

Sponsoring Charters

A Resource Guide for Minnesota Chartering Agencies

*The latest in a series of reports on the
changing face of public education*

February 2004



*A joint venture of the Center for
Policy Studies and Hamline University*

ABOUT THIS GUIDE FOR SPONSORS OF CHARTERED SCHOOLS

This Guide is intended to assist the sponsor of chartered schools carryout their role that is indeed a substantive one. While the relationship between the state, the board of the chartered school, the operator and the sponsor is a collaborative one, it is the sponsor that grants the charter to the board of the school and it is the sponsor that determines whether the students at the school are making sufficient progress to warrant the school continuing to operate. Naturally the processes as to how those decisions are made must be well designed. Providing direction for what those processes might consist of is the focus of this Sponsors Guide.

This document represents the efforts of several key organizations all of whom have given their approval of the content of this Guide and agree to using this Guide as the “Minnesota Sponsorship Guide.” These organizations are:

Education / Evolving
Minnesota Department of Education
University of Minnesota: Center for School Change
Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)

Having these organizations agree to accept this Guide as the statewide leadership document for sponsors of chartered schools demonstrates a commitment to consistent statewide leadership for the sponsoring function.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS OF THIS GUIDE

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ROLE OF SPONSORS IN CHARTERING IS UNIQUE AND ESSENTIAL

In 1991, Minnesota became the nation's first state to enact legislation authorizing chartered schools. Forty states plus the District of Columbia have now followed Minnesota's lead. This school year, over 700,000 students attend about 3,000 chartered schools all across America. By the fall of 2004, Minnesota will have over 100 chartered schools serving at least 15,000 students.

Given this growth, it is clear that chartered schools are now an integral part of American public education.

Minnesota law, like that of other states, includes a requirement that, for chartered schools to open, they must be granted a charter by an entity referred to as the "sponsor" or "authorizer." The concept of a "charter" and the subsequent "contract for results" are central to the chartering idea.

So is the role of the sponsor, which, unfortunately, has too often been in the background or even ignored. The sponsor has key roles throughout the development, implementation and evaluation of the schools it sponsors. The function of the sponsor is unique in public education. Since it has no peer at the present time in the traditional district system, it is understandable that guidance regarding its functions is lacking. It is therefore this function of "sponsoring" that is the focus of this guide.

The term "charter school" is really a misnomer. In this Guide, we try to avoid some confusion by talking instead about "schools that are district operated" and

"schools that are chartered." Both of these organizations are "public schools." Chartering is a process of creating schools. Chartering is not a "school."

Sponsoring is the granting of a charter to an organization/operator that enables the operator to open and implement a chartered school. Neither district operated schools nor chartered schools are "good" or "poor" simply because of their organizational model. Their impact is based on the learning that occurs because of them.

There are a variety of partners in the chartering process including the chartered school board, the operator of the school including staff, students and their parents, the sponsor, and the state department of education. There must be a balance in the development, implementation and oversight of schools that are chartered. While sponsors have a key role, the sponsor always needs to understand that it does not run the school. That responsibility rests with the chartered school operator and board. However, assuring the success of the students and the school requires a partnership among all of the parties.

This Guide is about what initial experience and the law tells us that sponsors should do to carry out their role and responsibilities in this partnership. Through effective sponsoring, the chartered school will be a better place for students to learn and grow.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: The Role of Sponsors in Chartering is Unique and Essential	Page 1
CHAPTER I: What are chartered schools	Page 3
Status of schools that are chartered in Minnesota	Page 3
Purposes of chartered schools in Minnesota	Page 3
Who may form a chartered school	Page 3
Organizations eligible to serve as sponsors	Page 3
Who may attend a chartered school	Page 4
Revenue available to the sponsor	Page 5
Sponsor protection against legal action	Page 5
CHAPTER II: Rationale for organizations sponsoring schools	Page 6
Does the mission of the agency include an education function	Page 6
Does the organization have the capacity	Page 8
Does the organization have the resources	Page 8
Models of sponsoring	Page 8
CHAPTER III: The role of various organizations in the chartering process	Page 10
The role of the Minnesota Department of Education	Page 10
The role of the board of the chartered school	Page 11
The role of the sponsor	Page 11
CHAPTER IV: The sponsor's role	Page 13
Responsibility No. 1: Provide information regarding the intent and conditions of the organization to serve as sponsor	Page 13
Responsibility No. 2: Determine whether a proposal meets requirements and merits sponsorship	Page 14
Responsibility No. 3: Request commissioner approval of the proposal	Page 20
Responsibility No. 4: Sponsor/chartered school contract development	Page 20
Responsibility No. 5: Provide assistance and service to the school	Page 22
Responsibility No. 6: Provide ongoing oversight of the chartered schools	Page 23
Responsibility No. 7: Determine whether to renew or terminate the charter	Page 26
Appendix A Current Organizations Sponsoring Chartered Schools in Minnesota	Page 31
Appendix B Organizations Providing Support and Information for Sponsors of Chartered Schools	Page 33
Appendix C Letters of support from partners in this project	
Cheri Yecke, Commissioner, Minnesota Department of Education	
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CHAPTER I: What are Chartered Schools?

Status of schools that are chartered in Minnesota

Minnesota laws governing chartered schools are included in Minnesota Statutes section 124D.10 subdivisions 1 to 25. Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd 7 provides that chartered schools are public schools and are a part of Minnesota's system of public education.

While most Minnesota public schools are "district operated," public education is also delivered through "district contract schools," through post-secondary institutions via the Post-secondary Enrollment Options Act (PSEO), through several state operated schools and through "chartered schools." Each of these are ways that public education is delivered to Minnesota learners.

Schools that are chartered are expected to be "results based" and are to be held accountable for achieving the results promised when the school was chartered. These "results" are primarily "student performance results."

While all schools strive to improve student achievement, chartered schools must assure that this achievement actually occurs. The consequences of not meeting the results specified in the contract between the chartered school and their sponsor includes the revocation of the charter. In exchange for this assurance of results, chartered schools are exempt from all Minnesota laws and rules (including those of the commissioner of education) applicable to a school, a board, or a district except those laws and rules specified in the charter law. Chartered schools must comply with all federal laws or regulations applicable to public schools unless the federal law exempts chartered schools from a specific requirement.

After a school is chartered, it must incorporate either as a cooperative under Minnesota Law Chapter 308A or as a nonprofit corporation under Chapter 317A.

Purposes of chartered schools in Minnesota

Minnesota law at section 124D.10 subd 1 identifies the purposes of chartered schools. They are:

1. To improve learning
2. To increase learning opportunities for pupils
3. To encourage the use of different and innovative teaching methods
4. To require the measurement of learning outcomes and create different and innovative forms of measuring outcomes
5. To establish new forms of accountability for schools
6. To create new professional opportunities for teachers, including the opportunity to be responsible for the learning program at the school site

Who may form a Minnesota chartered school?

Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 subd 4 provides that one or more licensed teachers may form and operate a charter school. The teachers must be licensed consistent with the provisions of Minn. Stat. section 122A.18. This does not preclude others such as parents, community members, other professionals or business partners from being a part of the development of the school.

Which organizations may grant charters in Minnesota?

Minnesota Statutes Section 124D.10 subd. 3 defines which organizations may serve as sponsors. Minnesota is fortunate to have an array of organizations that may serve as the sponsor of chartered schools. It is an advantage to have multiple sponsors because the missions of agencies differ and as a result, some agencies are more inclined to sponsor certain types of schools. Having different sponsoring entities gives those organizations options, but also provides opportunities for operators to find

the best fit for their school among the organizations in their part of the state.

It may not be feasible for certain organizations to sponsor many chartered schools since sponsoring such schools may not be central to their mission.

Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 subd 3 and 4 define the organizations that may serve as sponsors of chartered schools in Minnesota and they are:

- All Minnesota district school boards
- The board of an intermediate school district
- Education districts organized under Minn. Stat. section 123A.15 to 123A.19
- Charitable organizations under section 501 (c) (3) of the IRS code of 1986 providing that this organization is a member of the Minnesota council of nonprofits or the Minnesota council on foundations, is registered with the office of the attorney's general and reports an end-of-year fund balance of at least \$2 million
- A Minnesota private college that grants two or four year degrees and is registered with the higher education services office under Minn. Stat. Chapter 136A
- A community college, state university, or technical college governed by the state board of trustees
- The University of Minnesota
- Certain non-profit organizations that have existed for at least 25 years may sponsor chartered schools that have been operational for at least three years
- The Commissioner of Education may serve as a sponsor when a proposal is denied by a school board

The law does not include restrictions as to the types of schools each of the above may sponsor nor the number of schools each may sponsor.

Who may attend a Minnesota chartered school?

Chartered schools are open to all students, regardless of intellectual ability or aptitude, race or culture who are

within the age or grade for whom the schools is organized. If more students apply to the school than for whom there are spaces, the decision as to which students are admitted is a difficult one.

The statutes below provide some direction to this matter. In some cases, the operators of schools may want to send their children to the chartered school. However, if the school is oversubscribed, they too must be subject to the lottery process provided for in law.

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd. 9 provides that a *charter school may limit admission to:*

- (1) pupils within an age group or grade level;*
- (2) people who are eligible to participate in the graduation incentives program under section 124D.68;*
- (Note: these are students who have not succeeded based on various criteria in district operated schools) or*
- (3) residents of a specific geographic area where the percentage of the population of non-Caucasian people of that area is greater than the percentage of the non-Caucasian population in the congressional district in which the geographic area is located, and as long as the school reflects the racial and ethnic diversity of the specific area.*

The law further provides that, *"A charter school shall enroll an eligible pupil who submits a timely application, unless the number of applications exceeds the capacity of a program, class, grade level, or building. In this case, pupils must be accepted by lot. If a charter school is the only school located in a town serving pupils within a particular grade level, then pupils that are residents of the town must be given preference for enrollment before accepting pupils by lot.*

If a pupil lives within two miles of a charter school and the next closest public school is more than five miles away, the charter school must give those pupils preference for enrollment before accepting other pupils by lot. A charter school shall give preference for enrollment to a sibling of an enrolled pupil and to a foster child of that pupil's parents before accepting other pupils by lot.

A chartered school may not limit admission to pupils on the basis of intellectual ability, measures of achievement or aptitude or athletic ability.

What revenue is available to the charter school sponsor?

