



STUDENT
ACHIEVEMENT
MINNESOTA LLC

CHARTER SCHOOL PROGRAM GUIDE

July 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Charter School Application Types.....	3
Charter School Application Process	4
School Development Progress	5
School-Opening Significant Target Dates	6
Continuing Oversight - Accountability	7-8
Site Visits.....	9
Reporting Requirements.....	10
Expansion Application.....	11-20
Early Learning Programs-Expansion Application.....	21-23
Communications and Remediation.....	24-25
Charter Contract Amendment Process.....	26
Charter Renewal.....	27
Charter Termination or Non-renewal.....	28
Conflicts of Interest.....	29
Autonomy	30
Stakeholder Grievance Policy.....	31
Organizational Chart	32

Additional Resources--Refer to website (www.samnllc.org) for:

- Application and Guidance- New Schools
- Application Timeline
- Application Instructions & Format Requirements
- Budget and Cash Flow Templates
- Application Due Dates
- Application Evaluation Rubric
- Start-up Progress Form
- Application - Existing Schools
- Application – Replication
- Replication Application Timeline



Charter School Application Types

A. New School Application

Individuals or groups who desire to establish and develop a charter school.

B. High Quality Charter School Replication Application

Existing charter schools operating outside Student Achievement Minnesota's portfolio of schools that desire to replicate/duplicate a high-quality charter school.

C. Expansion Application-For Existing Student Achievement Minnesota Schools

Existing authorized Student Achievement Minnesota charter schools who desire to amend their school charter to expand the operation of the school to additional grades or sites.

D. Early Learning Program Application-For Existing Student Achievement Minnesota Schools

Existing authorized Student Achievement Minnesota charter schools that desire to offer a pre-kindergarten or pre-school instructional program to serve children between three years of age to kindergarten entry.

Charter School Application Process

New School and High Quality Replication

Student Achievement Minnesota is committed to supporting successful and sustainable schools. To that end, Student Achievement Minnesota endeavors to evaluate whether the charter school applicant group will likely develop a quality charter school. Experience demonstrates and Student Achievement Minnesota recommends that the composite board possess a broad range of skill sets in order to successfully launch and sustain a quality school.

- 1. Letter of Intent.** Prospective applicants must submit a Letter of Intent to Student Achievement Minnesota at: director@samnlc.org Student Achievement Minnesota must receive the Letter of Intent no later than November 1st immediately preceding the application due date (identified on the website). The Letter of Intent must be signed and dated and include the following information: Name of School, Intended Grades to be Served, a statement that the school intends to submit an application by the next due date, and Contact Information; no other information should be submitted in the Letter of Intent. Student Achievement Minnesota uses the Letter of Intent information to schedule sufficient Expert Reviewers to complete the application review process. Incomplete Letters of Intent or Letters of Intent received after November 1st (for the posted application due date) render the developing group ineligible to submit an application for the next application due date. Refer to the website www.samlc.org for the application due date and suggested (not required) Letter of Intent template.
- 2. Application.** Charter school developing groups must submit an application to Student Achievement Minnesota in a specified format. Refer to the website <http://www.samnlc.org/> for the current application and guidance; instructions and format requirements; timeline; budget and cash flow templates; and contact information.
- 3. Review.** Applicants are expected to respond to each application item in a comprehensive manner and follow the application and format requirements. Student Achievement Minnesota staff perform a desk review upon receipt of each application. Applications that do not comply with the application and format requirements or demonstrate significant fiscal deficiencies do not merit additional consideration, and are so notified.
- 4. Expert Review.** Applications meriting additional consideration are further evaluated by Student Achievement Minnesota and its review team. Student Achievement Minnesota contracts with external experts with a wide-range of experience, including charter school operations, education, governance, and finance in order to provide solid evaluation of the proposed charter school. Applications which demonstrate a thorough understanding of key issues and the capacity to successfully open a quality charter school are scheduled for an interview.
- 5. Interview.** The applicant's founders participate in an interview with the Student Achievement Minnesota Charter School Committee and advisors, who review the expert reviewer's comments and scores. There are not pre-determined questions for the interview. The applicants should be prepared for specific questions regarding any aspect of their application. The purpose of the interview is to respond to questions or concerns that the review team had in evaluating the application and to determine whether the developing group has the capacity to implement the proposal.

Post-Interview Evaluation and Decision. Student Achievement Minnesota makes a holistic determination as to whether the developing group has the capacity to successfully establish a high-quality charter school consistent with its proposal. Student Achievement Minnesota informs charter school applicants of the decision, with feedback.

School Development Progress

Between charter approval and school opening, Student Achievement Minnesota monitors, on a monthly basis, the school's progress in completing start-up tasks, through a Start-Up Progress task list.

