



MN ASSOCIATION OF
CHARTER SCHOOLS

Unleashing education from convention

CLOSING THE GRADUATION GAP:

***An Innovative Accountability System for Charter Schools
Serving Significant Populations of Students Eligible under
Minnesota's Graduation Incentives Law***

A Proposal

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Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

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Preface

Minnesota's charter school law enacted in 1991 defines six (6) purposes for chartered schools, two of which focus on developing different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes and new forms of accountability. In the early years of the charter school movement the focus was on developing new schools and school models, new models of governance, different teaching methods, and the practical everyday realities of operating a school. There was modest attention given to developing different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes and accountability.

The enactment of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2002 diverted most everyone's attention toward standardized testing as the only recognized and accepted means of measuring outcomes. This single accountability focus did nothing to create an environment to encourage the development of new or innovative forms of comprehensively measuring outcomes or accountability. In fact, it stifled innovation because without recognition and acceptance, few educators or organizations were willing to invest the time and resources needed to develop new and different accountability and outcome measures.

One notable exception was the development of the HOPE Study by EdVisions Cooperative, *"which enables schools to assess their school environment through the eyes of their students by measuring student perceptions of autonomy, belongingness and goal orientations as well as their resulting engagement in learning and disposition toward achievement. The Hope Survey can diagnose whether a school culture has the components that encourage higher levels of engagement in learning."*

However, adoption and use of the few new and innovative accountability tools and systems has been extraordinarily slow and sporadic given that school success is currently only measured by standardized tests.

This however, has not alleviated the need for different and innovative ways of measuring outcomes and forms of accountability. It has in fact, only exacerbated the need especially for schools that serve significant populations of students which the Minnesota Graduation Incentives Law describe as *"... students who have experienced or are experiencing difficulty in the traditional education system..."*.

The proposed accountability system developed by the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools Graduation Incentives Work Group is designed to fulfill the purposes of the charter school law to create new and different forms of measuring outcomes in an accountability system that measures and recognizes the impact and success of schools serving a population that has experienced or is experiencing difficulty in the traditional school settings.

The goal of is to provide an accountability system for schools which account for the three purposes of education – academic learning, readiness for work and lifelong learning and citizenship – recognizing that assessing all three aspects are critical to closing the graduation gap .

History of the Proposal

For several years there have been discussions of the need for an accountability system for assessing student performance in schools that serve significant populations of students who are eligible under Minnesota's Graduation Incentives Law (124D.68 Subd. 2). Those discussions have included school leaders from both the alternative education programs and charter schools who serve significant populations of "graduation incentive students". Legislation was introduced in more than one session to require the state to identify and develop multiple measures for determining school success. These legislative initiatives never went beyond the hearing stage of the legislative process.

For charter schools the need for an alternative accountability system was further crystalized when the first impacts of the revamped School Improvement Grant Program became a reality. Since that time charter schools have been examining different ways to define school success that recognize the unique characteristics and realities of schools which serve significant populations of "graduation incentive students." In 2012, there was a legislative initiative to address how graduation rates of charter schools serving these students would be addressed. That initiative had significant support in the education committees of the legislature but the proposed solution in the end would not have addressed the need for an accountability system for schools serving significant populations of graduation incentives students.

At the same time this legislative initiative was being discussed at the legislature, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools convened a Graduation Incentive Working Group to do three things.

First, identify what data existed on graduation incentives students in charters and collecting program information on how schools were serving the different needs of graduation incentives students.

Second, identify areas in which schools might work together through information sharing and joint programing.

Third, develop an accountability system for utilization by authorizers and schools, followed by legislation to codify that alternative accountability system to achieve the purposes of Minnesota's charter school law.

For the last nine months the Graduation Incentives Work Group has researched and discussed frameworks, concepts, elements and outcomes for an accountability system for Charter Schools Serving Significant Populations of Students Eligible under Minnesota's Graduation Incentives Law.

This proposal is the result of the months of work and effort of the MACS Graduation Incentives Work Group.