Some revenue is available to the sponsor. Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 subd 15 provides that in the first three years of operation, the sponsor may bill the schools it charts up to \$30 per pupil not to exceed \$10,000. After the third year, this amount is \$10 per pupil not to exceed \$3,500. The decision to bill for sponsor services is optional on the part of the sponsor. If the chartered school and the sponsor agree that the sponsor will provide specific services for the schools it sponsors, it may also bill for these services.

When the school has been granted its charter to operate as a chartered school, it becomes eligible to apply for federal planning and implementation funds. The chartered school may include as part of the application

that some of the revenue will be used for assistance provided by the sponsor such as consultation and technical assistance. This will need to be agreed to with the operator as the initial application is developed.

Is the sponsor protected against any legal action involving the schools it sponsors?

Minnesota law includes protection for sponsors to guard against sponsors being held liable for the actions of the schools which they sponsor in a court of law.

This is important for the sponsor to understand as they pursue their decision as to whether to serve as a sponsor of chartered schools. Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 subd 25 (c) provides as follows:

The commissioner, a sponsor, members of the board of a sponsor in their official capacity, and employees of a sponsor are immune from civil or criminal liability with respect to all activities related to a charter school they approve or sponsor.

CHAPTER II: Rationale for organizations serving as sponsors of Minnesota chartered schools

Making the decision as to whether to serve as a sponsor of a chartered school is the first important decision the organization must make regarding this process. Why an organization would want to serve as the sponsor of a chartered school is a common question especially if the organization is not an education organization.

Making the decision to do so is a significant decision and needs to be made at the board level within the organization. Sponsorship carries with it substantive responsibilities which are policy related and therefore are board decisions.

There are several reasons for serving as a sponsor but each has its focus on the desire to improve learning opportunities to the children and youth of Minnesota. That is always central to the question of “Why should we sponsor chartered schools?”

MAKING THE DECISION TO SPONSOR

- * Sponsoring is a way to carry out the sponsor's mission
- * Sponsor has the capacity to serve
- * Sponsor has the needed resources
- * Sponsor has long-term commitment

Does the mission of the agency include an education or youth serving function?

A decision by an eligible sponsor to get into the business of granting charters may vary depending on the type of organization and its mission.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS, for example, may see sponsoring of chartered schools as a unique way to carryout the mission of the organization. By sponsor-

ing chartered schools, they can have a significant impact on students and families in a cost effective manner.

- The YMCA mission includes an education provision. Y's are deeply involved with the youth of the community in virtually all aspects of their daily lives not just the physical domain. At one time, YMCA's operated schools for inner city youth throughout the nation. The Minneapolis YMCA became a sponsor because they believed it was one way to carryout their mission. Now, charter sponsorship is a priority for YMCA's at the national level.
- Like the YMCA, the Minnesota Volunteers of America (VOA) organization is adding sponsoring to its list of ways to meet its mission. VOA (MN) is a social service organization with a long history of responding to community needs with effective programs. Sponsoring chartered schools allows VOA (MN) to empower communities to respond to their needs which is part of the VOA (MN) organizational mission. VOA (MN) is one of Minnesota's largest sponsors of chartered schools.
- The Audubon Society and Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center are immersed in education regarding the environment of our planet. Sponsoring chartered schools around their mission is a natural choice for them.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS may also see chartering as serving a unique role in a number of ways.

- Institutions can create laboratory schools in which to try new and innovative education models similar to the “lab schools” of a previous era.
- Departments such as business, sociology as well as education can use the charters as parts of their program
- College programs promoting entrepreneurial leadership will be able to study the impact of innovation in education. Hamline University is planning to have graduate students assist the schools

they charter in evaluation studies or other areas as a part of their University experience.

- An institution may use the chartering process to engage the institution in community service activities. For the University of St. Thomas, this is a key part of why it is a sponsor. By sponsoring chartered schools, it is able to extend its mission to serve the urban community, provide educational settings for its students to experience and grow in their understanding of the issues and challenges faced by urban educators and promote faculty and student participation in service to the community through tutoring, mentoring and other service programs.
- Students attending secondary chartered schools may want to attend that higher education institution.

Finally, **DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARDS** may want to sponsor charters as another management/organizational approach for them to educate the children and youth of the district. Most school boards now use only a single organizational model to educate the students of the district, that being they “own and operate” all of the schools in the district. Through the chartering process, the board is provided a way to create new schools designed to carryout its mission. The school board can create new schools free from current bureaucracy but based on models selected by the district. Examples are:

- The Chisago Lakes district initiated a distance learning model with a few of its neighboring districts in the mid 1990’s. It has now converted this program model to a chartered school called, “TRIO Wolf Creek Distance Learning School.” The chartered school serves students primarily from the Chisago Lakes district but has also enrolled students from other Minnesota districts through open enrollment. The contract with TRIO Wolf Creek Distance Learning School provides that the chartered school purchases curriculum leadership, special education services, business functions, etc. from the sponsor. This arrangement provides

excellent learning opportunities for students without the chartered school needing to duplicate services that can be purchased from the district.

- The Hopkins District is partnering with a community based organization, Stages Theatre, to sponsor an arts school. The Fine Arts Interdistrict School (FAIR), an multi-district desegregation magnet school located in Robbinsdale, along with the Perpich Center for the Arts High School will provide Hopkins area students with a K-12 fine arts program of the highest quality. The Hopkins district will provide selected services to the chartered school on a fee for service basis.
- The Faribault district has sponsored an elementary school in Nerstrand based on the request of citizens of that part of the Faribault district. The Waseca district is also sponsoring an elementary school initiated by the district.

These are examples where the school district has either initiated the charter arrangement or collaborated with the school it has chartered. Through these chartered schools, the **district board of education** is meeting its responsibility to educate the children and youth of the district. The district board may initiate charter schools so that:

- Successful teaching and learning models can be replicated more readily
- New management models can be implemented that result in a greater share of the revenue devoted to the classrooms
- By converting current sites to charters, teachers are provided an empowerment option unparalleled in any other type of organizational structure.

Regardless of the reason for serving as a sponsor, the basic core responsibilities of sponsorship remain the same although the strengths of the sponsoring organization will impact the level of involvement between sponsor and the schools it has chartered.

Does the organization have the capacity to serve as a sponsor?

When the board is making the sponsoring decision, it must also consider whether it has the capacity to carry out the sponsoring role. Does it understand the role of sponsoring? Does it have the long-term commitment to this effort? Each of these questions should be discussed by the board as it makes the sponsorship decision.

Does the organization have the resources to serve as a sponsor?

In order to function appropriately, the sponsoring organization must be willing to commit the resources necessary for this role. This includes allocating the time of current staff or contracting with new staff to implement the sponsor responsibilities. The amount of time and staff will depend on the number of charters granted.

Sponsoring requires not only initial review of applications but also ongoing oversight of the sponsored schools, including renewal or termination decisions. While sponsoring chartered schools is a partnership with those school operators, the sponsor has a unique set of responsibilities and decisions that only it can make.

The sponsor need not have all the resources necessary within its organization to be an effective sponsor. It may want to partner with other organizations including other sponsors for activities such as application review or school oversight or it may want to contract with private consultants to carry out part of the sponsoring function.

Models of Sponsoring

Although not specifically delineated in law, there are two distinct models of sponsoring chartered schools. The model of sponsoring used most frequently is the *Operator Designed Model*. In this model, the potential operators of the school develop the design of the school and seek out a sponsor. The sponsor usually enters the

development phase after the model has been determined and development is underway.

Under this model, the sponsor will likely have less involvement in the actual creation of the school. While it is responsible for assuring that the type of school is worthy of its sponsorship, it will likely have limited involvement in creating the actual learning structure of the school. The sponsor remains responsible for the contract development and oversight responsibilities.

MODELS OF SPONSORING

- * Operator Designed Model
 - Operator determines the model of the school and seeks the best sponsor
- * Sponsor Designed Model
 - Sponsor determines the model of the school and seeks the best operator

A second type of sponsorship is the *Sponsor Designed Model*. In this model, it is the sponsor that determines the type of school it wants to sponsor. It then seeks out the best operators to develop the details of a proposal and ultimately to manage the school the sponsor has designed. The sponsor will likely be more involved with this school in terms of setting the expectations, determining the curriculum and providing assistance to the school in addition to oversight and accountability roles.

The *Sponsor Designed Model* will likely be more attractive to district school boards because in this model, the district board is able to select the model of the kind of school it wants as well as guide its development. In this model of sponsorship, the sponsor role can range from having a general idea as to the type of school(s) it wants to sponsor all the way to having a detailed plan for the school's design.

Sponsors can use this model to meet the requests of parents in the community. For example, parents frequently request Montessori schools, including a pre-school component, and language immersion schools as well as other models. The requests of the parents can be met through a *Sponsor Designed Model*. A district board

may want to model new types of accountability, which it may in the future want to extend to the district operated schools as well. Again, the *Sponsor Designed Model* will be a useful option for the district board. The district can include stipulations in the contract, which provide further direction to the chartered school.

In the *Sponsor Designed Model*, the school board should view the schools it has chartered as one way for it

to educate the public of the district because the school that it has designed and chartered is carrying out the direction of the district board. District school boards need not “own and operate” all (or any) of the schools in the district in order for the board to carryout its responsibilities.

CHAPTER III: The roles of various organizations involved in the chartering process

The rationale for clarifying the roles and responsibilities of the parties involved with providing learning opportunities for students through the chartered sector is intended as a way to better foster a partnership among the involved parties. While each entity has responsibilities that are unique to that organization, a successful chartered sector will be one that implements a balanced approach in a collegial but professional manner that is focused on expanding quality schools and program models for students while at the same time assuring improved accountability for student learning, quality program management and effective use of school revenue.

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) performs a variety of critical roles in chartering schools, including:

1. Provide leadership and direction regarding the authorization, operation, evaluation and financing of chartered schools. The MDE periodically consults with chartered schools, sponsors and others to solicit input regarding the chartering process.
2. Sets direction for the chartering process consistent with the provisions in Minnesota law.
3. Act on the sponsor's and operator's request to grant a charter. This can result in approving the request of a sponsor to grant a charter, requiring modifications to the application or denying the request for charter status. As part of the review, the MDE will determine whether the sponsor is a legitimate sponsor as provided for in law.