The Start-Up Progress task list consists of over 100 identified items in key areas, such as:

1. **Facilities**, such as conducting a needs assessment to determine the facility necessary to support the program
2. **Financial Management/Business Plan**, such as establishing appropriate policies and reporting systems
3. **Governance and Management**, such as adopting appropriate policies and job descriptions
4. **Learning Program**, such as aligning the curriculum with state standards and identifying local assessments to drive instruction
5. **Systems**, such as purchasing appropriate finance and student information systems
6. **School Culture**, such as staff training
7. **Leadership, Personnel, and Policy Development**, such as hiring an effective school leader through a fair and open hiring process, and developing necessary procedures
8. **Regulatory Issues**, such as being familiar with legal requirements
9. **Services to Students**, such as providing sufficient services to traditionally disadvantaged students including English Language Learners and Special Education students
10. **Enrollment/Marketing**, such as creating and implementing a marketing plan to capture sufficient enrollment
11. **Accountability**, such as participating in goal setting
12. **Community Partnerships**, such as developing community relationships

The start-up task list is available on Student Achievement Minnesota's website:
<http://www.samnllc.org/>

School-Opening Significant Target Dates

Student Achievement Minnesota has identified six key start-up dates with related tasks (e.g. facility, school leader identification, enrollment, staff) which, if not met, create a rebuttable presumption that the school will not open that year. Student Achievement Minnesota provides multiple reminders to the school of these key target dates. In addition, Student Achievement Minnesota requires and monitors monthly financial statements as soon as the groups receive funds (which, in some cases, predates the federal grant). As an additional precaution, Student Achievement Minnesota requires a pre-opening evaluation to ensure each school is ready to open.

The Significant Target Dates/Tasks are:

March 1	School leader identified
March 1	Facility secured
May 1	Database of interested students/families that is 125% of budgeted enrollment
May 10	Significant renovations/build-out to facility have begun
May 31	Seventy-five percent (75%) of budgeted students officially enrolled
June 1	Seventy-five percent (75%) of teaching staff hired
July 1	One hundred twenty-five percent (125%) of budgeted students officially enrolled

Where significant target dates are not met, the school board will submit a written plan to Student Achievement Minnesota detailing how the condition will be remedied within thirty days. Where Student Achievement Minnesota does not believe the school is ready to open, Student Achievement Minnesota counsels the school to delay opening and, if necessary, intervenes to prevent the school from opening.

Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates its charter schools in three primary areas:

1. Academic Performance
2. Fiscal Performance
3. Operations and Legal Compliance

1. Academic Performance: Is the school improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students?

Academic Performance is evaluated based on multiple criteria:

Commissioner's Expectations for Public Schools: Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates a school's academic performance in meeting or exceeding expectations established by the Commissioner for public schools.

Absolute Proficiency: Expecting proficiency for each student, Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the percentage of students meeting or exceeding state standards on the state assessment tests.

Comparative Proficiency: Expecting each charter school to fulfill its statutory obligation to improve student performance, Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates how well the charter school performs compared to its resident district, and state average performance and may compare to a nearby district school that the charter school students would otherwise likely attend.

Growth: Expecting growth for each student, Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the growth each student achieved on the state and other assessments.

Achievement Gap: Expecting all students regardless of economic status to achieve academic success, Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the degree to which students qualifying for free/reduced lunch achieve the same proficiency rates as students not qualifying for free/reduced lunch on the state assessments.

Academic Governance: Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the school board's demonstration that it critically evaluates and strategically leads academic performance.

2. Fiscal Management: Is the school fiscally sound?

Fiscal Performance is evaluated based on five criteria: External Audit, Fund Balance, Charter Contract Fiscal Obligations, State Finance Award, and Governance.

External Audit: Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates external audits and expects its schools to work towards elimination of deficiencies.

Fund Balance: Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates a school's fiscal health based on its ability to pay unforeseen expenses.

Charter Contract Fiscal Obligations: Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the degree to which the charter school is achieving its financial management obligations contained in the charter.

Compliance with State Requirements. Student Achievement Minnesota considers whether a charter school has complied with state financial management requirements, such as adopting required financial management policies.

Governance: Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the school board's demonstration that it pre-approves and maintains a balanced budget; reviews monthly and annual budget reports and requires explanations for out-of-budget spending; receives required board training; and has adequate time to review board materials.

3. Operations and Legal Compliance: Is the school well-managed and legally compliant?

Operations and Legal Compliance is evaluated based on four criteria: Compliance with Applicable Law, Minnesota Department of Education Audit Results, Charter Contract Reporting Obligations, and Leadership.

Charter schools must comply with all applicable laws, such as admissions, teacher licensing, and special education requirements. Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates the degree to which the school complies with these requirements.

Effective operations and governance are fundamental to a quality charter school. Consequently, Student Achievement Minnesota evaluates effective operations through attendance at board meetings, re-view of board meeting minutes, discussions with staff and other stakeholders, MDE audit results, and the adherence to charter requirements.

Student Achievement Minnesota regularly monitors and evaluates other measures of school performance such as, near-term and long-term fiscal health metrics. These measures inform Student Achievement Minnesota's oversight but generally are not used in determining charter renewal unless the measures impact charter school obligations contained in the charter contract.

Student Achievement Minnesota engages in site visits as one tool in its oversight program. Site visits may be announced or unannounced. In addition, Student Achievement Minnesota may hire educational experts to pose as parents interested in enrolling children in the school to also engage in site visits.

