the Council has adopted standards for authorizers to use in authorizing, overseeing, evaluating, and reauthorization and renewal. While the standards are universal and align with the Council's guiding principles, individual authorizers have the responsibility to implement their own systems in a manner that is supported by the standards.

Standards for Authorizing a Charter School

A Michigan quality authorizer understands the importance of a comprehensive, fair application process, coupled with a strong charter performance contract that is in compliance with Michigan law and holds schools accountable for results.

Application

The application process should:

- Allow first-time applicants as well as experienced operators.
- Encourage expansion and replication of charter schools demonstrating success.
- Allow autonomy while encouraging innovation.
- Be rigorous and transparent, ensuring authorizer expectations are clearly stated.

The application review should consider:

1. School performance goals.
2. A compelling and realistic vision.
3. Sound and sustainable business and financial plans.
4. The will and capacity to effectively implement the plans

Performance Contract

Authorizers should develop performance contracts that emphasize student achievement while ensuring compliance with Michigan law and holding schools accountable for results. It should include, but not be limited to:

- Clear academic performance expectations that: (a) ensure students are prepared for success in college, work and life, and (b) require academic improvement for all groups of students.
- Clear operational performance expectations.
- The rights and responsibilities of each party to the contract.

Standards for Overseeing and Evaluating a Charter School

A Michigan quality authorizer understands its responsibility to establish a comprehensive system that monitors and evaluates academy performance and compliance. This system should provide the necessary information to oversee, evaluate and periodically report the performance of the charter school.

An authorizer’s oversight system should preserve and protect the autonomy of the school while minimizing its compliance burden. A comprehensive oversight system includes but is not limited to monitoring and evaluating the following areas (again, focusing on the outcomes, not the processes):

- Academy board
- Student application and enrollment
- Academic performance
- Special education
- Teacher certification
- Financial performance
- Operational performance
- ESP accountability
- Facility and health safety
- Public disclosure and conflicts of interest

If, during the course of the charter contract term, the authorizer determines that a charter school is not making adequate progress, the authorizer shall give notice to the school and allow reasonable time and opportunity for the school to make necessary changes. However, if after the changes, the school is still not making adequate progress, the authorizer shall consider intervention support strategies that work to improve student outcomes and operations while maintaining program autonomy and accountability.

Standards for Reauthorization or Nonrenewal

A Michigan quality authorizer shall establish and implement a consistent and comprehensive charter reauthorization process, guided by the following core questions:

- Is the charter school achieving its academic goals as stated in the charter contract?
- Is the charter school organizationally, educationally, and financially viable?
- Is the charter 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 school is not making adequate progress towards meeting its performance goals (academic, fiscal or organizational) as defined in the charter contract, the authorizer will impose appropriate consequences – up to and including closure.

If a decision to not renew a charter contract is made, the authorizer will communicate the decision in such a manner that will minimize disruption to the students. Although the responsibility of closure lies with the Michigan Department of Treasury, the authorizer will facilitate the transition and ensure students and their families are given information about educational options.

Authorizing Best Practices

A Michigan quality authorizer will consider the following practices that support the standards outlined in this document:

- Ensure each academy provides access to all students by monitoring the school’s application and enrollment procedures.
- Establish a clear policy detailing the selection and appointment process for charter school board members.
- Ensure each school coordinates with the Michigan Department of Education, intermediate school districts and other appropriate organizations to ensure its inclusion in applicable local, state, and federal programs.
- Ensure the charter school uses properly certified teachers that have satisfied necessary criminal history checks and professional disclosure requirements.
- Ensure the charter school develops and implements a financial monitoring system.
- Ensure any charter school that contracts with an educational service provider performs sufficient due diligence and negotiates an arm’s-length agreement.



MCCSA

Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers
201 Townsend, Suite 900, Lansing, MI 48933 | (517) 487-4848