4. Provide training and assistance for charters and sponsors as required in law including the identification of best practice both for the chartered schools as well as for sponsors.
5. Provide revenue to the school as provided for in state and federal law including:
 - a. Federal grants (discretionary and formula)
 - b. State and federal revenue when in operation
6. Provide services afforded to all schools in the state i.e. assistance with implementing state standards, statewide testing program, etc.
7. Conduct oversight of chartered schools. Items a-e are also provided for district operated schools:
 - a. Teacher licensure reviews through Staff Automated Reporting System (STARS)
 - b. Review student reporting based on data submitted through the Minnesota Automated Reporting Student System (MARSS)
 - c. Finance reviews conducted through the review of annual independent audits as well as reviews of districts in statutory operating debt (SOD)
 - d. Monitor compliance with applicable state and federal law and rules such as special education
 - e. Implementation of No Child Left Behind legislation including the determination of sites not making adequate yearly progress (AYP) and providing assistance and oversight accordingly
 - f. Review and comment on the annual reports filed by the chartered schools
 - g. Review and comment on the evaluations conducted by sponsors during the charter renewal process
 - h. Remove the charter from schools based on financial mismanagement as provided for in law

The MDE communicates its findings regarding the above to the charter operators with copies to the sponsor.
8. Provide information to the public regarding the level of performance being achieved at the chartered schools based on the criteria set by the state and federal authorities.

The board of the chartered school

It is important that the sponsor recognizes its role and not attempt to perform the role of the chartered school board or operator. The chartered school board is the legal entity of the chartered school. As such, it is the organization that is ultimately accountable for assuring that the chartered school is implemented properly and that the results promised are attained.

Boards of chartered schools like the boards of district operated schools may exercise their responsibility to operate a school through different organizational models. The chartered school board may employ staff to operate the school or it may contract with another entity such as a cooperative or with teachers organized under applicable laws governing cooperatives.

If the board chooses to contract, it would not perform part 6 below as it relates to employing staff and managing the budget. However, the charter board would approve the annual budget. It would monitor the contract regarding those and other duties provided for in the contract. If the board does not contract with another entity, but rather operates in a traditional manner of a school board/school relationship, it would perform all of the following duties.

1. Provide leadership to the development of the application of the school including determining the mission, vision and goals of the proposed school including student expectations; the model of the school and the student population to be served; board membership model; financing of the school; and, how success will be defined.
2. Request an eligible organization serve as its sponsor and provide the information needed by the sponsor so that it can make the appropriate sponsoring decision.
3. Provide the commissioner the necessary information so that the request of the sponsor to grant the charter will be approved.

4. Following receipt of its charter, enter into a contract with the sponsor regarding the implementation of the school, the services to be provided by the sponsor and the oversight expectations of the sponsor.
5. Following the granting of the charter, provide direction regarding the planning of the start-up of the school including the employment of all staff, space for the school, financing arrangements and other start-up activities.
6. Approve the annual budget, act on the employment of all licensed staff and approve the expenditures of the school.
7. When the school becomes operational, work in partnership with the school operators so the mission, vision and goals of the school are attained.
8. Periodically review the student performance on multiple indicators and make decisions accordingly and hold the school leadership and staff accountable for results. If the school continues not to meet expectations, the board should discontinue operation of the school.
9. Provide reports or other information to the sponsor based on the contract requirements.
10. Provide reports or other information to the commissioner as required.
11. Communicate frequently to the parents, students and community regarding the school.
12. Determine whether the sponsor is performing its role as provided for in the contract and act on this determination when appropriate.

The sponsor

The role of the sponsor is unique in public education. It has no peer. While the sponsor has a crucial role in this process, it is intended that the sponsor be a helpful partner in this process. While its role is one of “sponsor”

and not “operator” it too is invested in assuring student success.

1. Provide information regarding the intent and conditions of the organization to serve as a sponsor of chartered schools
2. Determine whether a proposal requesting it to serve as a sponsor meets state, federal and sponsor criteria for a charter school. It needs to conduct a rigorous analysis to aid in arriving at this determination.
3. Following a determination that the proposal meets all requirements, along with the operator, the sponsor requests the commissioner to approve its intent to grant the charter. The sponsor must collaborate with the operator so that this request is submitted in a timely manner.
4. Enter into a contract with the operator following commissioner approval. This decision is based on the level of readiness of the operator to start the school. The parties may also determine to enter into a service agreement that specifies the services to be provided the chartered school by the sponsor. The

contract must include the provisions in law as well as how the sponsor will carry out its responsibilities under No Child Left Behind.

5. Provide assistance and service to the school as agreed to in the contract or service agreement. There is a presumption that the sponsor will provide assistance to the chartered school if the sponsor is capable of doing so and the operator agrees such assistance is needed.
6. Provide ongoing oversight of the school to ensure compliance with the contract and service agreement as provided for in state law.
7. Determine whether or not to renew the charter based on the results achieved by the school. Should the sponsor decide that it no longer will serve as a sponsor of chartered schools, it should provide adequate notice of this decision to both the schools it sponsors and to the commissioner so that new sponsorship agreements can be developed.

CHAPTER IV: Sponsor roles and responsibilities

This final chapter is intended to provide sponsors with guidance to assist in the implementation of its responsibilities. The “Recommended Practices” are based on the experience of current sponsors as well as other organizations.

The chapter is also organized in chronological order – with the various steps taken by the sponsors and schools following the graphic below.

Sponsor Responsibility Number 1: *Provide information regarding the intent and conditions of the organization to serve as a sponsor*

How do organizations learn who is willing to serve as a sponsor? Minn. Stat. section 124D subd 19 provides:

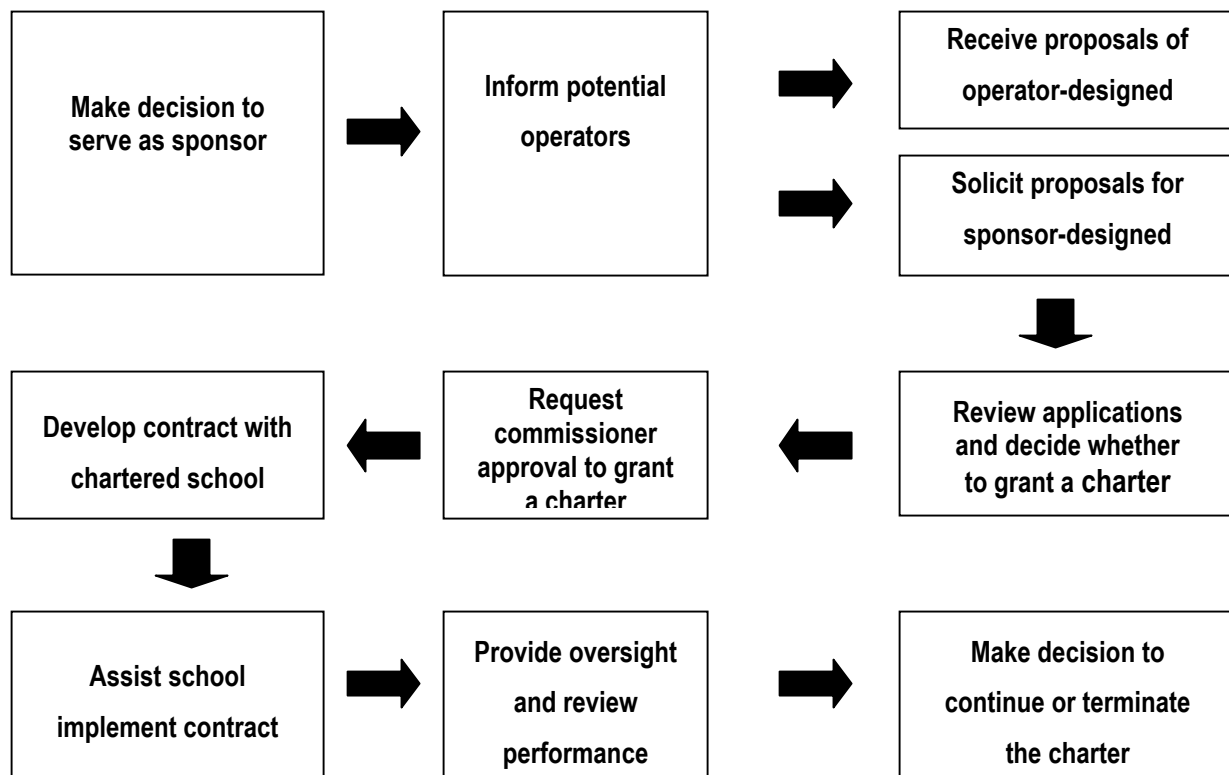
Disseminate Information. The sponsor, the operators and the department of education must disseminate information to the public on how to form and operate a charter school and how to utilize the offerings of a charter school. Particular groups to be targeted include low-income families and communities, and students of color.

Recommended Practices:

The Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) and other state organizations disseminate information as to how to form and operate a chartered school. The Minnesota Department of Education and MACS websites provides information as to which organizations are serving as sponsors.

It is recommended that organizations interested in sponsoring schools develop a brochure, website, etc. which provides information as to its process for sponsoring schools. If the organization is going to be a sponsor,

CHARTER SCHOOL SPONSORING PROCESS



INFORMING POTENTIAL OPERATORS OF SPONSORSHIP AVAILABILITY

- * Inform Minnesota Department of Education, Minnesota Association of Chartered Schools, Education/Evolving, Center for School Change
- * Inform targeted groups
- * Develop a brochure/web site
- * Verbally inform others
- * Include sponsorship criteria in information

it will want potential operators to know this so that the very best applications will be forwarded to the sponsor. If the sponsor is interested in sponsoring schools with a specific focus that should be made known as well. For an example of such information, refer to the VOA (MN) website at: www.voamncharter.org

In many cases, an operator will seek out an organization that is currently not a sponsor because the operator believes the organization is a good match for the kind of school it wants to create. Sometimes, this is the action that initiates the discussion within the sponsoring organization as to whether it is interested in performing that function.

Potential operators of chartered schools need to know of available sponsors and their criteria for serving as sponsors for several reasons:

1. The potential operator should know how its proposal will fit with the mission of the sponsor and the types of schools in which the sponsor is interested.
2. Understanding the sponsor's process for review and implementation will provide the potential operator with a guide for proposal development.
3. The sponsor may have expertise in education, finance or other key areas that it is willing to share with operators resulting in a stronger proposal.
4. The sponsoring organization can become familiar early in the development of proposals and can inform the operator of interest it may have regarding the model, timing of the proposal or other areas.

5. If the sponsor is going to charge a sponsorship fee or has other conditions for sponsoring, it will be helpful for the potential operator to understand those requirements.

By providing this information, the sponsor is able to communicate not only its intent to sponsor but also its process and criteria for sponsoring.

A number of Minnesota-based organizations – including Education / Evolving, Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS), University of Minnesota Center for School Change – disseminate information regarding charter sponsoring. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers (NACSA) is also an excellent resource. See Appendix B for more information on how to contact these organizations.