To ensure consistency in high standards and quality for the schools, Student Achievement Minnesota applies a framework utilizing quality standards of academic achievement, financial management, and operational / legal accountability including:

1. School progress towards meeting charter contract goals.
2. School achievement on state assessments
3. School financial indicators
4. School health and safety factors
5. School compliance

Student Achievement Minnesota provides written feedback to the school leader and board chair regarding the site visit. The feedback contains an evaluation both of selected charter contract requirements, such as status of academic outcomes and fiscal management, and of general school improvement areas not specified by the charter contract, such as school culture, lesson plans, and teacher evaluations. Where Student Achievement Minnesota believes certain actions may lead to school improvement, but those actions are not required by the charter contract, such actions are identified as “recommended” for the school’s consideration. Similarly, where certain actions are mandatory, whether by law or the charter contract, those actions are noted as “required.”

Reporting Requirements

The charter contract sets forth numerous reporting requirements for authorized schools (generally found in Article VI).

To minimize the burden on high-performing well-managed schools, Student Achievement Minnesota waives selected contract reporting requirements annually for schools which:

Attained a 90%+ compliance reporting rate for three consecutive years

and

obtained state recognition of compelling academic performance on state assessments or high-quality designation in the immediately preceding school year

and

have adopted statutorily-required policies

Charter contract reporting requirements are waived EXCEPT for the following:

- Monthly board minutes
- Monthly board packets
- Monthly financial statements
- Board member assurances
- Lease
- Final budget for upcoming school year
- Annual report
- External audit
- Charter Renewal Proposed Goals
- Statutory or MDE required reporting items (e.g. Comprehensive Achievement and Civic Readiness)

Student Achievement Minnesota provides written notice to schools which have earned the waiver.

Student Achievement Minnesota may withdraw the waiver at any time if warranted, in Student Achievement Minnesota's sole discretion. Examples of circumstances which may result in waiver withdrawal include, but are not limited to: change in leadership, loss of positive state designation, and unfavorable state designation.

Due Date to Student Achievement Minnesota: March 1st

Response from Student Achievement Minnesota to School: September 1st

Requirements:

Expansions for additional sites or grades – require an application to Student Achievement Minnesota.

The application to Student Achievement Minnesota is only the first step in the expansion process. If Student Achievement Minnesota approves the application, Student Achievement Minnesota is required by law to submit an affidavit to the Minnesota Department of Education for approval. The then-current affidavit may require additional information not addressed herein, and in completing its review, the Minnesota Department of Education may similarly request additional information.

The application to Student Achievement Minnesota must contain:

- I. **Evaluation of Planned Growth:** Provide an explanation of how the expansion will affect the school facilities, faculty and enrollment. A quality application will include:
 - a. **Facility:** Describe how the expansion will affect the school's overall facilities plan and comply with health and safety regulations. Identify the potential location and the impact of the expansion on the school's transportation plan, demonstrating ability for access to the school by traditionally underserved students.
 - b. **Faculty:** Describe how the expansion will affect staffing needs, including the need to hire additional teachers, managers and support staff to complete the expansion. Include brief job descriptions for each staffing change. Attach a copy of the current faculty organizational chart and proposed faculty organizational chart for the expansion. The current faculty organizational chart should include current teacher names and assignments. The proposed faculty organizational chart should include 1) current teacher names and assignments for existing faculty 2) position titles and assignments for proposed new faculty (ex. teacher – social studies), and 3) clearly identify which staff is to be hired in which year.
 - c. **Need and Demand:** Provide evidence of need and existing demand for the expansion. Indicate by grade, the school's prior year and current student enrollment, and waiting list number. Demonstrate board, parents and staff support for the expansion. Identify existing public schools that serve the same grades in the targeted area and why the expansion will serve an unmet need.

For grade expansions: also identify (1) existing public schools that serve the same grades in the targeted area and why the expansion will serve an unmet need, and (2) provide evidence supporting long-range (minimum of five years) enrollment projections (by site, if applicable).

For additional site expansions, also provide and analyze a market need and demand study. A market need and demand study must include, for the proposed location(s) of the school, at a minimum:

- (1) Current and projected demographic information;
- (2) Student enrollment patterns;
- (3) Information on existing schools [traditional, district, charter, and private] and types of

educational programs currently available;

- (4) Characteristics of proposed students and families;
- (5) Availability of property zoned and classified facilities;
- (6) Quantification of existing demand for the proposed expansion; and
- (7) Long-range (minimum five years) enrollment projections (by site)

II. **Evaluation of Current School Academic and School Performance:** Provide an evaluation of school performance. A quality application will include:

- a. **Academic Performance:** Provide evidence of improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students, including, by student group and consolidated: (1) meeting the Commissioner's Expectations for All Public Schools; (2) significant student growth on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments for the preceding three years, (3) a longitudinal record of at least the three most recent years of the student academic proficiency and growth on state assessments showing the school is improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students, (4) for upward grade expansions, a summary of the school's performance data on state assessments for the highest grade currently served demonstrating that the students are academically ready for their next grade level; and (5) the extent to which the school has attained its charter contract academic goals, including attaining goals related to other academic assessments (other than state assessments) that annually measured at least the three most recent years of longitudinal student proficiency and growth. Evidence must include at least one full year of state assessment performance data for all grades currently chartered.
- b. **Staff:** Provide evidence that current teaching staff is appropriately licensed or have received appropriate waivers from the Minnesota Board of Teaching.
- c. **Governance & Management:** Provide a copy of the current school board roster which includes member names and positions on the board. Describe the extent to which the school has a successfully functioning board including, but not limited to, adequacy of membership (by skill sets in chart form showing experience in charter schools, curriculum, instructions, management, facilities, finance, and law), fulfillment of training requirements (dates and session description), and extent of member involvement in board and committee meetings. For grade expansions: Explain why the school did not initially or with a subsequent grade expansion) request a charter for the expansion grades sought and the extent to which it reflects adequate planning and governance/management capacity. Provide evidence that the school has the board and management capacity to implement and manage the expansion which includes meeting reporting obligations, below.

