



School Accountability and Authorizer Oversight System

Introduction

As a leading authorizer, Volunteers of America–Minnesota builds its portfolio of high-performing charter schools by only selecting proposals with a strong potential for success. It then ensures that such potential is realized through a unique system of accountability that begins even before a school opens its doors.

VOA-MN is committed to fulfilling its role as a charter school authorizer by holding its schools accountable for a range of results. The accountability system presented in this document ensures that VOA-MN will uphold its legal obligation to make sure the schools it authorizes are reaching (or making adequate progress toward) the goals and benchmarks outlined in its charter contract and Minnesota statute.

VOA-MN uses a standard charter contract with unique school-specific terms that capture different approaches to achieving student success. The individuality of each school will be preserved in the “Academic Program Description” addendum to the charter contract.

Volunteers of America of Minnesota Accountability Plan

The primary purpose of a charter school is to improve pupil learning and student achievement. VOA-MN holds the schools it authorizes accountable in five major areas: academic performance, fiscal management, board governance, management and operations, and legal compliance. Each area may have multiple indicators of success and the charter school’s performance on each indicator will be rated as:

- Meets standard;
- Partially meets standard;
- Does not meet standard.

The highest rating a school can achieve in any section of evaluation is meets standard.

Three essential questions guide our VOA-MN authorizer oversight and charter school accountability plan.

1. Academic Program Performance - Is the school’s Learning Program a Success?

Academic Performance- All public schools, including charters, must fully participate in the state assessments - Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments. Additionally, the school shall annually complete a VOA-MN (authorizer)/School jointly approved interim assessment in reading and math. Data from state assessments as well as Title 1 Designation utilizing Multiple Measurements Rating (MMR) will be compiled and evaluated in the Annual VOA-MN Authorized Charter Schools Academic Performance Report by the authorizer. Charter schools are required to set specific and measurable goals in academic and nonacademic areas for which they agree to be held accountable in their charter contract. These goals provide the central focus for the charter school leadership, staff, and families.

The VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program publishes annually an Academic Performance Report on their network of authorized charter schools. The purpose of this report is to be a single annual source of academic program and performance information on the fifteen VOA-MN- authorized charter schools, including academic program, performance, and professional development data.

The intent of the Academic Performance Report is to provide an annual multi-faceted understanding of student performance at the charter school. VOA-MN authorized charter schools also have charter contract specific performance goals in academic and nonacademic areas for which they agree to be held accountable by authorizer

VOA-MN. The expectations for academic performance contained in the Annual Network Report will be standardized for all schools.

In addition, VOA-MN schools will have school specific annual SMART goals for academic performance contained in the charter contract appropriate for their student population served.

The Annual VOA-MN Authorized Charter Schools Academic Performance Report will contain multiple indicators of school academic success (The authorizer reserves the right to have flexibility to reasonably amend these broad standards as needed (e.g., if the state school accountability plan changes or NACSA further updates their Performance Framework):

- Students are performing well on state examinations in comparison to students at schools they might otherwise attend as evidence of meeting their primary statutory purpose of improving all pupil learning and all student achievement.
- School has adopted a formal teacher evaluation process and adheres to the requirements set forth in state statute (Minn. Stat. 122A.40).
- All teachers (but especially new teachers) are supported through a school-wide professional development plan.
- Professional development is job-embedded and directly linked to instructional practice in order to improve student achievement.

2. Financial Sustainability – Does the School Exhibit Strong Financial Health?

Charter schools receive public funds and must meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management. It is VOA-MN's duty to ensure that the schools are responsible stewards of public funds. The charter school shall provide VOA with a copy of its draft and final annual budgets and monthly cash flow projections for each fiscal year by July 1 of each fiscal year. VOA-MN shall use submitted budget and cash flow statements, along with any other relevant information, to determine if the charter school has a realistic balanced budget plan for the current year. VOA-MN shall use the financial statements presented in the charter school's annual financial audit, along with any other relevant information, to determine if the charter school maintained a balanced budget during the prior-year. Schools are expected to have audits that are free of all findings.

The VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program publishes annually a School Financial Oversight Report on their network of authorized charter schools. The parties acknowledge that the Minnesota Charter Schools Law requires a charter school to meet generally accepted standards of fiscal management. This requirement has two underlying purposes: to ensure the successful operation of the school into the future and to ensure the proper use of public funds. The Annual VOA-MN Authorized Charter Schools Financial Performance Report contains multiple indicators of school financial strength and compliance:

VOA-MN's financial expectations include the following:

- The school maintains a balanced budget.
- The school is compliant with state and federal financial reporting compliance.
- The school's financial audit will be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Education, Office of the State Auditor and the authorizer by December 31.
- Schools are expected to have audits that are free of all findings.
- The school is current on all financial obligations, including, but not limited to: pension payments, payroll taxes, insurance coverage, loan payments and terms.
- The school provides VOA-MN and school board members with monthly financials at least three days prior to board meetings. Packets include at least the following: 1) detailed income/expense report, 2) cash flow sheet, 3) check register, and 4) enrollment.
- The school develops and maintains a targeted fund balance determined by the school board for a projected period of years. For the finance report, VOA-MN also determines a standard for fund balance annually based on items such as school funding trends and funding hold-backs.
- The school board has a finance committee that meets monthly to review financials.
- All board members exhibit working knowledge of financial oversight.

3. Is the organization effective and well run?

- **Governance** – Effective board governance is essential to the successful start-up and operation of a public charter school. The diversity of charter school board memberships – teachers, parents, community leaders, and volunteers – heightens the importance of consistent expectations and development activities.

The authorizer regularly monitors the performance quality of the school board based on authorizer observations; interviews with the director, board and faculty; and the review of school policies, reports and board meeting minutes. A school must have a governance model that provides quality oversight by ensuring that there are checks and balances between the board and the school administrators.

A school board is responsible for developing, implementing, and assessing policy; defining sound employee relations; conducting open meetings; recognizing and conforming to the legal mandates imposed by state and federal laws; and governing within the limits of a delegation of state authority – as a nonprofit and public school board. Additionally, the board has an obligation to assess its successes and failures; inform the public of all deliberations and decisions; promote accountability; enhance public understanding of its mission; conform to standards of ethical behavior; provide a framework for setting goals; and develop strategic plans for the accomplishment of those goals.

The VOA-MN Charter School Authorizing Program publishes annually a School Board Governance Report on their network of authorized charter schools. The purpose of this report is to be a single annual source on the board operations and compliance of the fifteen VOA-MN- authorized charter schools. Authorizer VOA-MN also observes a minimum of one school board meeting annually. VOA-MN’s governance expectations include the following:

- The Board of Directors complies with Minnesota law regarding board training requirements and board governance structure.
- The board regularly reviews, updates, and approves its bylaws. The bylaws are consistent with state law.
- The Board conducts a comprehensive evaluation (including all aspects of the position description) of the performance of the school leader through a defined annual evaluation process.
- The Board has a board-approved professional development plan for the school director (if applicable as required by Minn. Stat. 124D.10, Subd. 11(b)).
- The Board of Directors will maintain a quorum for all board meetings.
- A board packet, containing the agenda, related documents, and monthly financials is distributed to all members of the Board of Directors, the school leadership and the Authorizer at least three days prior to each board meeting.
- The Board of Directors complies with the Minnesota Data Practices Act (Minn. Stat. Chapter 13).
- The Board of Directors institutes / follows an orientation process for bringing on new members.
- The Board of Directors completes a self-evaluation each year.
- The Board of Directors periodically engages in strategic planning, and the school exemplifies the strategic direction set by the board.
- The Board of Directors meets its governance model requirements laid out in its bylaws and as required by Minnesota Statute. It will maintain a balance of skills and expertise among members including business, marketing, legal, accounting, fundraising, human resources, and education.
- The Board of Directors maintains a Board Documents Binder which includes meeting minutes, bylaws and articles of incorporation and financial statements.
- The Board of Directors maintains a Policy Binder. The board reviews, updates, and approves its policies as needed or required by state law.

