



**Student Achievement Minnesota LLC**  
**Commissioner-Approved Authorizing Plan**  
Effective March 2016

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# Student Achievement Minnesota

## Part A Measures: Authorizer Capacity and Infrastructure

**Measure A.1 – Authorizer Mission:** *The authorizer has a clear and compelling mission for charter school authorizing.*

### Essential Elements:

- The mission is stated and fully aligns with Minnesota charter school law
  - The response includes a description of how the process of chartering schools is a way for the organization to carry out its mission
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### Mission:

Student Achievement Minnesota (SAM) is a Minnesota single purpose authorizer whose mission is to improve student achievement through quality authorization of charter schools.

### Mission Alignment with Minnesota Charter School Law:

Student Achievement Minnesota’s mission – improving student achievement - is compelling for charter school authorization because it is fully aligned with Minnesota’s primary statutory purpose for charter school establishment: *to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement*; Minn. Stat. 124E.01 Subd.1(1).

### How Chartering Furthers Mission:

As a single-purpose authorizer, Student Achievement Minnesota can legally conduct no activity other than authorizing charter schools. Consequently, chartering is the sole means through which Student Achievement Minnesota’s mission may be realized.

**Measure A.2 Authorizer Vision and Organizational Goals:** *The authorizer has a comprehensive vision for charter school authorizing with clear organizational goals and time frames for achievement that are aligned with the purpose of Minnesota law.*

### Essential Elements:

- The authorizer’s vision addresses, with specificity, the desired characteristics of the schools it will charter
  - The authorizer’s vision includes organization-specific purposes, if applicable
  - The authorizer’s organizational goals aligns with chartering vision and statutory purpose(s) per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01, Subdivision 1
  - The organizational goals are measurable
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### Vision & Desired School Characteristics:

Student Achievement Minnesota’s vision is:

*To authorize high-quality charter schools demonstrated to increase student achievement when measured against a traditional district school with comparable demographics in the district in which the charter school is located, or state averages.*

Student Achievement Minnesota’s vision for authorizing charter schools is specially aligned with the statutory primary purpose for charter schools: “to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement,” Minn. Stat. 124E.01 Subd.1(1). Furthermore, its organizational goals further its vision and the statutory primary purpose through seeking to:

- improve pupil learning by increasing school performance, and
- improve all pupil learning by increasing disadvantaged students served and by increasing the charter school portfolio.

Student Achievement Minnesota’s board approved measurable organizational goals with timeframes include:

1. **Improve Student Achievement.** Student Achievement Minnesota will annually demonstrate capacity to accelerate student success as a result of quality oversight and monitoring practices aligned with Minnesota law and best practices. Student success will be measured annually by increased proficiency and growth gains on the state portfolio data performance report for each school when compared to each school’s resident district or state average.
2. **Realize Replication of High Performing Models.** Student Achievement Minnesota will solicit and achieve replication of high-performing exemplars of instructional practices, academic program, and/or governance models. Target minimum replication is five models by 2019.
3. **Increase Disadvantaged Children Served.** Student Achievement Minnesota will actively solicit new charter school applicants or expansion of schools intending to serve at least 50% disadvantaged students. Target minimum number of disadvantaged students served in 200 students by 2019, which represents a 75% increase in total disadvantaged students served from 2015.

Student Achievement Minnesota will conduct annual assessments to determine progress and growth towards goal attainment. Refer to A.9 for Student Achievement Minnesota’s Self-evaluation Plan.

**Measure A.3 Authorizer Structure of Operations and Measure A.4 - Authorizer Staff Expertise:**  
*The authorizer has a clear structure of duties and responsibilities and sufficient resources to effectively oversee its portfolio of charter schools. The authorizer has appropriate experience, expertise and skills to sufficiently oversee the portfolio of charter schools.*

**Definitions:**

- **Expertise** is defined as having knowledge, education, training, etc. in the areas of charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law
- **Experience** is defined as length of time working in the areas of charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law
- **Skills** is defined as effective application of experience and expertise in the areas of charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law

**Essential Elements:**

- Description of the capacity of the organization to serve as an authorizer, including the positions (e.g. employees, contractors, volunteers; both paid and unpaid positions) who will perform the authorizing duties and ratio of positions (FTE) to portfolio size
- The authorizer describes a clear structure of duties and responsibilities, including required expertise, experience and skills in curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law in charter schools, at a level adequate to meet the needs of the portfolio

- The authorizer describes how the organization will manage and safeguard information and records related to authorizing
  - An organizational chart that shows clear lines of reporting and authority/decision-making and, if applicable, showing projected organizational changes due to proposed expansion over the next five-year term.
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**Authorizing Positions:**

Student Achievement Minnesota will retain a 0.5 FTE minimum, director and external resources/consultants with diverse skill sets to provide oversight in curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance and law.

**Ratio of FTE Positions to Portfolio:**

Staffing and external resources/consultants ratio (0.5 FTE) to schools in portfolio (3) is 1:6. An annual review will be conducted to evaluate staffing and organizational structure to ensure maintenance of effective oversight and mission/vision attainment. An increase in portfolio size will result in increases to FTE resources to maintain a comparable ratio.

**Structure:**

The 0.5 staffing FTE consists of a Director (0.4 FTE) and External Consultants (0.1 FTE) with diverse expertise and skill sets.