Sponsor Responsibility Number 2: Determine whether a proposal meets requirements and merits sponsorship

Minnesota Law does not include a specific process for how the sponsor determines whether to grant charter status to a school. However, the law provides minimum criteria that the operator needs to meet in order for the proposed school to be granted a charter by the sponsor.

Recommended Practices:

Making the decision to serve as a sponsor is the first significant decision an organization makes regarding chartering. The second significant decision is deciding whether to sponsor a specific proposal and grant it chartered status. It is important that the sponsor have a process to follow as it makes this important decision.

This process will differ somewhat depending on whether the sponsor is considering sponsorship of a proposal developed by an operator i.e. Operator Designed Model or whether the sponsor has a specific model it wants implemented i.e. Sponsor Designed

DOES PROPOSAL MEET REQUIREMENTS?

- * Pre-application phase
- * Application review criteria
 - Meets state standards
 - Strong operator leadership
 - Clear sense of purpose
 - Quality program design
 - Clear evaluation design
 - Competent governance
 - Sound financial plan

Model and intends to actively solicit applications and will select from the best application it receives.

The sponsor should develop a “sponsor cadre” which will be responsible for the sponsoring process. In a school district, this team may include persons with expertise in curriculum, special education, assessment and evaluation, finance and the district legal counsel. At a postsecondary sponsor, persons from the education department, business department, law school and other departments might form the team.

Nonprofit organizations should include program development staff, finance staff and other applicable members. Sponsors may want to consider assembling a cadre of consultants to assist in the application review. For example, depending on the competencies within the organization, consultation on the particular program model may be needed or a consultant to advise on the finance plan may be useful.

When an operator approaches an organization requesting that it consider being its sponsor, the following components are key in that decision making process.

1. Pre-application Phase

It is important for the sponsor to have spent time determining that it will be a sponsor and has articulated what its process and conditions for sponsoring are. This is very beneficial for the potential operator to have this information. However, if the sponsor has not addressed this, it is encouraged to do so with its board prior to getting too far into the process with the operator.

Having a “pre-application” discussion with the operator is one place to start so that the sponsor has an idea of the model being proposed, timelines, who will lead the development of the proposal, financing, potential community and business partners, etc. It can see how that model and vision fit with its own mission and vision.

Discussion as to the expectations of the operator of the sponsor can be initiated. This discussion will likely be held with the administration of the sponsor or the “sponsor team” as addressed in the following paragraph.

As a result of these “pre-application discussions” both parties should know whether a partnership to create a chartered school should be pursued further.

2. Application Development, review and communication

The written application needs to address both the requirements of the sponsor as well as the requirements of the MDE since the commissioner ultimately will be asked to approve the sponsor’s request to grant the charter. The sponsor may have unique requirements in addition to those provided for in law. For example, Volunteers of America requires all applicants to include a community service provision in the proposal.

While the application must be complete, all parties must remember that it is not the final design of the school. Further development will occur after the school has been granted its charter. However, it must be of sufficient magnitude for the sponsor to conclude that when operational, it will be a good place for the children and youth of the community to learn and grow and will be financially viable.

An application outline which includes the provisions required in law is available on the MDE website. It is suggested that the sponsor adopt that application and augment it with its own additional requirements. Please refer to the MDE website for the current application.

What are key parts of the application that the sponsor should consider?

The primary focus of the proposal must be on improving student achievement. The school is designed so that achievement is the result. Chartered schools are “results-based schools.”

While each part of the application includes requirements that must be met, there are several provisions that clearly carry more weight in the decision to serve as sponsor.

It is important that the sponsor have a qualified team review the application. Depending on the staffing of the organization, application review consultation may be needed in order for the sponsor to determine whether to serve as its sponsor.

Operator Leadership. Those involved in the design of the school must not only be committed to its success but must also have the capability to carry out the school's promise.

- The proposed operators must have in-depth knowledge regarding the model of the school they are proposing.
- They should have an understanding of the complexities of operating a school. While the financial management of a school can be contracted, the day to day operation will be the responsibility of the operator. They need to provide evidence that they can do this or will be employing persons who can.

The qualifications of the proposed operators coupled with the discussions held with the proposed operators, should provide the sponsor with the needed evidence of that commitment, competence and promise.

Clear Sense of Purpose. Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 subd 1 provides for a wide range of “purposes” for chartered schools. (See Chapter 1) The proposal must be designed so that the school will fulfill one or more of these purposes.

- The mission and vision of the proposed school should be clear and should be focused on the type of school to be developed. The sponsor should clearly understand what this school is going to accomplish.
- The goals and objectives need to be clear and measurable. Chartered schools are “results oriented schools.” While chartered schools must meet the state expectations and the goals and objectives should be in line with those expectations, chartered schools will have additional objectives relating to the mission and purpose of its charter. While some schools may use new practices for assuring that learning occurs, the results of what will be accomplished with student’s needs clarity.

The application cannot suggest that the substance of the proposal will be developed at some later point. Feedback from the sponsor to the operator during the application process is helpful in this regard. If the sponsor is to be able to make a quality decision to sponsor, it must have a quality proposal.

Program Design. The type of program or learning design should be determined by the type of school to be developed.

- A sponsor may be interested in authorizing schools that are “innovative,” meaning “different than what we have now.” It is important not to define “innovative” too narrowly. Certainly the definition of innovative includes designs based on new ideas and concepts. But, “innovative” also includes proven models that have been implemented successfully elsewhere. They are innovative because they don’t exist here. Innovative may also mean that the school is designed for a unique group of students although the program model may not be unique. Finally, chartered schools reflect an innovative management concept and the very fact that they are being chartered makes them different or “innovative.”

- Schools may be organized around a specific instructional model or curriculum such as Success for All, direct instruction, Core Knowledge, etc.
- Some schools are based on a defined philosophy. While not a curriculum per se, these schools have clear designs. Examples include Montessori, open school, continuous progress, project based learning, etc.
- Other schools may be organized around a management design such as technology based schools, data driven decision making, or may have close partnerships with the pre-kindergarten community, higher education institutions or other organizations.
- Others may be a “Teachers Professional Practices” model where the teachers have formed a cooperative and operate the school through a contract between their “professional teacher cooperative” and the charter board.

The application should also be clear as to the ages/grades to be served. For example, if it is being proposed as a K-5 with the intent of becoming a K-8 or K-12, that should be clear in the application.

Regardless of the program model(s) to be used, the proposal needs to address how it will serve children and youth with disabilities and children whose first language is not English.

The sponsor should be open to new kinds of schools that have a strong program design element supported by a review of the research supporting the design as well as a clear description of how the school will be organized to implement the chosen design. For models that are new and without a research base, the application should include a thorough discussion as to the models rationale.

Evaluation design. Because chartered schools are “student results based schools,” the evaluation design is key to providing quality information not only for the operator but also for the parents, students and sponsor.

The evaluation must provide data and information which enables these parties to make decisions based on the effectiveness of the school at attaining the results specified in its charter and contract with its sponsor.

One of the statutory purposes of chartering is to develop new ways for evaluation. Therefore, while a charter must include the statutory requirements, the charter board or operator may want to develop new ways to evaluate its success. When such new evaluation models are proposed, the sponsor is encouraged to carefully consider them and not dismiss them because the design breaks from the status quo.

It is important that the application include a thorough evaluation design so that its success on an ongoing basis can be determined. However, the design of the school, including its purposes and mission, should determine the evaluation model to be used. For example, schools organized around a project based learning model will require an evaluation design different than one based on courses.

Regardless of the schools’ model, the evaluation design needs to include valid and reliable methods of assessing student achievement and should include the types of information that will be collected to determine how progress on each goal will be determined. Multiple indicators should be included to determine the schools’ success. Evaluating the results of the schools’ impact on student performance is key to chartered schools. The following are important to have included:

- By law, the chartered school must be designed around state standards and students must participate in state testing. These state standards and student testing will also meet the requirements of the federal law, “No Child Left Behind.”
- The evaluation should include how the schools’ design is being implemented. For example, if a school was sponsored as a “professional development school,” or a “teacher as owner school,” the evaluation should also address how well the schools

design is being implemented. This is important because it may be the key reason it was granted a charter.

- The school may also include other ways to measure academic success such as the development of portfolios, curriculum based measures, levels testing, etc. “Value Added” growth models of determining success should be encouraged. For models based around “project based learning,” portfolios and other examples of student work are key to evaluating the success of the program and should be supported.
- Parent, student and staff surveys will provide valid and reliable information. Actually, this type of information is extremely valuable especially when considering the design of the school. Learning about why parents/students selected this school and how the parent/student see their experiences at the school are important pieces of information.
- Community based indicators will be useful depending on the schools’ emphasis. If community service is part of the school, the community should be asked about the impact. If reduced truancy, improved student behavior, etc. are part of the school, the community should be asked about the impact.
- Data on indicators such as attendance and behavior should be included. If student mobility is a factor at the school, the reasons for this mobility should be ascertained. Why are students leaving the school?
- Of key importance are indicators which provide information as to the student’s success in whatever occurs next in their life. How prepared were they for middle school, high school, post-secondary education or the world of work?

The Center for School Change has produced a publication titled “What should we do?” which provides direction relating to accountability. And, the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) is implementing an “Accountability Project” with member schools. The

sponsor may want to recommend that the schools it sponsors determine whether to participate in this project.

Governance A sound board is crucial to the success of any organization. While the sponsor does not select the board of the school, as a part of its review, it may want to include certain criteria such as the following:

- Certain types of people are useful on boards or on advisory committees to the board. For example, persons with an understanding of the education model to be used as well as persons who will be teachers should be on the board. Others might include a person with a finance background, an attorney, members of the community, a business partner and others.
- By law, a minimum of five members must serve on the board. Not later than the end of the third year of operation, the board must consist of a majority of teachers employed at the school unless the commissioner waives this requirement. Many schools that have requested this waiver have received it.
- To better assure that board members meet high standards, the sponsor may want to require that a background check, as is done for all school employees, be a part of the board selection process.
- The sponsor should not be a member of the board. While the sponsor is encouraged to attend board meetings on an on-going basis, actual board membership is discouraged. Being a board member places the sponsor in the role of “operator.” This not only removes the “arms length relationship” between the sponsor and chartered school, but it also may remove the statutory protection against litigation afforded by Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd 25 (c). Employees of the sponsor can be on the chartered school board if they are involved with the school, such as being a parent of a student at the school, but in such cases, they are not representing the sponsor.