- **Management & Operations** - Effective day to day operations of a charter school support the Learning Program. A well-run school provides an environment in which staff and students can perform at the highest possible level and more effectively reach the school’s goals. Management and operations of the school will be monitored by the authorizer and reported in the Formal Site Visit Report. VOA-

MN's management and operations will be reported by the authorizer using the Formal Site Visit Rubric. Authorizer expectations include, but are not limited to:

- The school maintains a high level of parent, teacher and student satisfaction rates based on interviews, surveys and retention rates.
- Mission and Vision are central to the school's identity and inform all decision making processes.
- The school's learning program exemplifies the mission and vision of the school.
- The school exhibits strong academic and organizational leadership.
- The school employs highly qualified, appropriately licensed teachers.
- Criminal background checks are conducted on all persons per the board policy and Minn. Stat. 123B.03, Subd. 1.
- The school meets / maintains its enrollment goals.
- The school maintains a safe and healthy environment per state and federal guides and board policy.
- The school institutes a fair and open student admission process that complies with Minnesota law.
- The school is fulfilling its purposes as defined in the Charter School Law (Minn. Stat. 124D.10, subd. 1) and charter contract.
- The school's employment process complies with state and federal law.
- The school has defined job descriptions and evaluation process for all personnel.
- Teacher evaluations are designed and conducted consistent with state requirements.

- **Legal and Contractual Compliance**

Charter schools are required to follow many state and federal laws pertaining to all public schools and are expected to uphold all provisions of the charter school contract. VOA-MN expects compliance with legal and contractual obligations. Each VOA-MN authorized charter school shall maintain a Compliance Binder on site that includes VOA-MN defined evidence of compliance with state and federal statutes organized in the manner prescribed by VOA-MN. Additionally, VOA-MN authorized charter schools shall submit information to the authorizer in accordance with the VOA-MN prescribed Annual Submission Calendar. Management and operations of the school will be monitored by the authorizer and reported in the Formal Site Visit Report and additionally as needed.

SITE VISITS

One of the most important ways VOA-MN gathers information about the schools it authorizes is through on-site visits. Site visits allow the authorizer to observe the school, hear directly from key stakeholders, and corroborate school-reported information and data. VOA-MN conducts two different types of site visits: Formal and Informal.

- **Formal Site Visit-** Formal Site Visits are typically conducted once per year by a member of the VOA-MN Authorizing Program Leadership Team who interviews key stakeholders and conducts observations. Written feedback is provided to the Board of Directors and school leadership guided by the Site Visit Rubric. VOA-MN staff will provide formal written feedback summarizing observations. The feedback will identify areas of strength and areas that require improvement. If a more serious issue arises from a site visit, VOA-MN may implement an intervention based upon the "Range of Interventions" table.
- **Informal Site Visit-** VOA-MN may conduct informal site visits at any time to fulfill its duties as an authorizer. Reasons for informal site visits may include: investigation of a complaint, determination of readiness to open, follow up on implementation of improvement plans, or documentation of best practices. These visits are typically less formal and may be without notice.

BOARD MEETINGS

Another important component of VOA-MN authorizer oversight is board meeting observations conducted at least twice per year and more often (approximately every other month) for schools within their first three years after initial charter approval. Authorizer VOA-MN uses the Board Meeting Observation Rubric and provides

timely feedback to the school boards. VOA-MN also closely monitors the monthly board meeting minutes and financials of each authorized school and provides feedback to the school as needed.

SCHOOL PUBLISHED ANNUAL REPORTS

The Charter School Law (Minn. Stat. 124D.10, Subd. 14) includes requirements for a charter school annual report. Additionally, VOA-MN requires that annual reports include specific elements defined by VOA-MN annually. VOA-MN required elements include how the school is performing based on the three essential questions: Is the student learning program a success? Does the school exhibit strong financial health? Is the organization effective and well-run? VOA-MN requires that the final draft be board approved and posted to the school's official website by October 1st annually. The VOA-MN Annual Report criteria contains the World's Best Workforce Report.

AUTHORIZER PUBLISHED SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REPORTS

In addition to the Formal Site Visit Report that each school is provided, VOA-MN will also annually publish three VOA-MN Charter School Network Reports: Academic Performance, Board Governance, and Financial Management. The cumulative purpose of these reports is to assess the ongoing performance of VOA-MN authorized schools regarding academic success, financial sustainability, and organizational effectiveness.