The Director reports directly to the Board Chair; external consultants based on service sought might report to the Director or Board Chair. Collectively, Student Achievement Minnesota current staffing and external FTE resources possess the experience, expertise, and skills as identified and stated below:

**Experience, Expertise and Skills**

<b>Area</b>	<b>Experience, Expertise and Skills</b>
Charter Schools	0.4 Staff; 1 External Resource/Consultant
Curriculum	0.4 Staff; 3 External Resource/Consultant
Instruction	0.4 Staff; 3 External Resource/Consultant
Management	0.4 Staff; 1 External Resource/Consultant
Facilities	0.4 Staff; 1 External Resource/Consultant
Finance	0.4 Staff; 2 External Resource/Consultant
Law	0.4 Staff; 1 External Resource/Consultant

Note: FTE staffing is as of July 2015. Student Achievement Minnesota is committed to maintain experience, expertise and skill sets in each category and will retain FTEs necessary to ensure quality oversight regardless of anticipated FTE future changes.

**Manage & Safeguard Data:**

Student Achievement Minnesota protocols ensure security:

- SAM uses Bitlocker, a security encryption feature to protect data and files on laptop computers.

**Organizational Chart:**

See Organizational Chart, Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 29, which identifies responsibilities and decision making authority. Any future increases in portfolio size will result in increases to internal or external resources to maintain a comparable FTE to portfolio ratio as identified above.

**Measure A.5 - Authorizer Capacity and Skill Development of Leadership and Authorizing Staff:**

*The authorizer has a plan to build the knowledge and skill base of its authorizing leadership and staff through professional development. The authorizer has a plan to provide professional development aligned with its operations, vision and goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools.*

**Essential Elements**

- The authorizer describes a plan to offer professional development to authorizing leadership and staff
  - The authorizer describes the frequency and nature of potential professional development as well as personnel expected to attend
  - The authorizer describes how the professional development aligns with its operations, vision and goals for the portfolio of charter schools
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**Plan:**

Student Achievement Minnesota provides professional development to its staff and consultants in three essential areas:

- Authorizer Practices
- School Operations
- Student Achievement

Professional development opportunities provided might address the implementation of new statutory requirements (proactive) or responding to issues known to exist in one or more schools (reactive).

Student Achievement Minnesota delivers professional development via:

- Attending specific, mission-aligned workshops, conferences and training both locally and nationally
- Bringing in experts from within the state and nationally to deliver high quality professional development
- Sponsoring regular professional development workshops where staff/consultants network with each other
- Networking and collaborating with other state charter school authorizers

Student Achievement Minnesota will conduct a professional development needs assessment each year to determine the needs and growth opportunities of its staff/consultants which are relevant and meaningful. Student Achievement Minnesota's annual needs assessment survey results will guide professional development planning and trainings.

**Frequency, Nature, Personnel to Attend:**

Leadership and consultants are required to attend at least one professional development annually and other professional development sessions that leadership may mandate. Leadership and consultants may attend one out-of-state conference (e.g. NACSA or National Charter School conference) annually at the expense of Student Achievement Minnesota

**How Professional Development Aligns with Operations, Vision and Goals**

Student Achievement Minnesota provides professional development so as to:

- To adequately fulfill the charter school state statute; the primary purpose of charter schools is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement; as an authorizer we must advance our understanding and recognize key elements which drive student achievement.
- Inform and augment its authorizing practices
- Better understand school operational requirements, which are correlated with effective oversight

**Measure A.6 - Authorizer Operational Budget for Authorizing the Portfolio of Charter Schools:** *The authorizer has a plan to allocate resources commensurate with its stated budget, needs and responsibilities of authorizing the portfolio of charter schools.*

**Essential Elements:**

- Anticipated five-year budget (SYFY 16 – SYFY 21) outlining the following:
  - Anticipated revenue sources such as fees collected annually from schools and additional funds from outside sources
  - Anticipated expenditures such as staff, travel, consultants and office costs
  - Anticipated authorizer staff increases in relationship to portfolio growth
- The budget projects the number and size of schools in the portfolio

**Important note:** this establishes the maximum portfolio size for the authorizer’s next five-year term.

**Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer describes how its budget shows resource allocations are devoted to achieve nationally recognized quality authorizing standards

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The budget is included as A.6. The budget submitted is a five year projection that reflects reasonable income and expenditure projections based on projected portfolio size. Note that circumstances, such as portfolio changes and unforeseeable costs, may necessitate revisions within the five year period.

**Measure A.7 - Authorizer Operational Conflicts of Interest:** *The authorizer implements a clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools.*

**Essential Elements:**

- Clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools
- The authorizer describes how the policy will be implemented (forms, process, etc.) in order to avoid conflicts of interest that might affect the authorizer’s capacity to make objective, merit-based application and renewal decisions, including avoiding decisions and interventions that hold the authorizer accountable for the school’s performance

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**Policy:**

Student Achievement Minnesota’s conflict of interest policy occurs in two document types:

1. Charter school contract, and
2. Policy specific to conflicts of interest

**Charter Contract:**

- Section 2.2 states the independent status of schools and that Student Achievement Minnesota has no authority to control the operational, administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the school except those stated in the contract which comply with state statutes.
- Section 2.3 further confirms the separation of financial obligations of Student Achievement Minnesota and its schools.
- Section 2.4 clarifies that neither Student Achievement Minnesota nor its school can obligate the other into contracts.