III. **Evaluation of Legal and Fiscal Performance:** A charter school requesting an expansion must provide evidence of at least three years of sound school finances and an expansion plan that sustains the school's finances and operations. A quality application will:

- a. **Reporting:** Identify the extent to which the school met all MDE and charter contract obligations during the existing contract period and, if less than three years, the preceding contract term, and explanation for any deficiencies and extent to which they reflect adequate growth capacity.
- b. **External Audit:** Provide the three most recent external audits, evidence that any findings in past audits have been corrected, and that the two most recent audits reflect no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies.
- c. **Fund Balance:** Provide the fund balance history for the immediately preceding three years. Provide evidence that the school has a fund balance exceeding 20%.

Expansion Application

- d. **Financing:** Provide evidence that the financing the school needs to implement the proposed expansion exists.
- e. **Budget:** Evidence that the expansion will become self-sustaining. Five budgets (revenue and expenditure budgets) must be submitted. Budget one is the current year. Budget Two is the subsequent year without expansion. Budget Three is the subsequent year with the expansion proposal. Budget Four is the second expansion year; Budget Five is the third expansion year. Budgets 1, 2, 3 and Budgets 3, 4, 5 must be displayed side-by-side for ease of comparison (two side-by-sides; Budgets 1-3 and Budgets 3-5). Each budget must contain the anticipated end-of-year fund balance. Budgets are complete year budgets and are line-item reports, subtotaled by program. A narrative must be attached that contains a detailed description of the budgetary changes that result in the expansion budget. Detailed budget development assumptions are also contained in the narrative.

Temporary Site Expansions: For **temporary** additional site expansions (e.g. when a facility build-out or addition is delayed) after the initial contract term has expired, Student Achievement Minnesota may consider, **if warranted**, deviations from the stated requirements as long as the school demonstrates overall academic, fiscal, and operational strength. For example, Student Achievement Minnesota may approve a temporary site expansion when a charter school does not have a 20% fund balance but presents a credible plan to achieve it.

Additional Site Expansions: Except for the market need and demand study, which is always required, Student Achievement Minnesota may consider deviations from the stated requirements for additional site requests due to normal growth. For example, Student Achievement Minnesota does not expect a K-12 charter school to lease all space needed for its K-12 program in its early years and may consider exceptions to accommodate the charter school's normal and anticipated growth, in Student Achievement Minnesota's discretion.

Mergers: Student Achievement Minnesota may also consider deviations from the stated requirements for additional site and grade level expansions due to mergers where the resulting school offers no additional grades other than those currently offered by the merging schools and/or where the resulting number of sites does not exceed the combined number of the existing sites.

Expansion Application Evaluation Rubric

SAM analyzes the evidence in all areas of school performance and planning when considering a charter school's application for site expansion or grade level.

I. Planned Growth		
	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
A. Facility Describes how the expansion plan will affect the school's overall facility plan.		
Identifies the potential location		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the potential location will adequately serve students.</i>		
Identifies the impact the expansion will have on school's transportation plan.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school has adequately evaluated the expansion's impact on the school's transportation plan.</i>		
Demonstrates access to the school by traditionally underserved students.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively demonstrates that the school will reach-out and serve all students.</i>		
B. Staff Describes how the expansion will affect staffing needs (additional teachers, managers and support staff).		
Includes a brief job description for each staffing change.		
Provides a current organizational chart which includes staff names and assignments.		
Provides a proposed staff organizational chart for the expansion and includes:		
1. Current staff names and assignments for existing staff		
2. Position titles and assignments for proposed new staff (ex. teacher-math)		
3. Identification of which staff is to be hired in which year		

C. Need and Demand Provides evidence that the expansion will serve an unmet need and has sufficient existing demand.		
Identifies, by grade, the school's prior year and current student enrollment, waiting list numbers, and projected enrollment for four years (by site, if applicable).		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school's enrollment information persuasively supports an expansion.</i>		
Provides evidence of board support for the expansion.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which board support is persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
Provides evidence of parent support for the expansion.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which parental support is persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
Provides evidence of staff support for the expansion.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which staff support is persuasively demonstrated.</i>		
For grade expansions, identifies existing public schools that serve the same grades in the targeted area and why the expansion will serve an unmet need.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively demonstrates that the expansion will serve an unmet need (e.g. no area schools serving grades, etc.).</i>		
For additional site expansions, provides a market need and demand study.		
For additional site expansions, the market need and demand study includes and the applicant analyzes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • current and projected demographic information 		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which current and projected demographic information persuasively support an expansion</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student enrollment patterns 		