- The sponsor should have a regular place on the board agenda for it to address sponsor related matters.

Financial Plan. Poor financial planning will virtually assure a failed school. In some cases, the proposed operators have had limited experience in finance management. They may understand program models and teaching strategies but do not always understand the importance of sound financial management and what that means in terms of planning.

The sponsor must insist that a sound financial plan be presented as a key part of the application. The sponsor may need to engage the assistance of a financial consultant to review this part of the plan if its staff is not familiar with education finance. The MDE application includes an outline for the financial plan. The following should be addressed in that plan:

- The financial plan should be for three years.
- The plan must be based on a specific number of students who are anticipated to be attending the school. In order to have sufficient revenue, the school must have a marketing plan to attract students to the school. The application needs to provide a plan as to how it will recruit the number of students needed so that the school will not only meet its student learning expectations but be financially sound as well.
- The budget should include revenue sources in addition to basic education revenue including basic skills revenue, other general education revenue, state and federal special education aid, Title I (No Child Left Behind), ELL if applicable, Food and Nutrition if breakfast and lunch are part of the application and lease aid. Each revenue source must be documented as to whether the estimated amount is defensible.
- While the financial plan should include the planning and implementation funding anticipated in a federal start-up grant, a separate application will need to be

approved by MDE after the charter has been granted and approved by the commissioner.

- The application should identify how the financial operation of the school will be managed. If the school will be contracting with financial accounting services, it is important that this firm have successful experience in Minnesota education accounting and reporting practices. Non-Minnesota organizations may not be familiar with Minnesota requirements.

The sponsor and proposed operator should have periodic discussions regarding the substance of the application as it is being developed. The application proposal, when final, should be very familiar to the sponsor. The sponsor should be communicating its support or concerns regarding the application as it is being developed.

Depending on the resources of the sponsor, it should provide guidance in areas where it is able to do so. The sponsor may be able to assist in budget planning especially if the sponsor is a school district. If the sponsor has unique requirements, it should suggest ways that these requirements might best be satisfied.

Making the decision to sponsor

When the proposal is completed, the operator should make a formal presentation to either the board of the sponsor or to the leadership of the sponsoring organization responsible for sponsorship decisions. Making the decision to serve as a sponsor of a school and grant it chartered status is a significant decision. As a result of this presentation(s), the board of the sponsoring organization makes the decision as to whether it will serve as the sponsor and to request the commissioner to approve its decision to grant chartered status to the school.

Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 Subd 4 (d) provides that the granting or renewal of a charter by a sponsor

must not be conditioned upon the bargaining unit status of the employees of the school.

If the sponsor is a district operated public school, Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 Subd 4 (a) provides that the board must make the decision to serve or not serve as the sponsor within 90 days of receiving the proposal from the operator. If the board does not make a decision within that 90 day period, the operator may apply directly to the commissioner for sponsorship.

If the board elects not to sponsor a school, the applicant may appeal that decision to the commissioner. In such cases, the commissioner may elect to sponsor the school or may assist the school find another sponsor.

Sponsor Responsibility No. 3: *Request Commissioner approval of the charter proposal*

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd 4(b) provides:
Before the operators may form and operate a school, the sponsor must file an affidavit with the commissioner stating its intent to authorize a charter school. The affidavit must state the terms and conditions under which the sponsor would authorize a charter school. The commissioner must approve or disapprove the sponsor's proposed authorization within 60 days of receipt of the affidavit. Failure to obtain commissioner approval precludes a sponsor from authorizing the charter school that was the subject of the affidavit.

Recommended Practices:

The request for commissioner review should be submitted jointly by the sponsor and the operator. The MDE has several dates during the year when it reviews chartered school applications. In some cases, the MDE will require that a presentation be made to its advisory board for chartered schools. In such cases, both the sponsor and proposed operator should attend the meeting, make the presentation to that board and respond to questions.

It may be necessary for the sponsor and/or operator to provide additional information prior to being considered for approval. If such information is necessary, the sponsor needs to collaborate with the operator so that this request is submitted to the MDE in a timely manner.

If the commissioner does not approve the application, the sponsor is prohibited from granting the charter. While the application may be reconsidered again at a later time, the school cannot be opened as a chartered school without the commissioner's approval.

If the commissioner does approve the request to grant the charter, the sponsor should inform the operator of this in writing and initiate the process for developing the contract.

Sponsor Responsibility No. 4: *Following approval of the Commissioner, the sponsor and operator must enter into a contract*

Before entering into a contract, the chartered school must form /organize either as a cooperative or a nonprofit organization

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd (c) provides as follows:

The operators authorized to organize and operate a school, before entering into a contract or other agreement for professional or other services, goods, or facilities, must incorporate as a cooperative under Chapter 308A or as a nonprofit corporation under Chapter 317A and must establish a board of directors of at least five members until a timely election for members of the school is held according to the schools articles and bylaws.

Recommended Practices:

The operator should begin the process for creating the non-profit organization well in advance of this point because this process does take some time.

The contract between the sponsor and chartered school

Minn. Stat. 124D.10 subd 6 provides as follows:

The sponsor's authorization for a charter school must be in the form of a written contract signed by the sponsor and the board of directors of the charter school. The contract must be completed within 90 days of the commissioner's approval of the sponsor's request-ed authorization. The contract for a charter school must be in writing and contain at least the following:

- (1) a description of a program that carries out one or more of the purposes in subdivision 1;*
- (2) specific outcomes pupils are to achieve under subdivision 10;*
- (3) admission policies and procedures;*
- (4) management and administration of the school;*
- (5) requirements and procedures for program and financial audits;*
- (6) how the school will comply with subdivisions 8, 13, 16, and 23;*
- (7) assumption of liability by the charter school;*
- (8) types and amounts of insurance coverage to be obtained by the charter school;*
- (9) the term of the contract, which may be up to three years, and*
- (10) if the board of directors or the operators of the charter school provide special education instruction and services for children with a disability under sections 125A.03 to 125A.24, and 125A.65, a description of the financial parameters within which the charter school will operate to provide the special instruction and services to children with a disability*

"No Child Left Behind" requires:

- 1. That chartered schools comply with this law*
- 2. That chartered schools are subject to the same accountability requirements as are district operated schools.*

- 3. That sponsors monitor the schools they have chartered to ensure they are meeting the State's adequate yearly progress (AYP) definition.*

Note: In Minnesota, the state Department of Education sets the NCLB standards, oversees the statewide NCLB testing, issues reports to each site (including chartered schools) based on the NCLB standards and monitors AYP status. Therefore, the sponsor's role is to use these data as a part of the oversight process and the renewal decision making process.

Recommended Practice:

The above are the minimum requirements in Minnesota law and the requirements for sponsors of chartered schools as provided by federal law Title I (No Child Left Behind). A sponsor may want to include other conditions of sponsorship as well. It is suggested that the approved charter application be included as an appendix of the contract.

CHARTER CONTRACT CONTENTS

- * Requirements in state law
- * Requirements of "No Child Left Behind"
- * Sponsor requirements
- * Initial year requirements
- * Annual report provisions
- * Oversight plan
- * Assistance to be provided
- * Fees of sponsorship

Part (10) of the Minnesota law and the contract (see above) does not mean that the chartered school must curtail its special education program in any manner. The chartered school must meet all of the state and federal requirements for special education. The above provision means that the chartered school must inform the sponsor as to how the special education program will be funded.

The sponsor should include in the contract that the chartered school will need to provide the sponsor with access to financial records as well as student performance information to the extent permitted under

the data practices statutes. The data and information which the sponsor will require in the “Annual Report” should also be specified.

If the charter board contracts with other organizations for services such as financial accounting, delivery of instruction, etc. the charter school board remains accountable for assuring that these functions are appropriately conducted.

For examples of contracts, see the Education/Evolving website (www.educationevolving.org). The contract is the vehicle by which the sponsor will hold the chartered school accountable so it is crucial that the contract provide clear expectations for the chartered school. It is also appropriate that the contract provide the expectations for the sponsor including the oversight process which will be initiated. The sponsor must be accountable for carrying out its responsibilities.

The operator will need a signed contract in order for it to complete the lease, set-up accounts with financial institutions, etc. In some cases, the sponsor may need to provide a letter to the operator stating that the contract will likely be approved (assuming that this is the case) so that the operator may complete its work.

The contract must be finalized within 90 days following the approval by the commissioner for these reasons. However, the sponsor may want to include language in the contract which requires the board of the chartered school to temporarily delay the opening of the school for a year if certain conditions have not been met.

Those provisions may include that prior to the school becoming operational, the board of the chartered school must have a signed lease for appropriate space, have a specific number of students enrolled and have appropriately licensed staff employed.

Sponsor Responsibility No. 5:
Provide assistance and service to the school as agreed to in the contract or service agreement. There is a presumption that the sponsor will provide assistance to the chartered school if the sponsor is able to do so.

As identified in the previous chapters, the sponsor should assist the charter in the areas for which it is able. The sponsor is encouraged to provide assistance at no cost to the chartered school when reasonable.

For example, district operated sponsors should invite the chartered school to participate in staff development experiences, provide the charter access to its board and operating policies, participate in joint purchasing, etc. The charter should be expected to pay for materials associated with staff development and the cost of presenters, food, etc.

Sponsors are discouraged from requiring the schools it sponsors to purchase services from them such as financial management and human resource services. Clearly the sponsor must be assured that such functions are competently planned for but it should not require that it manage them directly.

As a condition of sponsorship, some district sponsors may require that the schools they sponsor participate in the sponsor’s student testing and evaluation process. In such cases, the sponsor needs to be certain that its testing and evaluation process is consistent with the mission and model of the chartered school.

Of course the sponsor and charter board may agree on having the chartered school purchase certain services from the sponsor. This should be an agreement of the two parties not a requirement of the sponsor.

In such cases, a delineation of the services to be provided should be included in a separate “service agreement” and not included in the contract. The reason for this is that the contract is usually for a three-year

period. The services provided are frequently modified on an annual basis. By having a separate document, ongoing contract modifications are avoided.

Examples of these services:

1. **The sponsor may provide the following services to the chartered school:**
 - a. Program evaluation services
 - b. Curriculum consultation and staff development
 - c. Special education evaluation and/or direct service to students
 - d. No Child Left Behind (Title I) leadership
2. **The charter school may provide the following services to the sponsor**
 - a. Assistance in the area of specialty of the charter i.e. technology, project based learning, etc.
 - b. Parental involvement

The costs associated with each of these services and the timeline for payment are also provided in the agreement.