The combination of school performance based on the three VOA-MN Annual School Performance Reports, annual Formal Site Visit Reports, informal site visit observations, authorizer observations of board meetings, and ongoing monitoring of school reporting and compliance provides an accountable oversight mechanism for the authorizer, schools, and other organizations. This collective body of evidence will also form the basis for contract renewal decisions.

CHARTER SCHOOL PRE-OPERATIONAL STAGE (Start-up Checklist)

A charter school's ability to successfully fulfill the three primary components of its contractual agreement with VOA-MN – academic success, financial sustainability, and organizational aptitude – depends on what happens well before the doors of the school open. While a Start-Up Coordinator is often hired by the interim board to handle many functions, the volunteer efforts of board members and parents are often necessary to absorb much of the work and provide direction to any pre-operational staff.

VOA-MN has organized a charter school's start-up year. Progress and completion of Ready to Open Critical Targets for Preoperational School Development must be included in the Board Chair or Start-Up Coordinator report at all board meetings. Monthly check-in meetings with VOA-MN are required.



Volunteers of America-Minnesota Annual Formal Site Visit Rubric

School Name:

Visitation Date:

Report Prepared By:

One of the most important ways VOA-MN gathers information about the schools it authorizes is through on-site visits. Site visits allow the authorizer to observe the school, hear directly from key stakeholders, and corroborate school-reported information and data. VOA-MN conducts two different types of site visits: Formal and Informal. School site visits help inform the extent to which the school is meeting the charter school contract provisions contained in the body of the contract as well as contract Addendum B.

Formal Site Visits are typically conducted once per year by a member of the VOA-MN Authorizing Program Leadership Team who interviews key stakeholders and conducts observations. Written feedback is provided to the Board of Directors and school leadership using the Formal Site Visit rubric. The Formal Site Visit rubric follows the same standard scale as the School Accountability and Authorizer Oversight System:

- Meets standard
- Partially Meets standard
- Does Not Meet standard

Formal School Site Visit Rubric				
Scale		Meets Standard	Approaching Standard	Does Not Meet Standard
Section I	School Mission and Vision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission and vision are central to the school’s identity and inform all decision making processes. • The school’s learning program exemplifies the mission and vision of the school. 			
	Evidence suggests that the school’s mission and vision are central to the school’s learning program and decision-making process (contract Article 6 and 9).			
Section Comments:				
Section II	School Culture & Learning Environment			
	Observations indicate that classrooms are clean and conducive to learning. (Contract Article 8 and Addendum B).			
	Observations indicate that shared spaces like hallways, gym, cafeteria, and bathrooms, are clean and safe (contract Article 8).			
	Evidence suggests that the school complies with state and federal health and safety laws (e.g., facility /ADA, building inspections, school liability insurance, student medical / health matters, school drills) (contract Article 8).			

	Evidence suggests that the school engages parents and students in ways that build positive relationships and engages them as partners in their child’s learning (contract Addendum B).			
	Evidence suggests that the school teachers are covering the scope and sequence of the state academic standards (contract Article 7).			
	Evidence suggests that the school has a plan for meeting their primary purpose to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement, as well as how they are preparing students to meet or exceed standards on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (contract Article 1 and 7).			
	Evidence suggests that the school has designated an Assessment Coordinator and process for ensuring compliance with state examination administration (contract Article 7).			
	Evidence suggests that the school is adhering to their plan for standardized interim assessments and utilizing that student performance data (contract Article 7).			