- Section 11.1(a)1 states that renewal of charter contract (accountability) is a result of school performance, i.e. whether the school has improved all pupil learning and all student achievement (outcomes).

### Policy

Student Achievement Minnesota’s policy on school conflicts of interest is addressed in the Student Achievement Minnesota’s Charter School Program Guide, page 26. The policy sets forth several prohibitions, including:

- Student Achievement Minnesota personnel do not participate in any decision-making at an authorized school.
- Student Achievement Minnesota personnel do not work in any capacity at a charter school.
- Student Achievement makes objective, merit-based decisions in all aspects of charter school oversight.

Due to the integral relationship between conflicts of interest and school autonomy several concepts are interrelated. For example, Student Achievement Minnesota’s policy on school autonomy, Charter School Program Guide page 27, states in part, Student Achievement Minnesota monitors and evaluates school performance and takes no action making the school responsible for school performance.

### **How Policy Is implemented:**

Student Achievement Minnesota requires full disclosure of any potential or perceived conflicts of interest between reviewers or decision makers and applicants or schools. Written instructions are provided to all reviewers and decision makers in advance of their participation in the review or decision, and individual confirmation obtained. Student Achievement Minnesota reminds staff and external consultants of the SAM Conflicts of Interest policy on an annual basis or as situations may warrant.

**Measure A.8 - Ensuring Autonomy of the Schools in the Portfolio:** *The authorizer implements a policy to preserve and support the essential autonomies of the portfolio of charter schools.*

### **Essential Elements:**

- The authorizer describes a clear policy to ensure school autonomy
- The authorizer describes processes and procedures for implementing and executing school autonomy
- The authorizer describes a focus on holding schools accountable for outcomes rather than on processes

### **Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer describes how its policy to ensure school autonomy aligns with nationally recognized quality authorizing principles and standards

### **Policy:**

Student Achievement Minnesota’s school autonomy policy occurs in two document types:

1. Charter school contract, and
2. Policy specific to school autonomy

### Charter Contract:

- Section 2.2 states the independent status of schools and that Student Achievement Minnesota has no authority to control the operational, administrative and financial responsibilities of the school except those stated in the contract which comply with state statutes.
- Section 2.3 further confirms the separation of financial obligations of Student Achievement Minnesota and its schools.
- Section 2.4 clarifies that neither Student Achievement Minnesota nor its schools can obligate the other into contracts.

- Section 11.1(a)1 states that renewal of charter contract (accountability) is a result of school performance i.e. whether the school has improved all pupil learning and all student achievement (outcomes).

Policy:

Student Achievement Minnesota’s policy on school autonomy is set forth in the Student Achievement Minnesota’s Charter School Program Guide, page 27. The policy sets forth several guiding principles, including:

- Student Achievement Minnesota does not manage or operate schools
- Student Achievement Minnesota personnel are prohibited from participating in decision-making at an authorized school
- Student Achievement Minnesota personnel are prohibited from performing work at an authorized school
- Technical assistance offered by Student Achievement Minnesota is voluntary
- Student Achievement Minnesota makes merit-based decisions

Student Achievement Minnesota seeks to minimize burdens on charter schools in conducting oversight. In furtherance of this guiding principle, Student Achievement Minnesota has adopted a risk-based approach to authorizing oversight and waives reporting obligations for high functioning and well-managed schools (see B.5 Discussion)

**Processes and Procedures**

Student Achievement Minnesota promotes and ensures school autonomy through:

- Regularly reminding Student Achievement Minnesota staff and external consultants of guiding principles
- Refusing invitations to participate in school hiring decisions
- Providing, but not mandating, schools to utilize technical assistance
- Clearly distinguishing *required* versus *recommended* actions in communications

**Student Achievement Minnesota Holds Schools Accountable for Outcomes Rather than Processes**

Student Achievement Minnesota’s policy on school autonomy, reflected in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 27, specifically states that Student Achievement Minnesota does not manage or operate schools and that Student Achievement Minnesota holds schools accountable for their performance (outcomes). Additionally, section 11.1(a)1 of the Charter Contract specifically states that renewal (accountability) is based on school performance, explicitly whether the school has improved all pupil learning and all student achievement (outcomes).



**Measure A.9 - Authorizer Self-Evaluation of Capacity, Infrastructure and Practices:** *The authorizer plans to self-evaluate its internal ability (capacity, infrastructure and practices) to oversee the portfolio of charter schools.*

**Essential Elements:**

- The authorizer describes a plan to regularly review its internal ability to oversee the portfolio of charter schools
- The authorizer describes the organization’s process to implement continuous improvement plans which will result in more effective authorizing practices

**Advanced Elements:**

- The authorizer describes the process the organization will use to evaluate its internal ability (capacity, infrastructure and practices) regularly against its mission, vision and goals
  - The authorizer describes the organization’s frameworks for addressing any needs for improvement when falling short of its mission, organizational goals or strategic plan
- 

**Plan:**

Student Achievement Minnesota routinely engages in self-evaluation and improvement as a means to fulfill its vision to increase student achievement when measured against resident district or state averages. Specifically, Student Achievement Minnesota will monitor its capacity, infrastructure and practices to deliver high quality authorizing oversight. Self-evaluation criteria and practices consist of:

- Leadership Evaluation  
Leadership is evaluated at least once each year. During the evaluation process, professional development and growth needs are identified and professional goals established.
- Authorizer Procedure Review  
Leadership, board, and/or external consultants review authorizer process at least annually. The purpose of the review is three-fold: (a) adopt or revise processes to conform to identified quality practices, (b) minimize burden on schools; (c) create efficiencies.
- Staffing Adequacy  
Staffing adequacy is reviewed at least annually, in order to ensure alignment with oversight protocol, technical assistance to be provided, and maintenance of adequate staff: school portfolio ratio. (Note: the term “staff” includes external consultants.)
- Internal Process  
Student Achievement Minnesota engages in review of the internal processes through its regular meetings between board, leadership, and external consultants. The purpose of the reviews is to create efficiencies and identify strategic initiatives.