<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which student enrollment patterns persuasively support an expansion</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> information on existing schools [traditional district, charter, and private] and types of educational programs currently available; 		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively demonstrates that the expansion will serve an unmet need (e.g. no area schools serving the grades, academic program, etc.)</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> characteristics of proposed students and families 		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the characteristics of proposed students and families persuasively support an expansion</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> availability of properly zoned and classified facilities 		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively demonstrates that properly zoned and classified properties are available in the intended location(s)</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> quantification of existing demand for the school 		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively documents demand for / desire to attend the school</i>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> long-range (minimum five years) enrollment projections (by site) 		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application persuasively supports the enrollment projections</i>		
II. Current School Academic and School Performance		
	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
A. Academic Performance 1. Provides evidence of meeting the Commissioner’s Expectations for All Public Schools.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school’s historical performance persuasively demonstrates that the school is improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students.</i>		

2. Significant student growth on state assessments for the previous three years.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school's state growth data persuasively demonstrates that the school is improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students.</i>		
3. Longitudinal record of at least the three most recent years of student proficiency and growth on state assessment showing the school is improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school's historical state assessment data persuasively demonstrates improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students.</i>		
4. For upward grade expansions: Summary of school's state assessment academic performance data for the highest grade currently served showing that the students are academically ready for their next grade level.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the state assessment data persuasively demonstrates that the students are academically prepared to succeed at higher grade levels.</i>		
5. Extent to which charter contract goals are satisfied and achieved, including any other academic assessments (other than state assessments) that measure at least the three most recent years of longitudinal student proficiency and growth.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school persuasively demonstrates charter contract goal fulfillment.</i>		
6. State academic performance data provided for at least one year for all currently chartered grades.		
B. Staff Current teaching staff is appropriately licensed or has waiver status per MN Board of Teaching.		
C. Government & Management Current governing board members and positions.		

Describes functional governing board with skill sets and experience in charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance, and law.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the board is adequately functioning.</i>		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the board has adequate experience: to what degree is the board comprised of experienced charter schools, curriculum, instruction, management, facilities, finance, and law</i>		
Board member training compliance		
All board members received required initial training.		
Extent of board member participation in board and committee meetings.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the board members actively participate in board committees.</i>		
If a grade expansion, an explanation why the school did not initially request a charter for the expansion grades sought and the extent to which failing to do so reflects adequate planning, governance and management capacity.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the explanation reflects adequate capacity.</i>		
School has board and management capacity to implement the expansion and performs its obligations.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application demonstrates sufficient capacity to implement and manage the expansion.</i>		
III. Legal and Fiscal Performance		
	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
A. Reporting & Legal Compliance Identify compliance with MDE obligations during existing contract period and if less than 3 years, during the preceding contract period term.		

Identify compliance with charter contract obligations during existing contract period and if less than 3 years, during the preceding contract period term.		
Explanation for any deficiencies and extent to which they reflect adequate growth capacity.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the school persuasively demonstrates adequate capacity through compliance with MDE and charter reporting obligations.</i>		
B. External Audit Provides the three most recent external audits and evidence that findings in past audits that have been corrected.		
The two most recent external audits reflect no material weaknesses or significant deficiencies.		
C. Fund Balance Fund balance history provided for the immediately preceding three years.		
The school has a fund balance exceeding 20%.		
D. Financing Evidence provided re: available funding to implement the proposed expansion.		
E. Budget 1. The expansion will become self-sustaining.		
2. Submission of five (5) budgets (revenue and expenditure) with line items and sub-total program totals: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Year • Subsequent Year Without Expansion • Subsequent year With Expansion Proposal • Second Year of Expansion • Third Year Expansion 		
3. Budget development assumptions are detailed and included in the narrative.		
4. Detailed description of the budgetary changes that result in the expansion project.		
5. Estimated end-of-year fund balance for each of the budgeted years.		

<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the budgets reflect reasonable income and expenses.</i>		
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ADDITIONAL REVIEWER COMMENTS:

Expansion – Early Learning Programs Evaluation

Due Date: March 1st (approximately 18 months prior to the implementation of the Early Learning Program)

Response from Student Achievement Minnesota to School: Notice of denial or site visit will be scheduled within 60 days.

Final determination by September 1st.

Requirements:

An Early Learning Program (pre-K, preschool, or early childhood health and development screening) requires an application to Student Achievement Minnesota.

The application to Student Achievement Minnesota is only the first step in the process. If Student Achievement Minnesota approves the application, Student Achievement Minnesota is required by the Minnesota Department of Education to submit a request to the Department for official recognition of the program.

The application to Student Achievement Minnesota must contain **all** components of the expansion application found in the Charter School Program Guide. In addition, an application for an early childhood program must also contain:

- **For Early Childhood Health and Developmental Screening:** Provide a comprehensive description of the school's plan and capacity to provide an Early Childhood Screening program in accordance with Minn. Stat. 121A.16-121A.19 and Minnesota rules 3530.3000, 3530.3300, and 3530.3400.