Sponsors are encouraged to conduct periodic meetings with all of the schools it has chartered to discuss how the sponsorship process will be carried out, data required, oversight process, etc. These sessions should provide for two-way communication resulting in improved schools.

Sponsor Responsibility No. 6: ***Provide ongoing oversight of the chartered school to assure compliance with the contract and service agreement***

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subds 14 and 15 provide as follows: A sponsor shall monitor and evaluate the fiscal and student performance of the school.

A charter school must report at least annually to its sponsor and the commissioner the information required by the sponsor or the commissioner. The reports are public data under Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13.

Charter contract oversight responsibilities

- * Review reports of Minnesota Department of Education, school audits, etc.
- * Communicate with charter school board
- * Onsite observations
- * Meet with parents and students
- * Gather data (annual report)
 - Relating to student achievement
 - Relating to the organization of the school and finances
 - Other areas specified in the contract
- * Review the school's site improvement plan (SIP)

Recommended Practices:

Providing oversight of the school is a major responsibility of the sponsor and is one that must be addressed on an ongoing basis. The oversight process should be included in the contract and the criteria to be used for renewal should be addressed in the contract as well. Oversight is not something that occurs only prior to the time the renewal decision must be made.

Oversight is based on the chartered schools application and the contract. If the contract is clear in terms of what is expected, both parties should be clear as to what the oversight will consist of. Both the sponsor and the operator should view oversight as a part of the ongoing process of continuous improvement of the performance of the chartered school.

The chartered school should welcome the oversight process and be involved in its design. This process should not be seen as "extra work" but rather should be a well designed review and improvement process. The information needed for the oversight should be a by-product of what the charter school should have as a part of doing business as a quality school.

The sponsor should inform the schools it has chartered which individual or group of individuals within its organization will be providing the oversight and which individual or groups of persons will be making decisions regarding the charter contract. These two functions will likely be carried out by two different

people or groups of people. While the sponsor CEO or board will likely be the decision maker, an oversight person or committee will be responsible for the ongoing oversight.

The oversight process has several parts:

1. **Gathering information** that verifies the accomplishments of the contract goals. This should be an ongoing process throughout the year not something that happens at the end of the year. For example, if attendance is an objective in the contract, information should be collected frequently regarding attendance. The same could be said if behavior improvement is a contract objective. If improvement is needed in these areas, this should be addressed and implemented right away and not delayed until the following year. Other data, such as graduation rates, academic performance on state tests are appropriate to be gathered at the end of the year. It is important that multiple indicators be used for each contract objective where appropriate. The school model will influence the data to be gathered.

The oversight process periodically looks at how well the school is doing. What are teachers, parents and students saying about the school? Is the school an orderly place for students? Are students learning? Do students feel safe? Do parents feel welcome at the school? Is there sufficient revenue to meet expenses?

During the initial year of operation, other areas such as facility adequacy, staffing/employment decisions, finance operations, MDE reporting, board operations, etc. will need to be followed by the sponsor.

2. **Reviewing the “Annual Report.”** This Report is required by law. The contents of this Report should be specified in the contract. The Report should include student performance based on multiple indicators, parent/student/staff survey data; financial status information, etc. Although not required by law, the sponsor may want to require is a school improvement plans” (SIP) for addressing needs in

the current program or adding new parts to the education or management aspects of the school. The sponsor and school should consult as this plan is being developed. It is not a plan that the sponsor approves or disapproves, but feedback is encouraged. However, if the sponsor is concerned that the plan is not sufficient to accomplish what is necessary, that should be clearly communicated and if necessary, the school should be informed that the contract renewal will likely be impacted by failure to meet objectives

3. **Renewal decision.** A key result of oversight is the decision about contract renewal or termination based on the results attained. If the process of oversight is an ongoing one, the renewal decision is one that both parties will know well ahead of the actual decision.

What should be reviewed as part of the charter oversight process?

Key to the process of oversight is the careful delineation of the objectives in the charter contract and in the chartered schools annual site improvement plan. If expectations are not clear, oversight will be difficult and will have less meaning.

In essence, the ongoing oversight process is the review of the contract implementation and the site improvement plan developed based on the current needs. The focus is always on how the school is working to improve student performance. While other related factors are also addressed such as financing, teacher qualifications, facility safety, etc. the most important part of oversight is student performance enhancement.

How should oversight be provided?

Sponsors, especially those that are not education organizations, may not be capable of providing all aspects of the oversight process with the staff of their

organization. As a result, sponsors may want to rely in part on other organizations or actually contract with other organizations or individuals to carry out the oversight process.

Minnesota law does provide that chartered schools must pay a fee to the sponsor at the discretion of the sponsor. That fee cannot exceed \$30 per pupil up to a maximum of \$10,000 annually during the first three years and \$10 per pupil or a maximum of \$3,500 annually beginning with the fourth year.

Several sponsors may want to jointly contract with one or more individuals to conduct the oversight process, inform the sponsor and the chartered school of the results and make recommendations regarding action to be taken. Whenever feasible, the oversight should be used to assist the school improve. Clearly the chartered school also provides “self monitoring” of its implementation and results.

The sponsor and the school will be the recipients of information and data from other sources that will be useful in the oversight process. Some of those include:

1. Local auditors will provide the sponsor with copies of the local audits.
2. The MDE Office of Compliance and Accountability conducts monitoring and compliance reviews of special education on a regular basis.
3. No Child Left Behind information will be provided. If a school is not making adequate annual yearly progress (AYP) this information and expectations will be communicated by the MDE.
4. The MDE Finance and District Organization Office provide updates on the financial status of districts and chartered schools. Special oversight is provided for schools, including chartered schools, that are in statutory operating debt (SOD).
5. The MDE provides the results of student performance on state tests.

Methods of providing oversight

The level of oversight necessary will likely be related to how new the chartered school is. After the school is established and is producing the expected results, the level of oversight can be adjusted. The following reflect appropriate oversight methods being used by current sponsors.

1. Discussions with the charter school board

The sponsor should attend the board meetings of the charter school on a regular basis but at least quarterly especially during the first two years of the chartered schools operation.

At an annual meeting, the sponsor should make a presentation to the charter board summarizing the sponsors support and/or concerns regarding the school. Together with the school director, the expectations for the next year as developed in a school improvement plan should be articulated. At this meeting, a thorough discussion regarding the progress being made should be held and how that will be improved. The schools status under NCLB should also be addressed. If the school is “In Need of Improvement” the performance expectations in this regard should be clearly addressed

2. On site observations and discussions

The sponsor should visit the chartered site on a regular basis to observe the program in operation, discuss the education program with the teachers and students, discuss issues with the school business office and be available for questions from staff, parents or students.

3. Attend parent meetings

While parents should be informed of the sponsor contact person and how to reach that person, the sponsor should also be invited to attend periodic meetings of parents and community members. This could occur at school sponsored events or at community meetings.

4. **Periodic Reports**

The sponsor may want information to be provided on a regular basis especially during the first year or two of operation. The sponsor and operator should work together to determine the content and frequency of these reports. The substance of these reports in the initial year will likely deal with start-up issues and will be included in the annual report. After the initial year, a “Site Improvement Plan” (SIP) will have been developed and this plan should serve as the basis of the periodic reports. Following the review of the annual report, the sponsor should inform the schools it has chartered of any concerns it has so these issues can be addressed in the SIP.

Sponsor Responsibility No. 7:
Determine whether to renew the charter and continue to serve as the sponsor based on the results achieved by the school. Should the sponsor determine to withdraw as the sponsor, it should provide adequate notice of this decision and also assist in locating a new sponsor.

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subds 14, 15 and 23(a) provide as follows:

A charter school must report at least annually to its sponsor and the commissioner the information required by the sponsor or the commissioner.

The department must review and comment on the evaluation, by the sponsor, of the performance of a charter school before the charter school’s contract is renewed.

The duration of the contract with a sponsor must be for the term contained in the contract according to subdivision 6. (Note: maximum of 3 years) The sponsor may or may not renew a contract at the end of the term for any ground listed in paragraph (b).

CHARTER RENEWAL PROCESS

- * Review performance of students and management
- * Prepare report
- * Submit to commissioner for review and comment
- * Charter renewal decision
 - Renew charter for full three year term
 - Renew charter for less than three years
 - Terminate charter

Recommended Practices

At least every three years, the sponsor must determine whether to continue serving as the sponsor of the school. This decision should have a substantive emphasis on reviewing whether the student achievement is consistent with expectations provided for in the contract, whether the financial management is appropriate as well as other related matters.

While the contract includes the general renewal process and timelines, the sponsor should inform the operator and board of the schools it sponsors of the specific process and timelines for contract renewal decisions. This should be communicated by September 1 of the final year of the contract. The sponsor should make renewal decisions not later than March 1, which is four months prior to the end of the contract. The process for making this determination should include a review of the performance over the duration of the contract in at least the following areas:

1. Relating to student achievement:

- a. How are students performing in terms of meeting the expectations of the contract? This should be addressed through multiple indicators.
- b. Is the school making adequate yearly progress toward meeting state standards as measured by mandatory state testing? This relates to federal “No Child Left Behind” standards.
- c. Are students with disabilities, ESL students, and students with other unique needs are receiving an education as required?

d. Are the expectations of parents, students, community and others as appropriate being met?

2. Relating to the organization of the school:

- a. Is the school being implemented consistent the with purpose(s) for the school as set forth in the contract including the program design model?
- b. Is the board of the school organized consistent with the law and is it meeting its responsibilities?
- c. Is the management of the school meeting its responsibilities?
- d. What is the financial condition of the school?
- e. Does the teaching staff possess the credentials which are appropriate for the learning model being used at the school?
- f. Does the school have adequate curriculum, materials, supplies, technology, access to libraries, physical education, etc.?
- g. Do the facilities in which education is delivered meet local and state requirements?

3. Other areas as specified in the contract.

After completing a written review and evaluation of the school, the sponsor must submit this report to the commissioner. The law requires the commissioner to review and comment on the evaluation of the sponsor. Following receipt of the commissioner's review and comment, the board of the sponsor must determine whether to renew its sponsorship of the school. If the sponsor concludes that all of the key criteria are being met to its satisfaction as specified in the contract, the sponsor should renew the contract for a three year period which is the maximum under Minnesota law.

If the sponsor finds that not all of the renewal criteria have been met, but that the school is continuing to improve in the areas of concern, the sponsor may elect to renew the school for a period of one or two years so that additional improvement may be demonstrated.

During that time period, a "School Improvement Plan" is developed by the sponsor and charter operators which is designed to successfully address the areas where improvement are needed. The sponsor should be a partner in the SIP development and implementation process to the extent appropriate.