Statutory Context for Proposal

1] **MN Charter School Law 124D.10 Subd. 1(A)** – Defines the six (6) purposes of charter schools, including the following:

(4) *“measure learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes,”*

(5) *“establish new forms of accountability for schools”*

MN Statute 124D.10 Subd. 9 (2) – also states that a charter school *“may limit its admissions to pupils who are eligible to participate in the graduation incentives program under section 124D.68.”*

2] **MN Graduation Incentives Law 124D.68 Subd. 2** – Defines the students eligible to participate in a graduation incentives program. The legislature has defined twelve (12) criteria that make a student eligible.

MN 124D.68 Subd. 1 states: *“The legislature finds that it is critical to provide options for children to succeed in school. Therefore, the purpose of this section is to provide incentives for and encourage all Minnesota students who have experienced or are experiencing difficulty in the traditional education system to enroll in alternative programs.”*

THE PROPOSAL

Eligible Schools:

A charter school using this accountability system must be;

- 1) designated in their charter as graduation incentives school, or
- 2) a charter school serving a significant population 70% or more of students* eligible under graduation incentives rule during the previous charter school contract term.

The contract renewal criteria for charter schools designated in their charter as graduation incentives school or a charter school serving significant population 70% or more of students* eligible under graduation incentives rule must include both the required, and locally chosen elements agreed upon by the charter school board and the authorizer. Charter schools which are not designated in the charter as graduation incentives schools would need to document that their population continues to meet the 70% threshold at the time of contract renewal.

**Average over the length of the charter contract*

The 3 Elements of an Alternative Assessment System:

There are three elements in the Assessment System for Charter Schools serving Significant Populations of students eligible under the Graduation Incentives Law;

- 1] Academic Assessments,
- 2] Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Assessments, and
- 3] Student Engagement Assessments.

The three elements shall be weighted for decisions relative to school performance according to the following formula; Academic Assessments 30%, Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Assessments 40% and Student Engagement Assessments 30%.

These percentages would be the basis of the student performance outcomes for all charter contracts between the school and the authorizer.

1] Academic Assessments – 30%

The charter school is required to comply with both of the following academic assessment elements:

1] Student Academic Achievement – is performance on *a nationally or state normed assessments* capable of measuring achievement according to Minnesota Graduation Standards. Measurement on performance of students enrolled for at least 90 days and continuously enrolled at the time of testing. A minimum cohort of 20 students is required.

2] Student Longitudinal Academic Growth – is demonstrated growth on *a nationally or state normed assessment* capable of measuring progress on the Minnesota Graduation Standards. Measurement on performance of students enrolled for at least 90 days and continuously enrolled at the time of testing. A minimum cohort of 20 students is required.

2] Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness Assessments – 40%

The charter school board has a choice of postsecondary & workforce readiness assessments, however a school must chose at least 4 of these assessment elements for their postsecondary & workforce assessment measures. The school and authorizer must agree on the baseline and a growth target as part of the charter contract for the elements chosen by the charter school. Students included in these assessments must have been enrolled for at least 90 days.

1. **High school Graduation Rate** is the percentage of students from a beginning of 9th grade cohort (adjusted for verified & documented transfers in and out), who graduate or otherwise complete high school. Measurement on 3-year average for students who complete high school in 4 years, 5 years and 6 years.
2. **Student Drop-Out Rate** is an annual rate of percentage of all students enrolled in the school's grades who leave during a single school year without subsequently attending another school or educational program. Measurement is on a 3-year aggregate of the school's drop-out rate.
3. **Postsecondary Readiness and Placement Rate** - is the average ACT, PSAT, SAT, ACCUPLACER or ASVAB or other national postsecondary or workforce readiness assessment composite score. Measurement is the participation rate of students taking the assessment and the mean (average) of composite scores for Minnesota students taking the particular assessment.
4. **Senior Credit Graduation Rate** – is the percentage of seniors as defined by credits earned by beginning of the 12th grade cohort and successful graduate within that year. Measurement is on students who are continuously enrolled through their senior year and graduate by the end of the school year.
5. **Transition Success** – is the percentage of students who experience a positive transition after attending this school. Measurement on students who enroll in GED program, enroll in other public schools, enter day treatment center, return to home school, adult basic education program, etc.
6. **Post-completion Success** – is the percentage of students from the previous year who receive a diploma or completed a program that provides proof of planned college enrollment, enlistment or employment. Measurement is students that provide evidence of planned college enrollment, military enlistment, or evidence of employment.
7. **Credit/course completion** – is the percentage of students who complete the number of credits /courses to remain on track to graduate within the timeframe established upon enrollment. Measurement on students completing necessary number of credits/courses.
8. **Work Certifications & Pre-Apprenticeship Programs** – is the percentage of students who earn the required hours and pass the testing for national, state, or industry recognized work certifications or pre-apprenticeship programs. Measurement is students who enroll in the certification programs and earn the certification.
9. **Postsecondary course completion** – is the percentage of students who complete and earn postsecondary credits before high school graduation. Measurement on students enrolling and successfully completing postsecondary courses to earn postsecondary credits through PSEO, college in the classroom, etc.

