

Minnesota Authorizer Performance Evaluation System (MAPES) Performance Report

Authorizer Information

Authorizer: Friends of Education

Authorizer Type: Charitable Organization

Evaluation Period: July 2015 to June 2020

Report Issue Date: June 12, 2020

Characteristics of the Authorizer

- Friends of Education is one of the oldest authorizers in Minnesota. Founded in 1999, it oversees twelve charter schools throughout the state.
- Friends of Education's mission statement is "to improve the education of children" and the mission is woven throughout all the work it does.
- Ten of Friends of Education's schools are recognized by the state as high-quality schools. Schooldigger. com ranked two of its schools as the top two in the state. Friends of Education has been recognized by the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) for its exemplary authorizer performance.

Overall Performance Rating

MAPES Overall Performance Rating for Friends of Education is 3. 99 - Exemplary

Ratings Summary

Performance Measures A: Authorizer Capacity and Infrastructure – 25 Percent Weight of Overall Rating

A.1: Authorizing Mission (2. 5 percent)*	4
A.2: Authorizer Organizational Goals (1. 25 percent)**	4
A.3: Authorizer Structure of Operations (2. 5 percent)	4
A.4: Authorizing Staff Expertise (2. 5 percent)	4
A.5: Authorizer Knowledge and Skill Development of Authorizing Leadership and Staff (2. 5 percent)**	4
A.6: Authorizer Operational Budget for Authorizing the Portfolio of Charter Schools (2. 5 percent)	4
A.7: Authorizer Operational Conflicts of Interest (2. 5 percent)	4
A.8: Ensuring Autonomy of the Charter Schools in the Portfolio (2. 5 percent)	4
A.9: Authorizer Self-Evaluation of Capacity, Infrastructure and Practices (1. 25 percent)**	3
A.10: Authorizer High-Quality Authorizing Dissemination (1. 25 percent)**	4
A.11: Authorizer Compliance to Responsibilities Stated in Statute (3. 75 percent)	4
Total Performance Measures A Rating:	3. 95

Performance Measures B: Authorizer Processes and Decision-Making – 75 Percent Weight of Overall Rating

B.1: New Charter School Decisions (11. 25 percent)*	4
B.2: Interim Accountability Decisions (11. 25 percent: 3. 75 percent for expansion requests; 3. 75 percent for ready to open standards; 3. 75 percent for change in authorizers)	
Expansion Requests (3. 75 percent)	4
Ready to Open Standards (3. 75 percent)	4
Change in Authorizers (3. 75 percent)	4
B.3: Contract Term, Negotiation and Execution (7. 5 percent)	4
B.4: Performance Outcomes and Standards (11. 25 percent)	4
B.5: Authorizer's Processes for Ongoing Oversight of the Portfolio of Charter Schools (7. 5 percent)	4
B.6: Authorizer's Standards and Processes for Interventions, Corrective Action and Response to Complaints (3. 75 percent)**	4
B.7: Charter School Support, Development and Technical Assistance (3. 75 percent)**	4
B.8: High-Quality Charter School Replication and Dissemination of Best School Practices (3. 75 percent)**	4
B.9: Charter School Renewal and Termination Decisions (15 percent)	4
Total Performance Measures B Rating:	4. 00

**All percentages are presented in terms of overall weight*

***Continuous Improvement Measure*

Performance Measures A: Authorizer Capacity and Infrastructure

A.1 Measure: Authorizing Mission

Guiding Question: *Does the authorizer have a clear and compelling mission for charter school authorizing?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer has a clear and compelling mission for charter school authorizing.