**Continuous Improvement Plan Implementation**

Where improvement areas are identified, Student Achievement Minnesota implements a continuous improvement process by: (1) identifying the desired outcome(s), (2) identifying the individual primarily responsible for the improvement/outcome, (3) identifying actions to be completed with target dates for milestones and completion, (4) monitoring by leadership, and (5) team review of the product/outcome.

**Measure A.10 - Authorizer High Quality Authorizing Dissemination:** *The authorizer plans to disseminate best authorizing practices and/or assist other authorizers in high quality authorizing.*

**Essential Elements:**

- The authorizer describes the organization’s process to share best practices and/or provide assistance to other authorizers
  - The authorizer describes the organization’s intent to engage with other professionals (such as state or national associations) in order to promote high quality authorizing dissemination
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Student Achievement Minnesota conducts outreach and teams-up with local and national authorizers in support of enriching charter school authorizing practices. Networking and collaboration efforts promote best practice sharing and high-quality authoring dissemination. Student Achievement Minnesota regularly participates in monthly authorizer meetings and the National Association of Charter School Authorizers.

**Measure A.11 - Authorizer Compliance to Responsibilities Stated in Statute:** *The authorizer intends to comply with reporting, submissions and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statute.*

**Essential Element:**

- The authorizer describes its internal process which will ensure that it will comply with reporting, submission and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statute
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**Process:**

Student Achievement Minnesota calendars and tracks all compliance responsibilities, by both *due date* and *approaching due dates*. Compliance responsibilities are not removed until completed and satisfied. For example, the annual *Income & Expenditure Report* example due by September 30<sup>th</sup>; electronic reminders begin July 1<sup>st</sup> and continue every two weeks until manually removed from the calendar upon completion of the report.

## Part B Measures: Authorizer Processes and Decision Making

Student Achievement Minnesota engages in continuous self-reflection and self-improvement. Student Achievement Minnesota is committed to quality authorization and school oversight. Protocol and processes identified in the AAP reflect procedures and practices which may be subject to review and further enhancement.

**Measure B.1 - New Charter School Decisions:** *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate new charter school proposals. The authorizer outlines new charter school decision-making processes that will promote the growth of high quality charter schools.*

### Essential Elements:

- Comprehensive new school application instructions, evaluative criteria, procedures, timelines and review process that address all the following elements:
  - o Mission/Vision
  - o Need/Demand
  - o Primary statutory purpose of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement (Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01, Subdivision 1) and how the school will report the implementation of it to the authorizer
  - o Additional purpose(s) and how the school will report the implementation of said purpose(s) to the authorizer
  - o Program designed for students to meet or exceed the outcome expectations adopted by the commissioner for public school students (Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(15)(b))
  - o Academic plan: description of the school program, specific academic and nonacademic outcomes that students must achieve, educational philosophy and approach, school culture, curriculum and instruction, assessment and services for special populations
  - o Operational plan: governance and management, administration, human resource recruitment and development, student recruitment and enrollment, admission policy, school calendar, parent and community involvement, operational outcomes and compliance with applicable laws and regulations
  - o Financial plan: short and long-term financial projections, budget(s), business management procedures, financial outcomes and facility planning
- The authorizer's review process includes clear and transparent procedures and rigorous criteria to evaluate new charter school applications
- The authorizer describes the timeline of the new school application process consistent with statutory deadlines per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06
- The authorizer's new charter school application criteria is consistent with the authorizer's performance standards/framework as described in *B.4: Performance Standards*

### Advanced Element:

- The authorizer identifies how its new charter school application process is designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principles and standards
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**Application Instructions:**

Application instructions are on the Student Achievement Minnesota website, [www.samnllc.org](http://www.samnllc.org) and included as B.1/ New Charter School Application Document/Application Instructions and Format Requirements.

The evaluation rubric is on the website and included as B.1/New Charter School Application Documents/Application Evaluation Rubric.

**Evaluation Criteria:**

Guidance is inserted in the application. For each required element guidance is provided in the form of “A *quality application will...*”

**Application Procedures:**

The application process is described in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 4, and on the website.

**Timeline:**

The application timeline is on the Student Achievement Minnesota website and included as B.1/New Charter School Application Documents/Application Timeline. As stated in the document, the application due date is published on the website, and the process is aligned to ensure that, if the application is approved, the authorizer affidavit is submitted May 1<sup>st</sup>, which is fourteen months prior to July 1<sup>st</sup> of the year in which the school plans to open, in conformance with state law.

**Application:**

The application, containing required components, is on the Student Achievement Minnesota website and included as B.1/New Charter School Application Documents/Application New School.