Process for "termination" of a contract between the sponsor and school

If a sponsor concludes that the provisions of the contract have not been met, and if it concludes that the school is not able to make sufficient improvement in order to provide the students an appropriate education, it should not renew (or terminate) the contract.

TERMINATION OF THE CONTRACT

- * Sponsor termination during the contract term
- * Sponsor termination at the end of the contract
- * Commissioner termination of the contract

A sponsor may terminate a charter school contract before the end of the term of the contract or at the end of the contract term. The process is the same for both non-renewal at the end of the contract period or termination during the time the contract is in effect.

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd 23(a) provides:

A sponsor may or may not renew a contract at the end of the term for any ground listed in paragraph (b). A sponsor may unilaterally terminate a contract during the term of the contract for any ground listed in paragraph (b)

(b) A contract may be terminated or not renewed upon any of the following grounds:

- (1) failure to meet the requirements for pupil performance contained in the contract;*
- (2) failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management;*
- (3) violations of law; or*
- (4) other good cause shown*

If the sponsor does not intend to renew the contract or intends to terminate the contract during the time it is in effect, the law provides as follows:

At least 60 days before not renewing or terminating the contract, the sponsor shall notify the board of directors of the charter school of the proposed action in writing.

The notice shall state the grounds for the proposed action in reasonable detail and that the charter school's board of directors may request in writing an informal hearing before the sponsor within 14 days of receiving notice of non-renewal or termination of the contract. Failure by the board of directors to make a written request for a hearing within the 14-day period shall be treated as acquiescence to the proposed action.

Upon receiving a timely written request for a hearing, the sponsor shall give reasonable notice to the charter school's board of directors of the hearing date.

The sponsor shall conduct an informal hearing before taking final action. The sponsor shall take final action to renew or not renew a contract by the last day of classes in the school year. If the sponsor is a local board, the school's board of directors may appeal the sponsor's decision to the commissioner.

(Note: the statute does not include any provisions for the process or timeliness for the commissioner's review of the appeal nor does the law provide for an appeal of the commissioner's decision to the courts.)

If a contract is terminated or not renewed, the school must be dissolved according to the applicable provisions of chapter 308A or 317A, except when the commissioner approves the decision of a different eligible sponsor to authorize the charter school.

Recommended Practice:

Non-renewal or termination of the contract is a significant decision. This exemplifies the importance of a sound oversight system. The St. Paul Public Schools, Augsburg College and the MDE have terminated

sponsorship for both student performance as well as poor financial management reasons.

The sponsor should not agree to have the chartered school move to a different sponsor if the current sponsor has concerns regarding the school's student or financial performance. If the sponsor terminates the contract, the charter is withdrawn and the school cannot continue. This is the intent of the law. If the school does not perform, even after assistance, it cannot continue as a school. During termination proceedings, it is likely that legal counsel will be advising their clients.

The responsibility of the sponsor does not end with its decision to terminate sponsorship. The sponsor needs to provide oversight of the closing of the school including what happens with the students.

Commissioner may terminate chartered schools independent of sponsor action

Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 subd 23 (c) provides:

The commissioner, after providing reasonable notice to the board of directors of a charter school and the existing sponsor, and after providing the opportunity for a public hearing, may terminate the existing sponsorial relationship if the charter school has a history of:

- (1) financial mismanagement, or*
- (2) repeated violations of the law*

This action occurs when the sponsor is not properly exercising its responsibilities. If the sponsor is not doing its job, the commissioner must intervene.

Either the sponsor or chartered school may choose not to renew a contract

Minn. Stat. section 124D.10 subd 21(a) and (b) provide as follows:

*The sponsor may or may not renew the contract at the end of the term for any ground listed.
...the commissioner (may) approve the decision of a different eligible sponsor to authorize the charter school.*

NON-RENEWAL OF SPONSORSHIP

- * Sponsor determines to discontinue sponsorship of chartered schools
- * School determines to cease operations
- * School obtains a new sponsor with commissioner approval

Recommended Practices:

If the sponsor determines that it is not interested in continuing to sponsor a school at the end of the term of the contract, it may do so. This is not considered to be a contract termination but rather it is a non-renewal. Sponsors should provide the chartered school ample notification of its intent not to renew the charter so that a new sponsor can be found. Because the commissioner must approve change of sponsorship, it is important to have this information to the commissioner as soon as possible so that the MDE can make all of the needed modifications in a timely manner.

There may be situations when a chartered school may determine that it is in its best interest to change sponsors. This is a decision which should be made only after serious consideration. However, in some cases, a new sponsor may have a mission similar to the chartered school making that arrangement better for the school and the students.

When the chartered school makes such a determination, it needs to inform its sponsor as soon as possible. If this request is made during the renewal year, the sponsor should complete its evaluation of the school so that the new sponsor has the benefit of this information.

The current sponsor, the new sponsor and the charter should meet to assure that all applicable information is transferred to the new sponsor.

If a chartered school requests to change sponsors but the current sponsor intends to either terminate the charter or not renew it for a reason specified in law, the sponsor should move forward with the termination process as provided in law.

In such a situation, the school would then lose its charter, unless the district sponsor's decision was reversed on appeal, and would not be able to continue operation as a chartered school.

What happens to the students if a charter is terminated or not renewed?

Minn. Stat. Section 124D.10 Subd. 24 provides as follows:

If a contract is not renewed or is terminated according to subdivision 23, a pupil who attended the school, siblings of the pupil, or another pupil who resides in the same place as the pupil may enroll in the resident district or may submit an application to a nonresident district according to section 124D.03 at any time. Applications and notices required by section 124D.03 must be processed and provided in a prompt manner. The application and notice deadlines in section 124D.03 do not apply under these circumstances.

Recommended Practice:

Minn. Stat. Section 124D.03 above is referring to Minnesota's "open enrollment" law. It states that parents may enroll the child in the resident district or may open enroll the child in another district and the required timelines for open enrollment are waived. While not included in the above statute, it is suggested that other chartered schools also facilitate the enrollment of these students in the chartered school if that is the school of choice of the parent

Appendix A: Sponsor's of Chartered Schools in Minnesota

Sponsors that are public school districts - 23

Anoka Hennepin Public Schools
11299 Hanson Blvd NW
Coon Rapids, MN 55433
763-506-1120

Balaton Public Schools
PO Box 150
Balaton, MN 56115
507-734-5601

Brooklyn Center Public Schools
6500 Humbolt Avenue North
Brooklyn Center, MN 55430
763-561-2120

Chaska Public Schools
11 Peavey Road
Chaska, MN 55318
952-556-6110

Chisago Lakes Public Schools
13750 Lake Blvd
Lindstrom, MN 55045
651-213-2096

Duluth Public Schools
215 North 1st Avenue East
Duluth, MN 55802
218-336-8752

Faribault Public Schools
PO Box 618
Faribault, MN 55021
507-333-6000

Forest Lake Public Schools
6100 – 210 Street North
Forest Lake, MN 55025
651-982-8103

GFW Public Schools
323 East 11th Street
Gibbon, MN 55335
507-834-9813

Hopkins Public Schools
1001 Hwy 7
Hopkins, MN 55305
952-988-4021

Intermediate District N 917
1300 – 145th Street East
Rosemount, MN 55068
651-423-8214

LeSeuer/Henderson Public
Schools
115½ North 5th Street
LeSeuer, MN 56058
507-665-8828

Minneapolis Public Schools
807 NE Broadway
Minneapolis, MN 55413
612-668-0200

NE Metro Intermediate District
916
2540 East County Road F
White Bear Lake, MN 55110
651-415-5656

Northfield Public Schools
1400 Division Street South
Northfield, MN 55057
507-663-0629

Osseo Public Schools
11200 – 93rd Avenue North
Osseo, MN 55369
763-391-7003

Redwood Falls Public Schools
100 George Ramseth
Redwood Falls, MN 5628
507-644-3531

Rockford Public Schools
PO Box 9
Rockford, MN 55373

St. Paul Public Schools
360 Colborne Street
St. Paul, MN 55102
6541-767-8150

Stillwater Public Schools
1875 Greeley Street North
Stillwater, MN 55082
651-351-8301

Waseca Public Schools
501 East Elm Avenue
Waseca, MN 56093
507-835-2500

Winona Public Schools
654 Huff
Winona, MN 55987
507-494-0861

Yellow Medicine East Public
Schools
450 9th Avenue
Granite Falls, MN 56241
320-564-4081

Sponsors that are public and private colleges and universities - 15

Alexandria Technical College
1601 Jefferson Street
Alexandria, MN 56308
320-462-4422

Alfred Adler Graduate School
1001 Hwy 7 #311
Hopkins, MN 55305
952-988-4170

Augsburg College
2211 Riverside Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55454
612-330-1545

Bethel College
3900 Bethel Drive
St. Paul, MN 55112
651-523-2821

Century College
3300 Century Avenue
White Bear Lake, MN 55110
651-748-2609

College of St. Catherine
2004 Randolph Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55105
651-690-6798

SPONSORING CHARTERS

Concordia University
275 Syndicate Street North
St. Paul, MN 55104
651-641-8250

Hamline University
1536 Hewitt Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55104
612-290-2742

Metropolitan State University
700 East 7th Street
St. Paul, MN
651-793-1292

North Central University
910 Elliot Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612-343-4400

Rochester Community/Technical
College
851 – 30th Avenue SE
Rochester, MN 55904
507-285-7256

St. Cloud State University
720 – 4th Avenue South
St. Cloud, MN 56301
320-208-2281

St. Mary's University
2500 Park Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612-728-5217

Saint Paul College
235 Marshall Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55102
651-846-1365

University of St. Thomas
1000 LaSalle Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403
651-962-4844

Sponsors that are private non-profit organizations - 13

Audubon Ctr of the North Woods
PO Box 530
Sandstone, MN
888-404-7743

EdVisions, Inc.
PO Box 518
Henderson, MN 56044
507-248-3738

Friends Of Ascension
9135 Brandywine Rd
Corcoran, MN
952-475-7053

Islamic Relief Worldwide
4100 East 66th Street
Inver Grove Heights, MN 55076
818-238-9521

Lao Family Community
320 University Avenue W.
St. Paul, MN 55103
651-221-0069

Northwoods Children's Services
714 West College Drive
Duluth, MN 55811
218-724-8815

Ordway Center
345 Washington Street
St. Paul, MN 55101
651-282-3000

Pillsbury United Communities
1201 37th Avenue North
Minneapolis, MN 55412
612-529-9267

Project for Pride in Living
1216 Chicago Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55404
612-813-3239

St. Paul Area Chamber of
Commerce
401 North Robert Street, Suite 150
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55101
651-223-5000

Volunteers of America
5909 Golden Valley Road #110
Golden Valley, MN 55422
763-546-3242

Wolf Ridge Environmental
Learning Center
6282 Cranberry Road
Finland, MN 55603
800-523-2733

YMCA of Minneapolis
30 South 9th Street
Minneapolis, MN 55402
612-371-8744

Sponsors that are private foundations - 2

Alex Stern Family Foundation
2207 29th St. South
Moorhead, MN 56560
701-388-0936

James Ford Bell Foundation
1818 Oliver Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55405
612-377-8400

Sponsors that are state agencies - 1

Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Hwy 36 West
Roseville, MN.
651-634-2304

Appendix B:**Organizations Providing Support/Information for Sponsors of Chartered Schools**

Because this list is expanding on an ongoing basis, it is suggested that the reader “go on the web” at “charter school authorizer sponsor” for a current listing of resources. Also, the current Minnesota authorizers included in Appendix A of this Guide are also excellent resources.