- The authorizer’s website states that the mission of Friends of Education (Friends) is “to improve the education of children.” This aligns with Minnesota charter school statute 124E. 01 Subd. 1 (1) to improve all pupil learning and all student achievement. The second part of the mission aligns as well: improving K-12 education since 1999, Friends supports programs which emphasize foundational skills and critical thinking with demonstrated evidence of increasing student achievement and post-secondary readiness. The mission is also stated in the Charter School Program Guide and in the narrative.
- Friends carries out its mission for charter school authorizing by having strong requirements for curriculum and by providing professional development. It also advises other authorizers and facilitates the sharing of best practices. Report cards from 2015 to 2018 indicate that the authorizer carries out its mission by authorizing schools that focus on content-rich academic models of learning such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and standards-based learning. The authorizer carries out its mission through the practice of training teachers and sharing best instructional practices to improve student learning. For example, the authorizer offered professional development to board members, school leaders and teachers around high-quality best practices (July 2015 and May 2019), effective writing strategies (July 2016), differentiated assessment and grading (August 2016), checking for understanding (July 2017) and strategies for increasing active student participation (August 2018).
- The authorizer is implementing the mission from its commissioner-approved authorizing plan (AAP), as evidenced by its website and several other documents such as tax forms. The mission has also been carried over from its commissioner-approved authorizer application (AAA).
- The mission is verified internally in practice by having stringent standards for applications and monitoring, and is documented at the authorizing organization by tax forms, its website, and communications such as report cards.
- The authorizer’s mission is verified internally with consistent responses from interviewed individuals. During the authorizer interview, participants described its mission as “improving education for children” and provided examples of authorizing practices that align with the mission. Furthermore, they stated that all of the work Friends does goes through the lens of the mission, including application reviews, monitoring and oversight.
- The mission is verified by external references such as the GuideStar website and the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools website. It is also verified by the schools’ websites. Finally, the MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results show that 95 percent of respondents (n=22 total respondents) agree or strongly agree that they are familiar with the authorizer’s mission.
- During the charter school interview, school representatives consistently verified the mission, in some cases, almost verbatim. School representatives also elaborated and said that the authorizer is committed to high levels of academic achievement and that it is committed to accountability.

Key Evidence:

- A.1 Narrative
- Mission
- GuideStar Profile
- Friends Report Cards 2015 to 2018
- External Mission references
- Tax forms
- Program Guide
- AAA/AAP
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- Charter school leader interview, April 8, 2020

A.2 Measure: Authorizer Organizational Goals

Guiding Question: *Does the authorizer have clear organizational goals and timeframes for achievement that are aligned with its authorizing mission and Minnesota charter school statute?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer has clear organization goals, criteria and timeframes for achievement, which are aligned with its authorizing mission and Minnesota charter school statute.

- Friends has clear organizational goals, criteria and timeframes for achievement. In the narrative and in the annual reports, the authorizer has three goals listed: 1) to increase student performance; 2) to increase the portfolio size while maintaining quality; and, 3) to increase the number of disadvantaged students being served by the schools in its portfolio. Each of these goals has specific criteria tied to portfolio performance (e.g., portfolio proficiency achievement rate annually exceeds state average proficiency rate for all students on state assessments). The authorizer has timeframes for all its goals; student performance goals are reviewed and set annually and portfolio growth and the number of disadvantaged students are reviewed annually and set for the term.
- The original goals from the AAA and AAP are implemented. The goals from the AAP are aligned with goals in documentation (e.g., board notes) including timelines and criteria. The authorizer provides additional evidence of implementing original goals in board documents and emails.
- The goals align with the authorizing mission (to improve the education of children) by having goals related to school performance, increasing the size of the portfolio while maintaining quality, and focusing on disadvantaged children.
- The authorizer actively measures progress on its organizational goals, and each goal has at least two metrics. Meeting minutes show that the authorizer reviewed progress on its organizational goals in November 2016, November 2017, November 2018, and November 2019. For example, in 2019, the authorizer reviewed overall portfolio performance for SY 2016 through SY 2019 as compared to the state average for each year in reading, math and science. Results show that goals have consistently been met, with the exception of increasing portfolio size. As shown on the website and in the narrative, the authorizer has taken steps to market itself better through a video in order to increase applications and portfolio size.
- The authorizer regularly evaluates its monitoring and oversight practices against its authorizing mission and organizational goals. Emails to schools asking for evidence that goals have been met, in addition to board documents, show that Friends implements plans for improvement. Meeting notes indicate that Friends reviewed strategies implemented to grow the size of its portfolio and analyzed results (e.g., increase by 17 percent the number of students served). Additionally, the authorizer reviewed strategies for increasing enrollment of disadvantaged students (e.g., reporting dissemination activities to traditionally disadvantaged communities) and analyzed results (e.g., 19.7 percent increase in students who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds). A review of the enrollments by student demographics from SY 2015 through SY 2019 shows that the number of students in traditionally disadvantaged student groups (i.e., students of color, students who are English learners [ELs], students who receive special education services, students who qualify for free- and reduced-price meals and students who identify as homeless) increased in all categories.

