

ISSUE: Future of Authorizing

Over the last decade, the authorizing of chartered public schools in our State has undergone significant changes in terms of the types and number of authorizers, as well as authorizer accountability. A little over a decade ago, there were over 50 sponsors/authorizers of chartered public schools.

Today, there are only 2 traditional school districts, 4 non-profits, 5 single purpose authorizers, and there will be only 1 university authorizer after 2023 – meaning we will have 12 authorizers. So, how did we go from over 50 to a dozen authorizers?

- First, the change from sponsor to authorizer was not just a name change, it was a change in that authorizers had to have some processes and meet some requirements, which led several sponsors to leave the field.
- Second, a lack of a clear definition in the law of the authorizers' role and responsibilities has led to some authorizers becoming service providers while others see their role as having managerial authority.
- Third, the expectation that MDE has put on authorizers to be compliance officers in lieu of MDE fulfilling that role as it would with traditional school districts.
- Fourth, the bureaucracy that has grown around what was to be a simple evaluation process of whether authorizers were doing oversight of the schools they authorized, as many sponsors never did any real oversight.
- Fifth, the lack of any incentive for organizations to become an authorizer, while the system is perceived as creating disincentives.

POLICY SOLUTION: Define & Clarify Role, Responsibilities, & Requirements

- Require that the authorizer participate in department-approved training.
- Clarify that the role of an authorizer is to ensure a school has autonomy, fulfills the goal and purposes of a chartered public school, and is accountable to the agreed upon terms of the charter school contract in order to safeguard quality educational opportunities for students and maintain public trust and confidence.
- Define Authorizer responsibilities to be:
 - (1) review applications for new schools, including grade and site expansions and transfers of current schools, and determine whether to approve or deny the application based on the authorizer's approved criteria;

- (2) negotiate and execute the performance charter contracts with the schools it authorizes;
 - (3) conduct ongoing monitoring, oversight, and evaluation of the school's academic, operational, and financial performance commensurate with the school's circumstances during the term of the charter contract; and
 - (4) evaluate the academic, operational, and financial performance of the school as defined in the charter contract prior to the end of the contract to determine the renewal, nonrenewal, or termination of the contract.
- Clarify that the commissioner may not require an authorizer to undertake a role or responsibility beyond those in statute or the charter contract or perform any function that the department exercises in relation to a public school, school board, or school district.
 - Require the authorizer to document in the annual income and expenditure report the completion of competency-based training by its staff and consultants during the previous year on the charter school law and the authorizer's role or responsibilities.

POLICY SOLUTION: Revamp the Evaluation of Authorizer Performance

- Establish criteria and clarify the process of the Evaluation of Authorizer Performance.

For more information on this Issue & Solution, contact:

Eugene Piccolo
MACS Executive Director
eugene@mncharterschools.org
651.789.3090 Ext. 1