The following are several of the current leading resources for sponsors of chartered schools.

Minnesota Resources:

Chartered Schools Sponsors Project
Education/Evolving
1295 Bandana Blvd. Suite 165
St. Paul, MN 55108
651-644-6115
www.educationevolving.org

Center for School Change
Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs
University of Minnesota
301-19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612-626-1834
<http://www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/school-change>

Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS)
1295 Bandana Blvd
St. Paul, MN 55108
651-644-0432
www.mncharterschools.org

Minnesota Dept of Education
Division of School Choice and Innovation
1500 Hwy 36 West
Roseville, MN 55113
651-582-8200
<http://education.state.mn.us>

National Resources:

Chicago Public Schools
Charter Schools Office
125 South Clark Street
Chicago, Illinois 60638
773-555-1535
www.isbe.state.il.us/charter/

Central Michigan University
Charter schools Office
2520 South University Park Drive
Mt. Pleasant, Michigan 48859
517-774-2100
www.cmucso.edu

Center for Education Reform
www.edreform.com

District of Columbia Public
Charter School Board
1436 U Street NW Suite 401
Washington, D.C. 20002
202-328-2660
www.dcpubliccharter.com

Milwaukee Public Schools
Office of Board Governance
5225 West Vliet Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53208
www.milwaukee.k12.wi.us

National Association of
Authorizers of Charter Schools
1125 Duke Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
703-685-9701
www.charterauthorizers.org

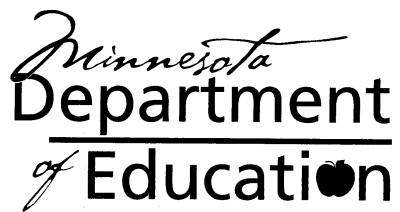
National Charter School Alliance
1295 Bandana Blvd
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108
651-644-6115
<http://www.charterfriends.org>

National Council of La Raza
www.uscharterschools.org/gb/community/laraza2.doc

Public Impact
423 Hermitage Court
Charlotte, North Carolina 28207
704-333-8978
www.publicimpact.com

United States Department of
Education
www.uscharterschools.org

US Charter Schools
(website developed by West ed through a contract with the US Department of Education
http://www.uscharterschools.org/public/uscs_docs/r/index.htm



February 1, 2004

Education/Evolving
Chartered School Sponsors Project

I want to congratulate Education/Evolving on the publication of its "leadership guide" for sponsors of chartered schools in Minnesota.

One of the truly innovative aspects of chartered schools in our state is the wonderful diversity of their sponsors, which include school districts, institutions of higher education, and nonprofit organizations.

While it may seem obvious that good sponsors lead to good schools, this leadership guide is a groundbreaking step toward identifying the specific characteristics and practices of high quality sponsors. Through the collaborative process used to develop the guide, Education/Evolving has done a superior job of drawing on the expertise that exists in Minnesota as a result of its "first in the nation" status in starting chartered schools.

The Minnesota Department of Education has appreciated the opportunity to offer input on the leadership guide and we look forward to working with you and other education organizations to promote its usage by existing, new, and prospective sponsors.

We are optimistic that the leadership guide will be a key ingredient in increasing effective sponsorship, strengthening accountability in chartered schools, and providing more excellent education options for Minnesota children and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cheri Pierson Yecke".

Cheri Pierson Yecke, Ph.D.
Commissioner

Executive Committee**Scott Anderson**

Schoolcraft Learning Community

Robert Bilyk

Cyber Village Academy

Patty Brostrom

Minnesota Transitions Charter School

Ron Buckanaga

Four Directions

Bob DeBoer

New Visions School

Ramona de Rosales

Academia Cesar Chavez

David Greenberg

El Colegio Charter School

Sheila Howk

Lafayette Charter School

Gary Knox

Liberty High Charter School

Eric Mahmoud

Harvest Preparatory School

Andrea Martin

Avalon Charter School

Jay Martini

Rochester Off Campus

Dr. Karen Rusthoven

Community of Peace Academy

Larry Schueler

E.C.H.O. Charter School

Liz Wynne

Twin Cities Academy

February 3rd, 2004

On the publication of SPONSORING CHARTERED SCHOOLS
- A Resource Guide for Minnesota Chartering Agencies

The partnership of a chartered school with its sponsor is a clear relationship for school accountability. However, the opportunity is that the relationship can and should evolve into a collaboration, which at its core is the goal of improved student learning.

Through the creativity and the courage of Minnesota's elected leaders, the legislation, as it relates to charter school sponsorship, has opened the door to sectors that choose to contribute in a significant way to the public, K-12 education community. Minnesota's charter school planning groups as well as the operating schools have and continue to initiate important conversations with potential and active sponsors around our children's education. The number and diversity of sponsors has greatly enriched our efforts to do better and undertake new strategies that may have significant impact on students. As schools, we benefit when our sponsors share their wisdom in this process of building new public schools.

We know that this tool is a guide, not a how-to manual, written in the spirit of encouraging the development of new and further enhancing strategies in the school - sponsor relationship. We see this as a significant and timely step in documenting the role of the sponsor and reviewing practices in sponsorship.

Thank you to The Saint Paul Foundation, Education Evolving, and the individuals who worked to prepare this guide. Our organization will utilize this guide as an aid to working with Minnesota's chartered schools.

Sincerely,



Steve Dess

Executive Director

Minnesota Association of Charter Schools

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Center for School Change

*Hubert H. Humphrey Center
301 - 19th Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55455*

*612-626-1834
www.centerforschoolchange.org*

February 2nd, 2004

To: Education/Evolving
From: Joe Nathan
Re: Guide for sponsors of Minnesota chartered schools

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to and help refine your guide for sponsors of Minnesota chartered schools. This guide provides extremely valuable information. It clarifies the opportunities and responsibilities of sponsorship. The Center for School Change will be using this document in our work with a variety of people, including:

- Organizations that may want to sponsor schools
- People who are trying to start schools
- People who are interested in Minnesota's chartered school movement

The Center for School Change has played a variety of roles in the charter movement including helping to develop Minnesota's initial charter legislation. 22 state legislatures and three congressional committees have requested CSC staff testimony on the charter idea.

We continue to do research on this idea and to provide assistance to a vast array of people seeking to use the charter idea to help improve public education. Our assistance includes conducting workshops, developing how-to guides, starting a handbook for charter schools in Minnesota, conducting research reports, and developing numerous other written materials, which can be found on our website at www.centerforschoolchange.org.

We would like to thank to Education/Evolving for taking the leadership in creating this important document. We believe it reflects that hard work, insight, and commitment to excellent education of it's chief author, former commissioner of education Bob Wedl.

ABOUT THE CONCEPT OF AN 'OPEN SECTOR' IN EDUCATION

Much of the work being done by Education|Evolving is to help create and sustain an “Open Sector” in public education – in Minnesota and elsewhere in the country. By “Open Sector,” we mean a “space” in public education that is open to new entrants – new schools that are started from scratch by teachers, parents, community organizations and multi-school networks. The “Open Sector” is also open to new authorizers or sponsors – entities other than school districts that oversee schools. The “Open Sector” is open to new learning programs and to new ways of governing and managing schools. And, as part of a broadening definition of public education, the “Open Sector” is open to all students who choose to attend schools in that sector.

The “Open Sector” is based on the premise that we cannot get the degree of change and improvement we need in education by relying only on fixing the schools we now have. And, to get enough new schools that are fundamentally different, we need a combination of public policies and private actions that will allow new schools to emerge and that will create an environment in which they can succeed. This kind of positive environment for creating and sustaining new schools can be established on a state-level through actions led by state policy makers. It can also be done – and is certainly needed – in major urban communities all across America.



Though chartered schools may be the most visible part of the “Open Sector” today, this concept of a positive environment for creating and sustaining successful new schools is not limited to charters. The “Open Sector” can also include schools operating within a district or state on some kind of contract other than a charter – as long as they are truly autonomous, accountable and open to all students who chose them.

There is also no prescribed or uniform learning program presumed by this vision for creating many more schools new. In fact, there’s an urgent need to better understand, respect and address the individual differences in students. It’s likely, however, that successful new schools in the “Open Sector” will be smaller and that they will make it possible for all students to take a more active role in their learning and to develop more direct and nurturing relationships with adults.

ABOUT EDUCATION|EVOLVING

Education|Evolving is a joint venture of the Center for Policy Studies and Hamline University, committed to challenging conventional thinking on elementary and secondary education in Minnesota and nationally. This collaborative is undertaking a number of initiatives over the coming year. They include a national initiative to convince policy makers, education reform leaders, journalists and others that *creating new schools* should be an essential element in achieving needed changes and improvements in teaching and learning – at least equal in importance to *changing the schools we now have*.

Education|Evolving’s leadership is provided by two Minnesota public policy veterans: **Ted Kolderie**, senior associate at the Center for Policy Studies, and **Joe Graba**, a senior policy fellow at Hamline University. Its coordinator is **Jon Schroeder**, former director of Charter Friends National Network.

Education|Evolving’s activities are regularly updated on the initiative’s new and unique web site – www.educationevolving.org. To receive print and electronic updates of Education|Evolving initiatives, contact info@educationevolving.org.



education | evolving

*A joint venture of the Center for
Policy Studies and Hamline University*

1295 Bandana Boulevard / Suite 165
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108

telephone: 651-644-6115
e-mail: info@educationevolving.org
web site: www.educationevolving.org

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Saint Paul, MN
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