- **For Early Learning Programs, the application must include:**

I. Program Description.

- a. **Early Learning Programs.** Describe the type and provide a comprehensive description of the program including:
 - (1) Key components / Core qualities
 - (2) Philosophy
 - (3) Staffing licensure with file folder number and other credentials
 - (4) Minimum Staff: Child Ratios not to exceed 1:10
 - (5) Maximum Class Sizes, not to exceed 20
 - (6) Teacher content knowledge in early childhood curriculum content, assessment, instruction
 - (7) Describe the licensed staff development on early learning curriculum and programs, instructional practice and assessment completed in the past five years.
 - (8) Daily (or weekly if the daily program differs) schedule illustrating time dedicated to various activities
 - (9) Instructional Methods: how program will be provided to ensure high-quality learning program.
 - (10) Describe the program's planned food service program.

II. Enrollment Process & Transition Plan.

- a. Enrollment Process. Describe the enrollment process for the early learning program and the kindergarten enrollment process.
- b. Transition Plan. For early learning program students who are accepted into the kindergarten program, explain the transition plan which should include meaningful planning and coordination with kindergarten teachers and engages families in a variety of ways to support the child's learning and successful transition. For early learning program students who are not enrolled into the kindergarten program, describe a plan for providing guidance to families for alternative programs.

III. **Assessments.** Describe the assessment process used to measure individual student progress in all early learning program classes and the instrument(s) used, such as High Scope Child Observation Record (COR), Teaching Strategies Gold, or Work Sampling System.

Expansion – Early Learning Programs Evaluation

- a. Describe the domains the assessment will assess, including language and literacy and mathematical thinking.
 - b. Describe the timing of the assessments. Note that the assessment must be used at program entrance and program exit.
- IV. **Instructional Practice.** Describe an instructional practice plan aligned with the state early childhood learning standards and kindergarten standards that is based on early childhood research and professional practice focused on a children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills and development and prepared children for the transition to kindergarten, including early literacy skills.
- a. Describe how the program content and instructional practices are aligned with the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards (ECIPs).
 - b. Describe the curriculum to be used.
 - c. Describe how the Early Childhood Indicators of Progress: Minnesota’s Early Learning Standards (ECIPs) are incorporated into the program
 - d. Provide an overview of instructional practice to support children’s early literacy skills development.
- V. **Community-Based Services.** Provide a description how the program coordinates with community organizations and how those resources are shared with families.
- VI. **Screening.** Describe how and where participating children receive developmental screening. Provide a plan for those children who do not successfully complete early childhood screening.
- VII. **Success.** Describe how the school will determine if the program is successful.

Expansion – Early Learning Programs Evaluation Rubric

Student Achievement Minnesota analyzes the evidence in all areas of school performance when considering a charter school’s application for site expansion or grade expansion.

Expansion Application – complete Expansion Application Rubric, then proceed		
	Meets Expectations	Does Not Meet Expectations
Program:		
Early Childhood Health & Screening: application describes the school’s plan and capacity to provide a screening program in accordance with applicable law and rule.		
<i>Qualitative: Describe the degree to which the application comprehensively describes the program to be provided and how the program will comply with all applicable law (e.g. an assurance of compliance is insufficient).</i>		
Early Learning Programs. Application contains:		
Key components/core qualities		
Philosophy		
Staffing licensure with file folder number		
Other staffing credentials		
Minimum Staff: Child ratios not to exceed 1:10		
Maximum class sizes, not to exceed 20		
Teacher content knowledge in early childhood curriculum content		
Teacher content knowledge in early childhood assessment		

Expansion – Early Learning Programs Evaluation

Teacher content knowledge in early childhood instruction		
Staff development on early learning within the past five years		
Schedule illustrating time dedicated to various activities		
Instructional methods		
Planned food service program is reasonable.		
Enrollment and Transition:		
Describes the enrollment process for both the early learning program and the kindergarten program.		
Describes the transition plan to kindergarten.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes meaningful planning and coordination with kindergarten teachers 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engages families in a variety of ways to support the child’s learning and successful transition 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to provide guidance for families not enrollment in the school’s kindergarten program 		
Assessments		
Identifies the assessments to be used		
Describes the domains the assessment will assess		
Describes the timing of the assessments		
Instructional Practice		
Describes how the program content and instructional practices are aligned with the ECIPs		
Describes the curriculum to be used		
Describes how the ECIPs are incorporated into the program		
Provides a summary of the instructional practices to support the child’s early literacy skills development		
Community-Based Services		
Provides a description how the program coordinates with community organizations		
Describes how community organization resources are shared with families		
Screening		
Describes how and where participating children receive developmental screening.		
Provides a plan for those children who do not successfully complete early childhood screening.		
Success.		
Describes how the school will determine if the program is successful.		

QUALITATIVE REVIEWER COMMENTS: *Describe the degree to which the school has comprehensively and adequately described an early learning plan meeting the minimum state requirements.*

Communications and Remediation

Student Achievement Minnesota believes that communication, from and to the school, is critical to the relationship between school and authorizer and to prevent “surprise”.