Key Evidence:

- A.2 Narrative
- Board Review materials
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- Dissemination information
- School demographics by year
- AAA/AAP

A.3 Measure: Authorizer Structure of Operations

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer operate with a clear structure of duties and responsibilities and sufficient resources to effectively oversee its portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently operates with a clear structure of duties and responsibilities and has sufficient resources to effectively oversee its portfolio of charter schools.

- The authorizer's structures of duties and responsibilities are clearly defined through job descriptions and the organizational chart. The authorizer's staffing model includes an executive director, education program specialist, one assistant and external consultants (as needed) who total 2.9 full-time equivalent (FTE) employment. According to the narrative, this allows for a ratio of one staff member to every 5.5 charter schools within the authorizer's portfolio. Friends has a sufficient staffing ratio, which is well below the National Association of Charter School Authorizer's (NACSA) suggestion of a 1:10 ratio. Descriptions of the positions as well as the organizational chart show that Friends has a clear structure of duties and responsibilities within its staffing model. For example, the executive director is responsible for all matters relating to the development and implementation of educational initiatives, including, but not limited to, establishing and implementing an oversight program for charter schools, developing strategic planning initiatives and the annual budget and managing staff and consultants. The education program specialist is primarily responsible for assessment analysis and monitoring in both primary and secondary schools, as well as reviewing compliance. The assistant is primarily responsible for supporting the authorizer's portfolio through the review of school reports, board minutes and websites. External consultants are also used when necessary, particularly to provide additional expertise, as well as to assist with site visits. The authorizer confirmed these roles and duties during the interview. As shown in the Charter School Program Guide, and confirmed in the authorizer interview, the authorizer also has an advisory committee that has been in place since 2010 and is made up of several board members and external consultants. The committee is fully empowered to make renewal and closure decisions in lieu of the board, which only meets four times per year. During the authorizer interview, participants explained that some decisions need to be made in a schedule that does not align with the quarterly board meetings, which is why the advisory committee has decision-making authority.
- The structure of duties and responsibilities are updated when necessary. For example, the authorizer readjusted FTE allocation when there was a staffing shift. Specifically, the narrative states that when an internal part-time assistant position was eliminated, the hours of another staffing position were increased from 0.5 FTE to 0.75 FTE to maintain the 2.5 internal FTE. During the authorizer interview, participants confirmed both staff duties and responsibilities as well as the FTE shift.
- Friends appropriately manages, retains and safeguards school and student information and records relating to authorizing as evidenced by its narrative description of its relationship with TCF Financial Corporation, which includes implementing data security protocols and systems, as evidenced by screenshots of data security and a memo from a data security expert. This includes, but is not limited to, limitations on individuals' access to specific drives, multi-layer threat analysis, encryption technology and a data back-up system. An email sent in January 2018 from Information Security and Risk Management at TCF Bank to the authorizer confirms that Friends has systems in place to safeguard its data from potential phishing threats, thus protecting school and student information, as well as records relating to authorizing. The authorizer provided a memo stating that the relationship (including services provided) with TCF has been in place since 2015.