Section Comments:

Section III	Compliance			
	The school’s VOA-MN Compliance Binder is complete (contract Addendum B).			
	Evidence suggests that the school adheres to their human resources policies and procedures (contract Article 6 and Article 8).			
	Evidence suggests that staff and volunteers have completed criminal background checks per state law and school policy (contract Article 6).			
	Evidence suggests that faculty have current job descriptions delineating roles, responsibilities, and qualifications (contract Article 6 and Addendum B).			
	Evidence suggests that the school only employs and contracts with teachers, as defined by Minn. Stat. 122A.15, Subd. 1, who hold valid teaching licenses issued by the State to perform the particular service for which they are employed at the school (contract Article 6).			
	Evidence suggests that faculty performance observations and evaluations are conducted according to established policy and consistent with state law, including director evaluation (contract Article 6 and Addendum A).			
	Evidence suggests that the school complies with laws pertaining to student data – collection, storage, and distribution (contract Article 8).			
	Evidence suggests that the school complies with laws pertaining to student application process and enrollment (contract Article 6 and Addendum A).			
	Evidence suggests that the school is meeting its enrollment goals with stable to growing enrollment (contract Addendum A).			
	Evidence suggests that the school complies with laws pertaining to student discipline and Pupil Fair Dismissal Act (contract Article 8).			
	Evidence suggests that the school maintains and distributes annually a student/ family handbook and employee handbook (contract Addendum A).			
	Evidence suggests that the school complies with statute regarding use of the authorizer’s name (contract Article 3).			

	Evidence suggests that the Board of Directors maintains at least the amount and types of insurance coverage up to the applicable tort liability limits under Chapter 466.04 and Article six of the contract – Types and Amounts of Insurance. The School provide the Authorizer with certificates of insurance at least annually (contract Article 6).			
	Evidence suggests that the school is only serving their authorized grades and approved school sites (contract Article 4 and 5).			
	Evidence suggests that the school is non-sectarian in its program, admission policies, and employment practices, and for all other purposes (contract Article 4 and 6).			
	Evidence suggests that the school has a plan for Service Learning (contract Article 7 and Addendum A).			
	Evidence suggests that the school complies with the Minnesota Human Rights Act, Chapter 363, which prohibits unfair discriminatory practices in employment, public accommodations, public service, or education (contract Article 8).			
	A review of extra-curricular activities verifies school compliance with Minn. Stat. 121A.04, equal opportunities for members of both sexes to participate in athletics (contract Article 8).			
Section Comments:				
Section III	Special Populations			
	Evidence suggests that a “Child Find Process” is in place and adhered to (Contract Article 8).			
	Evidence suggests that the school is adhering to special education laws / IDEA (contract Article 8).			
	Evidence suggest that the school has a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC) meetings (contract Article 8).			
	Evidence suggests that the school has a contract with a special education director (contract Article 8).			
Section Comments:				

Authorizer signature and date: _____

School Director’s Response to Authorizer Site Visit Report:

School director signature and date: _____



MINNESOTA

SCHOOL BOARD AUTHORIZER OBSERVATION FORM

School Board Meeting Observation Form for _____ (school name) Date: _____ Authorizer: _____ Observer: _____
 School: Meeting Type (check one): Regular Special Emergency Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Responses: **Yes** – There is evidence the indicator exists at an acceptable level. **Partial (P)** – The indicator exists, but improvement is needed. **No** –The indicator was not observed. **N/A** - The indicator was not observed at this meeting, but over the course of the year it is or maybe addressed.

Indicators	Observed				Evidence/Comments
<i>Preparation, Open Meeting Law and Protocols</i>	Yes	P	No	N/A	
One set of printed materials is available for public inspection.					
The board meeting is accessible to the public (directions).					
Record arrivals and departures of members (even for minutes) during meeting.					
A recorded roll call establishes the existence of a quorum.					
Action on items is taken only with a quorum present. (check bylaws)					
The meeting is closed with proper procedures (reason, cite, summary).					
Indicators	Observed				Evidence/Comments
<i>Board Meeting Organization</i>	Yes	P	No	N/A	
The meeting is called to order on time.					
An adopted agenda is followed after approval.					
Conflict of interest is addressed (a declaration on new agenda items).					
Written materials, including reports, accompany agenda items.					
An orderly methodology guides the running of the meeting e.g. Roberts Rules.					
Board members are engaged and strategic in their discourse.					
A controlled opportunity for public input is available.					
Indicators	Observed				Evidence/Comments
<i>Board Agenda</i>	Yes	P	No	N/A	
The mission and vision influence decisions.					
The agenda contains an item(s) on student performance and activity.					
A consent agenda is properly executed (call to split, motion)					
Enrollment is part of budget oversight. (Pupil Units vs. head count)					
Finance reports include register, balance sheet, rev/exp, and cash flow.					
The agenda contains evidence of a board policy review process.					