Communications may be:

- **School Initiated.** If the School fails to make adequate progress towards achieving its academic outcomes / goals, financial targets, or comply with applicable law or other requirements, the school may at any time prepare and implement an improvement plan to overcome such deficiencies. The school may at any time submit the plan to Student Achievement Minnesota for review and comment prior to adoption and implementation.
- **Student Achievement Minnesota Initiated.** If Student Achievement Minnesota has a concern about the school, or if the School fails to make adequate progress towards achieving academic outcomes/goals, or to meet financial performance requirements, or to comply with applicable law, or other requirements, Student Achievement Minnesota shall provide the following notices, as applicable.
- **Notice to School Leader or Board Chair.** Student Achievement Minnesota shall notify the school leader or board chair of area(s) of concern for correction. Student Achievement Minnesota may specify a target date for correction. Student Achievement Minnesota
- **Formal Notice to School.** If the situation remains uncorrected without reasonable explanation, or if the situation involves an urgent concern, Student Achievement Minnesota will formally notify the school board of the area(s) of concern for correction and may ask the school board to adopt a specific performance improvement plan. Student Achievement Minnesota shall specify a target date for correction which SAM may, if circumstances warrant, amend.

If Student Achievement Minnesota requires the School Board to retain a third-party investigation: (1) the school shall retain the investigator within ten (10) business days of such requirement; (2) the investigation must commence no later than fifteen (15) business days of such requirement; (3) the third party investigator must be acceptable to Student Achievement Minnesota; (4) ~~and~~ the School Board shall authorize such investigator to provide status reports to and communicate with Student Achievement Minnesota; (5) the School and School staff and School board members will not take any action which undermines the neutrality/impartiality or comprehensiveness of the investigation; (6) the School will ensure that the investigation is conducted and investigation results are issued free from influence of the School, School Staff, and School board members; (7) the investigative report must include both findings-of-fact and conclusions; (8) to ensure that the investigation is comprehensive and conducted free from influence, the School shall not impose cost limitations on the investigation; (9) if, during the investigation, new allegations unrelated to the issues which caused the investigation to commence are discovered, the School will require that the investigator promptly notifies Student Achievement Minnesota and the School of such new allegations; and (10) the School shall require the investigator to provide a complete copy of the investigative report to Student Achievement Minnesota.

- **Notice to School Board of Charter Revocation/Termination.** Student Achievement Minnesota initiates notice whereby charter authorization will be withdrawn pursuant to the charter contract.
- **Notice of Concern Action Required Communication.** The Notice of Concern Corrective Action Required form may be used to clearly communicate issues/concerns and required actions.



**STUDENT
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MINNESOTA LLC**

Notice of Concern: Corrective Action Required

School	
Area(s) of Concern for Correction:	Status: (Complete / Incomplete)
Finding(s):	
Required Corrective Action(s):	
Identified Responsible Person(s) / Entity (e.g. Board, School Leader):	Target Date for Correction:
Acceptable Evidence of Corrective Action Plan Completion:	
Oversight Monitoring Procedures and Practices:	
Follow-Up / Progress Reporting Due Dates:	

Charter School Authorizer

Date

Notice:
1st _____
2nd _____
3rd _____

Charter Contract Amendment Process

Occasionally, circumstances may warrant a charter contract amendment.

As provided by the charter contract, all charter contract amendments must be in writing.

Request: A charter school may request a charter contract amendment by submitting the request, in writing, to Student Achievement Minnesota. The request should clearly explain the amendment being sought and the rationale. *TIP: include a red-line of the contract provision.*

Decision: The timing of any amendment consideration depends upon the circumstances and will be determined by Student Achievement Minnesota on a case-by-case basis.

Please note that, generally, Student Achievement Minnesota does not amend charter contract academic goals or targets due to failure to make progress towards achieving them without other compelling factors (e.g. identified state assessment is discontinued). Failure to achieve charter contract goals and targets will be considered in the charter renewal process.

Charter Renewal

By September 1st of the school year in which the charter contract terminates, the School shall submit a renewal application to Student Achievement Minnesota which shall contain three parts: (1) School Performance. An analysis and evaluation of the School's performance under the charter contract, which shall include a comprehensive evaluation of each charter contract goal for each year of the charter contract, as well as an evaluation of governance performance, compliance with reporting obligations, and fiscal management, (2) Proposed Goals. A proposal for goals for the following charter contract period, and (3) Other Information. Any other information the School desires Student Achievement Minnesota to consider. The School agrees to provide to Student Achievement Minnesota documentation supporting the School's evaluation if requested by Student Achievement Minnesota.

Student Achievement Minnesota will notify the School within four weeks of receipt of the School's external audit (final, not draft) for the most recently completed fiscal year as to whether Student Achievement Minnesota intends to offer the School a renewal charter contract.

Improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students is the most important factor Student Achievement Minnesota will consider in determining contract renewal, which determination shall be based substantially on the school's attainment of its academic outcomes and goals identified in the charter contract. Student Achievement Minnesota will consider other factors in its renewal determination, which factors are secondary to improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students. Specifically, Student Achievement Minnesota will consider the achievement of statutory purposes (other than improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students), and financial and operational performance obligations and compliance with applicable law. The school will be eligible for renewal only if the school has improved the learning, achievement, and success of all students, notwithstanding superior performance in financial, operations, or legal compliance factors.

Charter Termination or Non-renewal

Student Achievement Minnesota terminates and does not renew charters for failure to improve the learning, achievement, and success of all students, failure to meet fiscal management standards, failure to comply with applicable law, and other violations of the charter contract.

As discussed under “Charter Renewal,” improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students is the most important factor Student Achievement Minnesota will consider in determining contract renewal, which determination shall be based substantially on the school’s attainment of its academic outcomes and goals identified in the charter contract. Student Achievement Minnesota will consider other factors in its renewal determination, which factors are secondary to improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students.