- During the authorizer interview, participants verified the structure of duties, responsibilities and staffing levels and provided examples of how Friends ensures that staffing levels are sufficient. For example, as stated above, the staffing ratio is approximately 1:5.5. The authorizer hires consultants on an as-needed basis to support its work.
- Level 2 indicators were met for the term to date. In both the narrative and the interview, the authorizer confirmed that, since 2015, a clear structure of duties has been defined and charted, to sufficiently meet the needs of the portfolio. Moreover, Friends has updated these as necessary. The Annual Report and Charter School Program Guide show that, with the support of TCF, the authorizer manages, retains and safeguards school and student information and records. Its relationship with TCF goes back to 2015 (if not earlier).
- In the charter school leader interview, the majority of participants confirmed that the authorizer operates with a clear structure of duties and responsibilities as well as sufficient resources to effectively oversee its portfolio of charter schools. For example, representatives stated that the authorizer is well-informed, has high levels of expertise and acts as a resource and a thought-partner for academics, finance, legal and operations. Additionally, charter school leaders added that the consultants have a high level of expertise and that they complete school quality reviews and attend board meetings. All school leaders agreed that the authorizer provides resources without compromising autonomy. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results also indicate that 90 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that staffing was sufficient.

Key Evidence:

- A.3 Narrative
- Program Guide: Organizational Chart
- Data Security
- Position descriptions
- Budget
- Friends Practices
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- AAA/AAP
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- Charter school leader interview, April 8, 2020

A.4 Measure: Authorizing Staff Expertise

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer have appropriate experience, expertise and skills to sufficiently oversee the portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently has appropriate experience, expertise and skills in academics, finance, operations and law, to sufficiently oversee the portfolio of charter schools.

- Friends' staff has experience, expertise and skills in academics, curriculum, instruction, finance/accounting, law, oversight, coaching and professional development and special populations (special education, ELs and gifted and talented students) as evidenced by resumes and licensures. The authorizer has five staff who have appropriate experience in education, including advanced education and experience in teaching, school improvement and accreditation and teacher training. Two of the authorizing staff have backgrounds in finance, one is also a certified public accountant. Three staff members have direct education or experience in operations, one specifically as a school administrator. The executive director has an attorney's license as well as a law certificate from another institution. The authorizer interview and supplemental documents confirmed this expertise and staffing structure.
- Because its staff and consultants have so much experience, Friends is able to sufficiently oversee its portfolio of charter schools. During the authorizer interview, participants explained how staff expertise is directly aligned with the needs of the authorizer, including curriculum and instruction, finance, legal, operations and governance. In the MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey, 91 percent of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the authorizer's staffing level is sufficient to meet the needs of their school.
- Authorizing staff experience, expertise and skills align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards, as shown in alignment to NACSA Standard #1: Agency Commitment and Capacity. Friends employs qualified and competent personnel in all areas essential to charter school oversight (i.e., academics, legal, compliance, finance, governance).
- A review of staff and consultant credentials shows that Friends' staffing has had the necessary experience for at least the authorizer term to date. The majority of staff has been at the organization since 2015 or prior to that date. Nine of the board members, internal staff and consultants who bring expertise and skills have worked with the authorizer since at least 2015.
- A review of credentials demonstrates that the authorizing staff has experience, expertise and skills in charter school academics, finance, operations and law. This includes, but is not limited to, Certified Public Accountant certification, educator licenses issued by the state of Minnesota, and an attorney license.

Key Evidence:

- A.4 Narrative
- Occasional Consultant
- Staff Expertise and credentials
- A.4 National Standards Alignment
- Knowledge and Skill Development Schedule
- Budget
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools
- AAA/AAP
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020

A.5 Measure: Authorizer Knowledge and Skill Development of Authorizing Leadership and Staff

Guiding Questions: *To what degree does the authorizer build the knowledge and skill base of its authorizing leadership and staff through professional development? Is professional development aligned with the authorizer's operations, mission and goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently builds the knowledge and skill base of its authorizing staff through professional development, which is aligned with the authorizer's operations, mission and goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools.