**Application Criteria Consistent with Performance Standards Framework**

The new charter school application criteria and evaluation are designed to ascertain whether the founding group has a viable plan and the capacity to develop a high-quality charter school which will improve all pupil learning and all students achievement. The performance framework, as discussed in B.5, evaluates the degree to which the school does so.

**Measure B.2 - Interim Accountability Decisions (i.e. site/grade level expansions, official early learning program(s) recognition, ready to open and change in authorizer):** *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate school opening decisions as well as proposals of existing charter school expansion requests and interim changes. The authorizer outlines interim accountability decision-making processes that will promote the growth of high*

**Essential Element:**

- Comprehensive application instructions, evaluative criteria, procedures, timelines and review processes, including academic, operational and financial conditions upon which the authorizer approves or denies the following:
  - o Site/grade level expansion per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, Subdivision 5
  - o Official early learning program(s) recognition per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, Subdivision 3(a) and Minnesota Statutes, sections 121A.16 to 121A.19
  - o Change in authorizer requests per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 5
  - o Ready to Open per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.06, Subdivision 3(g)

**Advanced Element:**

- The Authorizer identifies how its interim accountability decision-making processes are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principles and standards

**Expansions:**

Student Achievement Minnesota is of the belief that one of the best indicators of future performance is past performance and, thus, comprehensively evaluates a school's historical performance when considering school expansions. Expansion applications are evaluated for plan adequacy as well.

The expansion application is contained in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, pages 11-17. The application incorporates evaluation criteria which includes academic, operational and financial performance. Applications are due to Student Achievement Minnesota by July 1<sup>st</sup>, with a response due to the school by September 1<sup>st</sup> as noted in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 11. This timeline facilitates the October 1<sup>st</sup> statutory affidavit due date.

Student Achievement Minnesota's review process consists of: (a) internal review of the application for determination of satisfying application criteria; (b) recommendation to Charter School Committee/Board; and (c) Committee/Board review and decision making.

**Early Learning Programs:**

The Early Learning Program application is contained in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, pages 18-20. As indicated in the application, any school seeking to add an Early Learning Program must also complete an expansion application (pages 11-17 of the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide). Both applications incorporate evaluation criteria which includes academic, operational and financial performance. Applications are due to Student Achievement Minnesota by March 1<sup>st</sup>, with a response due to the school by September 1<sup>st</sup>, as noted in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 18.

Student Achievement Minnesota's review process consists of: (a) internal review of the application for determination of satisfying application criteria; (b) recommendation to Charter School Committee/Board; and (c) Committee/Board review and decision making.

**Change in Authorizer/Transfer:**

Similar to expansion applications, Student Achievement Minnesota is of the belief that one of the best indicators of future performance is past performance and, thus, comprehensively evaluates a school's historical performance when considering school transfers.

The school transfer process and application is available on the Student Achievement Minnesota website, [www.samnllc.org](http://www.samnllc.org) and included as B.2 Interim Decisions/Change in Authorizer Application. The application contains embedded guidance and evaluation standards for the application criteria which includes academic, operational and financial performance. As stated in the evaluation standards in the application, whether existing schools have met their performance standards in academics, finances and operations are the critical factors for the review and decision made by Student Achievement Minnesota. Additionally, as stated in the application, Student Achievement Minnesota accepts applications on a rolling basis; there is no application due date.

Student Achievement Minnesota's review process consists of: (a) internal review of the application for determination of satisfying application criteria; (b) recommendation to Charter School Committee/Board; and (c) Committee/Board review and decision making.

**Ready to Open:**

Student Achievement Minnesota's school ready to open process is described in the charter school contract (section 6.21) and in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 6. Student Achievement Minnesota's ready to open standards (website access and included in B.2 Interim Decisions/Startup Progress Form) include over 100 essentials in nine categories. The ready to open standards include areas key to charter school success and viability: facilities, financial management, governance and management, learning program, project management, leadership, personnel, enrollment and accountability.

Student Achievement Minnesota reviews start-up progress monthly with the school developing team and engages in a comprehensive ready-to-open meeting which reviews that status of all categories.

As set forth in the charter school contract section 6.21 and Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 6, Student Achievement Minnesota either counsels the school to delay opening or intervenes to prevent school opening where significant targets like staffing, enrollment and facility are not met which Student Achievement Minnesota believes negatively impact the school's ability to be a high quality charter school.

**Measure B.3 - Contract Term, Negotiation and Execution:** *The authorizer has contracts that clearly define material terms and rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer.*

**Essential Elements:**

- Sample charter contract (See Charter Contract Guidance on the MDE website) that meets all following elements:
  - *All* current statutory requirements per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10
  - Clearly state the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer
- The authorizer describes a plan to establish contract outcomes/goals that are strategic, specific, measurable and time-bound
- The authorizer describes its process for how its new contract(s) will be completed within 45 business days of the commissioner's approval of the authorizer's affidavit and the authorizer will submit to the commissioner a copy of the signed contract within 10 business days of its execution
- The authorizer describes how its existing contract(s) will be fully executed no later than the first date of the renewal period
- The authorizer describes how the contract will be amended for material contract changes when applicable

**Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer identifies how its contract term, negotiation and execution decision-making processes are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principles and standards

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**Sample Charter Contract:**

The sample charter contract is included as B.3 Charter Contract and Exhibits and a crosswalk to the statutory requirements is included as B.3 Statutory Requirements and Contract Location Chart.