There is management oversight without micromanaging.					
Indicators	Observed				Evidence/Comments
<i>Board Capacity</i>	Yes	P	No	N/A	
The board references its strategic planning process and goals to monitor and evaluate effectiveness (at least quarterly).					
Board development (orientation, training, recruitment) is discussed/noted.					
The board ends the meeting with a board evaluation or reflection.					

Charter Contract Goals: (Were these addressed? How?)

Observations, Questions and Recommendations:

List people in attendance including:
Board members:
Ex Officio's:
Vendors, Staff and Visitors:

The observation form is electronically delivered to the board chair and school leader after the meeting.



Charter School Contract Renewal and Revocation Process

Renewal Process

Volunteers of America-Minnesota (VOA-MN) views contract renewal as an on-going process that is engaged in by the Board of Directors, school leadership, and the authorizer throughout the entire life of the school's contract with its authorizer. This process culminates in the authorizer publishing an end of contract evaluation report.

End-of-Term Evaluation

VOA-MN publishes an end-of-contract evaluation report based on information, observations and documentation accumulated throughout the length of the contract. The evaluation is an opportunity to determine the extent to which the school is meeting VOA-MN's expectations of a high quality charter school. More specifically we assess the school based on the following three central questions:

- 1) Is the student learning program a success?
- 2) Does the school exhibit strong financial health?
- 3) Is the organization effective and well-run?

We quantify the school's progress in each area (academic performance, governance, financial management / health, and management/operations) using the following scale:

- Meets standard
- Partially meets standard
- Does not meet standard

VOA-MN will complete a draft of its end-of-term evaluation of the school and submit the draft for review and comment by school leadership and the board. VOA-MN will then make changes, if necessary, and resubmit a final evaluation and decision of renewal to the school's board. Through ongoing monitoring and the renewal evaluation process, VOA-MN determines whether to renew its contract with the charter school and if so, for what length of time. Contracts can be renewed for up to five years.

Termination or Nonrenewal of a Contract

Per Minn. Stat. 124D.10, Subd. 23(b), VOA-MN may act to terminate or not renew a charter under the following grounds:

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

At least 60 days before not renewing or terminating a contract, the authorizer shall notify the board of directors of the charter school of the proposed action in writing. The notice shall state the grounds for

the proposed action in reasonable detail and that the charter school's board of directors may request in writing an informal hearing before the authorizer within 15 business days of receiving notice of nonrenewal or termination of the contract. Failure by the board of directors to make a written request for a hearing within the 15-business-day period shall be treated as acquiescence to the proposed action. Upon receiving a timely written request for a hearing, the authorizer shall give ten business days' notice to the charter school's board of directors of the hearing date. The authorizer shall conduct an informal hearing before taking final action. The authorizer shall take final action to renew or not renew a contract no later than 20 business days before the proposed date for terminating the contract or the end date of the contract.

Minn. Stat. 124D.10, Subd. 23

The School will complete and submit their proposed Program Description (contract Addendum A) for review by VOA-MN. Once the content of the document is agreed upon - including curriculum, interim assessments contract academic performance goals, facility and staffing it will be incorporated into the renewal contract.

Example VOA-MN Timeline for Contract Renewal Process

Item	Responsible Party	Timeline
School Program Description Completed Charter School	Renewing School	February-March
Authorizer formal end-of-term evaluation draft completed and submitted to renewal school for review	Authorizer	April-May
End-of-term evaluation comments completed	Renewing School/Board	April-May
Contract academic performance goals negotiated	Renewing School/Authorizer	April-May
Draft contract submitted to renewing school for comment	VOA-MN	April –May
Contract approved and signed	VOA-MN	June
Contract approved and signed	Renewing Board	June

If Terminating/Not Renewing

Request a public hearing	Board	Within 15 business days of termination/nonrenewal notice
Final contract termination/renewal decision	VOA-MN	Within 20 business days of the contract end date if not renewing or terminating