- Professional development (PD) is intentional and planned to build the knowledge and skill base of staff. For example, the goals outlined in the AAP for PD are to inform and enhance its authorizing practices, better understand school operational requirements and improve pupil learning and achievement. PD is offered in a variety of topics and formats (e.g., attendance at national conferences, bringing in experts, etc.). The authorizer has a PD Strategic Plan that identifies each PD event and aligns that event with an area of need, as identified in surveys. Areas of need include: analyzing data, board function, charter school lease, creating assessments, data-driven instruction, elimination of the achievement gap, financial operation, legal and compliance, policy, school culture and school operations. There is documentation of PD topics, attendance and how it addressed a necessary skill-base for authorizing leadership (i.e., charter statute, law for authorizers, etc.), in addition to how the PD aligns with operations, mission and organizational goals. Certificates of Attendance are also included in the documentation. As examples, one listed PD event is the MDE's ESSA Webinar (July 2016), which is aligned with analyzing data. Another event is the NACSA Leadership Conference (2015, 2016, 2017, 2019), which aligns with school operations. A third event centers on and is aligned with data-driven instruction (August 2015). As evidenced in the Knowledge and Skill Development Schedule, staff attends PD at least one time per year, if not more.
- PD aligns with the authorizer's operations, mission and organizational goals for overseeing its portfolio of charter schools. The authorizer aligns each PD session with one of the PD goals. The Knowledge and Skill Development Schedule shows that notes and evaluations tied to sessions are also in alignment with the PD goals. Review of annual reports between 2016 and 2019 also confirms that the PD attended by staff is in alignment with the authorizer's goals. A review of the Friends PD schedule shows that sessions align with its mission of improving the education of children, as well as its goals for overseeing its portfolio of schools (i.e., increasing school performance, increasing the size of its portfolio while maintaining quality and increasing the number of disadvantaged students served). For example, authorizing staff participated in sessions on topics such as the elimination of bias, data-driven instruction, evolving technology, ethics and writing workshop. In addition to attending annual NACSA Leadership Conferences, staff participated in a number of PDs on legal issues including sessions on employment law, charter statute law and open meeting laws, as well as those focused on charter school finance.
- The PD attended by Friends staff fulfills the commitments outlined in the AAP. All PD sessions are aligned with the organizational goals, including to inform and enhance authorizing practices, better understand operational requirements and improve pupil learning and achievement. All sessions included in the PD schedule are aligned with at least one of these goals, and the PD Strategic Plan aligns all sessions with one of the goals.
- The Knowledge and Skill Development Schedule shows that authorizing staff participated in five or more PD events in each year from SY 2015 through SY 2019.

- PD attended by authorizing leadership and staff is customized to meet the needs of the authorizing leadership and staff. The FY 2015 Staff Survey shows that Friends surveyed its staff to determine their needs. The survey was aligned with authorizer responsibilities and goals, such as the school application review, monitoring, compliance, oversight, data and policy. The authorizer used the survey to inform its PD, as evidenced through the alignment of the survey results with the PD Strategic Plan and Knowledge and Skill Development Schedule. Staff PD Certificates of Attendance documents confirms staff attendance at sessions.
- The authorizer uses different tools to measure and evaluate its PD, including post-session quizzes, written reports following conferences and post-session surveys. These help the authorizer determine the effectiveness of each PD session or event. These evaluations are for both internal and external professional development offerings.