**Rights and Responsibilities of the School and the Authorizer**

School obligations are set forth primarily in Articles VI, VII and VIII.

Articles III identifies Student Achievement Minnesota's primary role as providing quality oversight. Additionally, section 2.1 specifically states that, except as provided in the contract, Student Achievement Minnesota has no authority or control, over operational, administrative or financial responsibility for the school.

**Establish SMART Goals:**

As set forth in the section 11.1(a) 4 of the Charter Contract, Student Achievement Minnesota requires schools to submit proposed goals for the next contract period, by September 1<sup>st</sup>. The provision requires goals to be written in SMART format. This September 1<sup>st</sup> date begins the contract negotiation process and Student Achievement Minnesota counsels adherence to the SMART format requirement.

**Execution Compliance:**

Student Achievement Minnesota “calendars” all compliance responsibilities. Not only by due date but by approaching due dates as well, which are not deleted until completed. Example, for July 1<sup>st</sup> renewal contracts, electronic reminders begin May 1<sup>st</sup> and continue every two weeks until July 1<sup>st</sup>. Then starting July 1<sup>st</sup>, electronic reminders occur daily until they are manually deleted from the calendar following contract submission. A similar process occurs for new charter school contracts. As soon as the Commissioner of Education approval is received, 45 business days are calculated and posted with similar reminders.

**Charter Contract Amendment**

As set forth in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 23, circumstances may warrant a charter contract amendment. As defined in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, any charter school may request an amendment; Student Achievement Minnesota will review requests on a case-by-case basis and, if approved, requires the amendment to be put in writing. Also defined in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, Student Achievement Minnesota does not amend charters contract academic goals due to failure to make progress toward achieving them without other compelling factors, such as discontinuation of the identified assessment. Student Achievement Minnesota provides copies of material amendments to the Minnesota Department of Education within ten business days of execution.

**Measure B.4 - Performance Standards:** *The authorizer has a performance framework under which it executes contracts with clear, measurable and attainable performance standards.*

**Essential Elements:**

- Performance framework addressing all the following elements:
  - o States the primary purpose of the charter schools in its portfolio is to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement and identifies additional purposes per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.01, Subdivision 1, Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivisions 1(a)(1) and 1(a)(2).
  - o The performance framework defines clear, measurable and attainable academic, operational and financial performance standards for all schools in its portfolio per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10
  - o The performance framework is designed to achieve outcomes that meet or exceed expectations adopted by the commissioner for public school students per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(15)(b)
    - Commissioner’s outcomes for public school students are the five goals of World’s Best Workforce:
      - All children are ready for school
      - All third-graders can read at grade level
      - All racial and economic achievement gaps between students are closed
      - All students are ready for career and college
      - All students graduate from high school

**Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer identifies how its performance framework is designed to promote high quality charter schools and aligns with national quality authorizing principles and standards

**Performance Framework:**

Performance standards are set forth in the charter contracts; a sample is included as B.3 Charter Contract & Exhibits:

1. Academic Performance Standards are established in Exhibit F, academic and non-academic goals and outcomes.
2. Financial Performance Standards are set forth in Exhibit J, (Financial Management Plan) and in Article VI, section 6.9, primarily.
3. Operational Performance Standards are set forth in Article VI as well.
4. Consequences resulting in termination are clearly identified in Article X. Consequences related to non-renewal are set forth in Article XI. In summary, renewal is based on the school's performance in improving all pupil learning and all student achievement which is based substantially on the school's attainment of its goals identified in Exhibit F; outstanding financial or operational performance does not override academic performance, but outstanding academic performance with financial or operational problems may also result in non-renewal.

Student Achievement Minnesota believes that incorporating the performance standards within the contract is imperative to ensure clarity and transparency of standards and expectations.

**Primary Purpose:**

The performance framework is incorporated the charter contract. Consequently, the charter contract identifies the primary purpose of each charter school as improving all pupil learning and all student achievement, page 1, paragraph 1 of the charter contract and B.3 Charter Contract & Exhibits Template.

Additionally, as previously stated, Section 11.1(a)1 of the charter contract also reflects the primary purpose of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement as the most important factor in evaluation and charter contract renewal.

**Designed to Achieve Outcomes Meeting /Exceeding Commissioner Expectations for Public Schools:**

As stated in the Contract Article XI regarding renewal, Student Achievement Minnesota requires charter schools to propose goals which are designed to meet or exceed the Commissioner's expectations for public schools.

Upon goal finalization, those goals comprise Exhibit F, which is the academic performance standards framework.

**Measure B.5 - Authorizer's Processes for Ongoing Oversight of the Portfolio Charter Schools:** *The authorizer has processes to monitor and oversee the schools in its portfolio in the areas of academic, operational and financial performance.*

**Essential Elements:**

- The authorizer describes the criteria, processes and procedures it will use to monitor and evaluate the fiscal, operational and academic performance of the schools in its portfolio per Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1(a)(7)
- The authorizer describes required academic, financial and operational reporting by the schools to the authorizer
- The authorizer describes an oversight plan that clearly establishes the criteria, processes and procedures that the authorizer will use to evaluate performance and monitor compliance, ensure school autonomy and protect student rights



- The authorizer describes how its ongoing oversight informs its standards and processes for intervention, termination and renewal decisions of the portfolio of charter schools (i.e. performance measures B.6 and B.9)

**Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer identifies how its ongoing oversight of the portfolio of charter schools is designed to promote high quality charter schools and aligns with national quality authorizing principles and standards

**Criteria, Process and Procedures:**

Student Achievement Minnesota utilizes oversight criteria, process and procedures identified in the charter contract.