3] Student Engagement Assessments– 30%

The charter school board has a choice of student engagement assessments, however, a school must chose at least 3 of these assessment elements for their student engagement assessment measures. The school and authorizer must agree on the baseline and a growth target as part of the charter contract for the elements chosen by the charter school. Students included in these assessments must have been enrolled for at least 90 days.

1. **Attendance** –the average daily attendance rate is the total number of hours attended out of the total possible hours attended for the most recent three years. Measurement is an aggregate of all students in the school.
2. **Truancy** - is the rate of total number of days that students were absent without an excused reason out of the total possible days attended for the most recent three years. Measurement is an aggregate of all students in the school.
3. **Student Re-engagement** – is the number of students who previously dropped out of any school that re-enrolled in the previous year. Measurement is the percentage of these students who remained enrolled through the end of that year.
4. **Returning Students (Retention)** – is the students who completed the prior year at the school and were eligible to return and attended the school for at least 12 weeks during the current year. Measurement is the percentage of students in this category including students retained in current grade.
5. **Character and Social Competencies** – is the percentage of students who have demonstrated growth in character and social competencies assessments. Measurement is the percentage of students who demonstrate growth or rank above normed ranking on a state or national assessment of decision-making skills, career readiness, education goals and life aspirations. (E.G. - HOPE Study, KIPP Character Assessment, Six C’s, or other research based assessments.)
6. **Citizenship and Community Service** – is the percentage of students that have community service goals as part of their individual learning plan. Measurement is the percentage of students who have fulfilled their goals in a satisfactory manner based on the school’s citizenship and community outcomes rubric.

References

1] **REINVENTING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION: An Assessment of Current State Policy and How to Improve It** a 2010 report by *Jobs for the Future*, states that:

“Only six states had “clear and separate accountability education that recognizes schools’ achievement in improving student performance. It further states that twenty-three other states address alternative education in some way in their state-level accountability systems; nine of those hold alternative schools to the same accountability standards as any other school. But in order to be effective, a state accountability system for alternative education must help schools mediate the tension between holding onto students and holding them to high standards. This is especially important for students who are both older and further behind typical high school student and may have experienced considerable interruptions in their schooling.”

The report outlines the “clear and separate accountability” created systems of three states.

North Carolina – evaluates school based on state testing and locally chosen quantifiers, such as attendance, dropout rates, graduation rates, parent and community involvement, school safety and student conduct. Whatever locally selected statistics are chosen, the school must quantify progress toward one of two benchmarks: “higher expectations for student achievement” or “student progress and proficiency.”

California – defines special accountability indicators for these schools. The California approach incorporates factors beyond those in NCLB and the state’s traditional state accountability system, and includes factors such as student persistence, average credit completion, attendance, reading completion, and GED section completion.

Oklahoma – accountability is determined through comprehensive annual evaluations conducted by the Oklahoma Technical Assistance Center. The evaluation assesses progress on key academic indicators, including grades, credits earned, standardized achievement tests, and state core curriculum tests.