Specifically, Student Achievement Minnesota will consider the achievement of statutory purposes (other than improving the learning, achievement, and success of all students), and financial and operational performance obligations and compliance with applicable law. The school will be eligible for renewal only if the school has improved the learning, achievement, and success of all students, notwithstanding superior performance in financial, operations, or legal compliance factors.

If the charter is terminated, the charter school must be dissolved. Similarly, if a charter is not renewed due to the charter school’s failure to achieve academic goals, failure to meet fiscal management standards, failure to comply with applicable law, and other violations of the charter contract, the charter school must be dissolved.

Student Achievement Minnesota complies with all laws relating to charter termination and non-renewal.

Conflicts of Interest

Student Achievement Minnesota believes that it has a duty to the state of Minnesota in exercising charter school oversight responsibilities. In exercising these responsibilities, it is the statement of policy that Student Achievement Minnesota will avoid even the appearance of a conflict of interest in conducting its oversight responsibilities. In furtherance of this duty, Student Achievement Minnesota has adopted a conflicts of interest policy which:

- Prohibits individuals involved in Student Achievement Minnesota charter school oversight or decision-making, or individuals working on behalf of Student Achievement Minnesota in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making, from participating in any discussion or decision involving an authorized charter school or a charter school applicant, in which the individual has a financial, personal, or other interest
- Prohibits individuals involved in Student Achievement Minnesota charter school oversight or decision-making, or individuals working on behalf of Student Achievement Minnesota in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making, from working in any capacity or volunteering in any capacity at an authorized charter school
- Requires objective, merit-based decisions in all aspects of charter school oversight, and will withdraw from any decision-making if unable to do so.

Autonomy

Pursuant to Minnesota law, Student Achievement Minnesota's role *vis-à-vis* its authorized charter schools is limited to oversight: Student Achievement Minnesota oversees the school board's management and operation of the school. Specifically, Student Achievement Minnesota monitors and evaluates the fiscal, operational, and student performance of its authorized schools and holds schools accountable for their performance.

Following are Student Achievement Minnesota's guiding principles in furtherance of this statutory duty:

- Student Achievement Minnesota does not manage or operate any charter school
- No member of Student Achievement Minnesota or any individual working on behalf of Student Achievement Minnesota in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making may be on the board of an authorized charter school
- No member of Student Achievement Minnesota or any individual working on behalf of Student Achievement Minnesota in any aspect of charter school oversight or decision-making may be employed by, does contracting work with, or volunteer at an authorized charter school
- Any technical assistance offered by Student Achievement Minnesota to its authorized schools is voluntary and not required.
- Student Achievement Minnesota strives to minimize burdens on charter schools in conducting oversight.
- Student Achievement Minnesota oversight decisions are results-based.

Introduction

This guidance establishes the process by which Student Achievement Minnesota strives to address complaints regarding its authorized schools.

As a charter school authorizer, Student Achievement Minnesota is required to monitor and evaluate the fiscal, operational, and student performance of a school, Minn. Stat. 124E.10 Subd. 3(b). Where a school fails to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management, commits violations of law, or fails to meet the required pupil performance requirements, the authorizer, after complying with statutory notification and hearing requirements, may cancel the charter of the school, Minn. Stat. 124E.10 Subd. 4(b). The Minnesota Commissioner of Education is also empowered to terminate the charter of a school with a history of repeated or major violations of law, financial mismanagement, or failure to meet required pupil performance requirements, Minn. Stat. 124E.10 Subd. 4(c). Accordingly, Student Achievement Minnesota seriously considers and reviews allegations of illegality or failure to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management and, if circumstances warrant, allegations regarding failure to meet pupil performance requirements¹ relating to its authorized schools.

Procedure

- (a) Notice of Complaint. The complaint must identify the complainant and provide a method of contact. Student Achievement Minnesota will not investigate oral or anonymous complaints.
- (b) Notice of Receipt. Student Achievement Minnesota will generally acknowledge receipt of the complaint.
- (c) Reasonable Inquiry. Student Achievement Minnesota will conduct a reasonable inquiry for the purpose of verifying whether the allegations provide sufficient evidence to establish the alleged violation(s) of law or fiscal mismanagement.¹ The extent and manner of the reasonable inquiry is in Student Achievement Minnesota's discretion. If the reasonable inquiry provides sufficient evidence to establish the alleged violation(s) of law or fiscal management,¹ Student Achievement Minnesota will notice the school and require action as necessary and appropriate, in Student Achievement Minnesota's discretion.
- (d) Student Achievement Minnesota Response. Although the length of the reasonable inquiry will vary depending upon the scope, complexity, and specificity of the complaint at issue, Student Achievement Minnesota's goal is to respond in writing to the notice within thirty days. If circumstances warrant, Student Achievement Minnesota may require additional time, in which case it will generally advise the complainant.

¹ Attainment of pupil performance requirements is generally a factual inquiry, evaluated throughout the term of the charter, and generally not subject to point-in-time grievance; however, if warranted by the circumstances, Student Achievement Minnesota will seriously consider and review allegations regarding failure to meet pupil performance requirements.

Student Achievement Minnesota LLC – Organization Chart

