

Quality Charter School Authorizing

What is an authorizer?

- The entity that holds the contract with the charter operator and protects the public interest
- The party that ensures autonomy and accountability
- The watch dog for the state, parents and children that ensures that money is well spent and children are well served

Who Can Authorize?

- Local school boards
 1. Two or more school boards if the charter school is located in one of the authorizing districts
 2. Two or more school districts together with a CESA
- Milwaukee Public Schools (MPS), the City of Milwaukee, UW-Milwaukee, and Milwaukee Area Technical College (MATC) within the MPS area
- UW-Parkside (restricted to K-8 schools of 400 or less students)

Authorizer's Responsibilities

("Quality Authorizing: Authorizer and Charter School Accountability under NCLB," National Association of Charter School Authorizers, April, 2006)

- Encourage the creation of new quality public school options
- Determine whether an application to start and operate a charter school merits approval
- Negotiate a contract with an approved charter school that defines the specific operating terms and performance expectations for which the charter school will be held accountable
- Approve, oversee and evaluate the performance of the charter school

- Create new systems of support based on innovation and flexibility
- Conduct ongoing oversight of charter school(s) to evaluate performance, monitor compliance, and enforce contract terms
- Determine whether to renew a charter based upon the results achieved by the school

Characteristics of High Quality Authorizers

(The following material is from NACSA 's Principals and Standards for Quality Authorizing, 2007 , Good Governance: Evaluating the Capacity of Charter School Founding Boards, September, 2007, and from Clayton Christianson, Joe Graba and the author)

- Make the well being of students the fundamental value informing all decision making
- Take adequate time up front to plan and develop a comprehensive and fair contract
- Know who you are contracting with and that they are prepared and capable of governing
- Live by the contract
- Approach authorizing deliberately and thoughtfully with the intent to improve the quality of public school options
- Support and advance the purposes of charter school law
- Serve as a catalyst for charter school development to satisfy unmet educational needs
- Strive for clarity, consistency and transparency in developing and implementing authorizing policies and procedures
- Become a source of accurate, intelligible, performance based information about the schools they oversee
- Take responsibility for holding schools accountable for their performance but not responsibility for the success or failure of individual schools
- Use objective and verifiable measures of student achievement as the primary measure of school quality
- Support parents and students in making decisions and staying informed about the quality of education provided in charter schools
- Hold themselves accountable for maintaining their responsibilities and commitments as listed in the charter/contract
- Draw a careful line between inadequate and intrusive oversight

Standards for Quality Authorizing

(NACSA Principals and Standards for Quality Authorizing, 2007)

- Create organizational structures and commit resources needed for effective and efficient authorizing
 1. Streamline and systematize work
 2. Define relationships and lines of authority to protect from conflicts of interest and political influence
 3. Secure excellent leadership and knowledgeable staff to complete their responsibilities as an authorizer
 4. Secure/devote sufficient resources to do an excellent job as an authorizer
- Implement a comprehensive, fair and rigorous application process designed to ensure the success of the school and students
- Negotiate contracts that clearly articulate responsibilities related to:
 1. Autonomy – over the educational program, control of funds, management decisions, waivers
 2. Expected outcomes - clear, measureable, attainable student achievement and organizational performance goals with rigorous performance indicators and standards for each goal
 3. Measures for evaluating success or failure
- Evaluation Process – type and scope of academic, organizational, financial and compliance data including process and frequency for gathering and reporting data
- Performance consequences:
 1. Conditions when authorizer can intervene
 2. Reasons and process required for revocation
 3. Criteria and process for renewal
- Monitor legal and contract compliance (charter's and authorizer's)
 1. Provide clear notice of evidence and/or contract based problems
 2. Allow reasonable time/opportunity for remediation
 3. Respect the school's authority over the day to day operations
- Conduct a transparent, contractually and data based renewal process
 1. Articulate the criteria (in the contract)
 2. Communicate options – renewal, renewal with conditions, non-renewal or revocation
 3. Provide appeals process (in contract)
 4. Consider multiple sources of data
 5. Include parent and public in-put
 6. Determine an orderly process for school closings

Additional Issues:

- Authorizers must be advocates for competition
- Authorizers are inventing the system of authorizing on the go
- Authorizers must hold themselves accountable for their end of the contract
- Authorizers should include an appeals process for resolving conflicts related to the contract
- Authorizing is somewhat like a district holding a contract with a bus transportation company
- Authorizers who reach in to modify, change or take charge of the charter school must share or take responsibility for outcomes. A charter can only be held responsible for outcomes if it controls the decisions