Charter Contract, section 3.1 and Article VI, included in B.3 Charter Contract and Exhibits Template, pages 4 and 6-13: Section 3:1 state Student Achievement Minnesota will monitor and evaluate school performance using the criteria, processes and procedures set forth in Article VI and Exhibit M (pages 7-8 of the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide). Section 3.1 also states that, in the mindset of continuous improvement, the school agrees that Student Achievement Minnesota may monitor and evaluate any indicator of academic, financial, operational and student performance, even performance indicators not specifically identified in the contract. This provides a comprehensive review of school performance. Article VI identifies the ongoing oversight and reporting obligations by the school to Student Achievement Minnesota.

In summary, Student Achievement Minnesota employs a consistent set of monitoring and oversight tools in the areas of academics, operations, and financials:

1. Academic performance oversight is conducted through collection and data analysis, site visits and a review of annual reports.
2. Financial oversight is conducted through the review of financial reports, review of schools’ external audits, interviews with the school leadership, board and school business manager. Schools are required to furnish Student Achievement Minnesota with financial data and reports regularly.
3. Operational oversight is conducted through review of school reports and disclosures, compliance monitoring, Student Achievement Minnesota’s attendance and observations at the schools’ board meetings (at least two per year), and site-visits to the schools at least annually.

Additionally, in evaluating performance and monitoring compliance as indicated as above, the oversight is governed by the charter contract and the charter contract sets forth expectations with respect to conflicts of interest (A.7 / Discussion), autonomy (A.8 / Discussion) and student rights (Charter Contract Article VII and Charter Contract VIII, section 8.1), Student Achievement Minnesota’s oversight protocol also promotes school autonomy and children’s rights.

**Reporting by the School to the Authorizer:**

A school’s reporting obligations to Student Achievement Minnesota are identified in Charter Contract, Article VI: section 6.7 (a) academic assessment data; 6.7(a) 6, professional development attended by staff; 6.7(a)7 common planning time reports; 6.8 school calendar; 6.9 (a), financial reporting including monthly financial reports and annual budget; 6.11 external audit; 6.14 annual report; 6.20 board data including changes, assurances, minutes, notice of meetings, conflicts of interest statements; 6.21(b)1 teacher licensure information; 6.21(b)2 enrollment and 11.3 building lease.

As stated in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 10, Student Achievement Minnesota may waive selected reporting requirements for high performing well-managed schools. The waiver is granted in writing and may be revoked at any time at Student Achievement Minnesota’s discretion. Student Achievement Minnesota is of the mindset such differentiated oversight reduces regulatory burden and promotes school autonomy.

**Alignment with Intervention, Termination and Renewal:**

Student Achievement Minnesota throughout its continuing oversight evaluates all information it obtains to inform its decision making. Ongoing oversight and action whether intervention, termination, renewal are integrally related. Example, interventions and/or notices of concerns may result from Student Achievement Minnesota's ongoing oversight processes and may lead to corrective action renewal or contract termination.

**Measure B.6 - Authorizer's Standards and Processes for Interventions, Corrective Action and Response to Complaints:** *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints, interventions and/or corrective action.*

**Essential Elements:**

- The authorizer describes standards, procedures and processes to address and resolve complaints, including forms if applicable
- The authorizer describes standards, procedures and processes for intervention and a plan for implementing corrective action
- The authorizer describes how its standards and processes for intervention, corrective action and response to complaints align with its ongoing oversight of the portfolio of charter schools (i.e. performance measure B.5)

**Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer identifies how its standards and processes for interventions, corrective action and response to complaints are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principles and standards

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**Complaints**

The Charter School Stakeholder Grievance Guidance is included in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 28 and is also available on the Student Achievement Minnesota website, [www.samnllc.org](http://www.samnllc.org).

**Interventions**

The remediation processes is identified in the Charter Contract, section 6.7(c). Student Achievement Minnesota issues a notice of concern; a form for this purpose is included in the Charter School Program Guide, page 22. If the notice of concern is unresolved, Student Achievement Minnesota issues a "formal" notice to the Board. If the issue remains unresolved, Student Achievement Minnesota may initiate charter termination proceedings. This process is explained in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 21.

**Alignment with Ongoing Oversight**

Ongoing oversight, monitoring and interventions are integrally related and inform each another. Example, interventions / notices of concern may result from Student Achievement Minnesota's ongoing oversight process and practices. A site visit or board discussion may reveal an issue warranting an intervention/notice of concern. Additionally, complaints, concerns identified by the department of education (MDE) may warrant a special site visit.

**Measure B.7 - Charter School Support, Development and Technical Assistance:** *The authorizer has an established process to support its portfolio of charter schools through intentional assistance and development offerings performance standards.*

**Essential Element:**

- The authorizer describes its plan to provide support and technical assistance and in a manner to preserve school autonomy
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**Plan:**

Annually, Student Achievement Minnesota provides Technical Assistance in two types:

1. Direct Technical Assistance- Student Achievement Minnesota retains consultants with varying expertise for the sole purpose of assisting schools in need of support.
2. Professional Development- Student Achievement Minnesota provides professional development opportunities to both prevent problems and to promote continuous improvement.

**School Autonomy:**

Technical Assistance is not required and, if offered, there is no-charge.

**Measure B.8 - High Quality Charter School Replication and Dissemination of Best School Practices:** *The authorizer has an established process to promote, within its portfolio, the model replication and dissemination of best practices of high performing charter schools.*

**Essential Element:**

- The authorizer describes a clear plan for successful model replication and dissemination of best practices
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Student Achievement Minnesota's plan for model replication is two-fold:

1. Require new charter school applications to identifying research supporting the educational model, curricula and teaching methods supporting the proposal (see B.1 New Charter School Application Documents/Application New School, page 3, item E. (2) b); in order to identify high-quality models to promote within Student Achievement Minnesota's portfolio.
2. Promote a streamlined application to stimulate replication of successful school models, see high Quality Charter School Replication Application.

Student Achievement Minnesota's plan for dissemination of best practices is two-fold:

1. School Dialogue and Network Exchange. Student Achievement Minnesota will organize quarterly instructional practice forums for school staff. Themes and topics will be school-initiated and based on school-needs assessments. The forum will incorporate opportunities for school staff to exchange ideas and experience in increase learning capacity quality teaching and best practices.
2. Website Depository. Student Achievement Minnesota will expand its website to include spotlight on instructional practices (teacher-solicited practices and strategies making a difference in the classroom and student learning) and Recommended Resources to promote effective teaching.

**Measure B.9 - Charter School Renewal or Termination Decisions:** *The authorizer has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to make high stakes renewal and termination decisions. The authorizer outlines charter school renewal and termination decision standards and processes that will promote the growth of high quality charter schools.*

**Essential Elements:**

- Comprehensive evaluative standards, procedures, timelines and review processes to evaluate a school’s academic, operational and financial performance for high-stakes renewal and termination decisions consistent with [Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivisions 1\(a\)\(7\), 1\(a\)\(8\), 1\(a\)\(13\), 1\(a\)\(14\) and Subdivision 3\(a\)](#) and includes the following:
  - Standards and process to evaluate the school’s performance in meeting or exceeding outcomes adopted by the commissioner for public school students ([Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1\(a\)\(15\)\(b\)](#))
  - Standards and process to issue a formal written performance evaluation of the school’s contract outcomes to determine eligibility for contract renewal per [Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1\(a\)\(8\)](#)
  - The authorizer describes clear standards for consequences for meeting or not meeting performance standards
- School closure plan and describes the authorizer’s role in the orderly closure of a school in the event of revocation, non-renewal or voluntary relinquishment of the charter per [Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10, Subdivision 1\(a\)\(15\), Subdivision 4 and Subdivision 6](#)

**Advanced Element:**

- The authorizer identifies how its charter school renewal or termination decision-making processes are designed to promote high quality charter schools and align with national quality authorizing principles and standards

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**Evaluation of School Performance:**

The renewal process is described in the Charter Contract, section 11(a) 4 and summarized in the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Program Guide, page 24. In summary, school submits an application by September 1<sup>st</sup>. Within four weeks of receipt of the school’s final external audit for the preceding fiscal year, Student Achievement Minnesota will notify the school whether it intends to offer a renewal contract.

A result of regular school site visits and frequency of communication with the schools is that Student Achievement Minnesota does not engage in a separate renewal-site visit process, i.e. the site visit for schools in renewal is the same as that site visit for schools not in renewal. This similarity during the site visit process demonstrates that renewal is based on performance data already generated, while considering the possibility that a site visit may also identify issues not previously identified.

All standards related to the school’s current existence are contained within the Charter Contract. As such, the performance standards set forth in the charter contract demand evaluation. As defined in Charter Contract Article XI (regarding renewal), Student Achievement Minnesota requires charter schools to propose goals which are designed to meet or exceed the Commissioner’s expectations for public schools. Once negotiated and finalized, those goals comprise Exhibit F which is the foundation of the academic performance framework. Subsequently, the evaluation of the school’s attainment in meeting its academic goals is designed to determine the degree to which each school is meeting or exceeding the Commissioner’s expectations for public schools.

**Written Performance Evaluation:**

Student Achievement Minnesota comprehensively analyzes each school's performance data. Student Achievement Minnesota then issues a written renewal evaluation which is included as Exhibit N to the Charter Contract. The written evaluation analyzes the school's performance in academics, finances and operations.

**Standards and Consequences for Meeting/Not Meeting Performance Standards:**

The Charter Contract, section 11.1(a)1 specifically states that improving all pupil learning and all student achievement is the most important factor in determining contract renewal, and that the determination will be based primarily on the school's attainment of its academic outcomes in the contract. However, the contract also allows Student Achievement Minnesota to consider other compelling evidence of student achievement on state assessments. The contract also allows termination for serious financial or legal problems.

The charter contract sets forth the circumstances for a corrective action renewal. If the school is improving all pupil learning and all student achievement but the school has financial, operational, governance, or legal compliance issues, there may be circumstances that result in a corrective action renewal. In this case, issues/concerns must be corrected during the corrective action renewal term and no new issues/problems occur or no subsequent renewal will be provided (contract section 11.1(a) 3).

**Closure Plan:**

The school closure plan included as Exhibit L to the Charter Contract and B.3 Charter Contract & Exhibits Template, pages 43-56 identifies separate responsibilities for both Student Achievement Minnesota and the charter school.