Key Evidence:

- A.5 Narrative
- Knowledge and Skill Development Schedule
- PD Measure and Evaluate
- FY 2015 Staff Survey
- PD Strategic Plan
- AAA/AAP
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement

A.6 Measure: Authorizer Operational Budget for Authorizing the Portfolio of Charter Schools

Guiding Question: *To what degree is the authorizer's actual resource allocation commensurate with its stated budget, and the needs and responsibilities of authorizing the portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer's actual resource allocation is consistently commensurate with its stated budget, and the needs and responsibilities of authorizing the portfolio of charter schools.

- Resource allocations for authorizing are consistent with the resource to portfolio size ratio committed to in its AAA/AAP. For example, in the AAP, the authorizer says it will maintain staffing ratios of approximately 1:5.5. The ratio over the review term has fluctuated between 1:1.48 to 1:1.52. In 2015, Friends had 16 schools in its portfolio. In 2020, the portfolio decreased to 12 schools, yet the staffing level has remained at 2.90 FTE. Despite reductions, the ratio is still approximately 1:1.52. The authorizer confirmed during the interview, and a review of the audit (contained in the 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement) confirms, that the authorizer has an endowment of two million dollars, which is more than sufficient to support the staff with the decreased portfolio size. As documented in a memo from 2015, TCF Financial Corporation pays the internal staff salaries in the form of an in-kind donation of one million dollars.
- The authorizer demonstrates that resource allocations are sufficient to fulfill authorizing responsibilities and are commensurate with the needs and scale of its portfolio (i.e., income, expenditures, number and size of the charter schools in the portfolio). For example, in the AAP, the authorizer said that it would maintain staffing ratios of 1:5.5 and, despite a reduction from sixteen to twelve schools, it now has maintained staff to school ratio of 1:1.48-1:1.52. Furthermore, the authorizer explained (and the budget confirmed) that expenditures per school have increased, despite a reduction in the number of schools in the portfolio, due to an increase in the number of students enrolled at each school. For example, the 2016 budget shows that the authorizer spent \$21,127 per school, with an increase to \$23,992 allocated per school based on the 2020 budget.
- The authorizer revised its staffing in relation to its portfolio size. For example, as shown in the Budget and Historical Expenditures, when there were 16 schools in the portfolio, the authorizer spent approximately \$55,000 on staff and consultants. However, with a decrease to twelve schools, it spent approximately \$44,000 for staffing. While the authorizer explained that it reduced one staff member by .5 FTE, it has maintained 2.9 FTE through the use of consultants over the past five years.
- Resource allocations align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards for financial resource commitments. For example, the authorizer meets the NACSA Standard #1 on agency commitment and capacity as its staffing ratio is lower than the recommended ratio (at 1:5.5 versus 1:10 which is NACSA's recommendation). As its schools are recognized by the state and nationally for their high quality (as shown in the Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools document) this would indicate that resources are sufficient. The Friends budget shows that it also receives substantial donations to support staff salaries and resources (facilities), and therefore it is not wholly dependent on fees from schools.
- Level 2 indicators were met for the authorizer term to date, as all documents, including the Budget and Historical Expenditures, Statements of Income and Expenditures and Friends Practices Result in High Quality Schools, go back to 2015.

- The budget shows that Friends allocates resources to meet nationally recognized quality authorizing standards, and revises budgets as necessary. For example, the budget shows that, with the reduction in portfolio size, the authorizer's revenue from fees decreased from approximately \$334,300 to \$289,700. Additionally, as stated above, the authorizer reduced personnel expenditures from approximately \$55,000 in 2016 to \$49,000 in 2020 by reducing the use of consultants due to the smaller portfolio size. Additionally, the authorizer explained in both the narrative and during the interview that it was able to reduce spending due to the fact that high-performing schools do not require as much technical assistance and support. Expenditures per school increased from \$21,127 in 2016 to \$23,992 in 2020 as a result of the increase in the number of enrolled students. Finally, the actual budget differs from the Estimated Budget in the AAP due to the reduction in portfolio size, showing that the authorizer allocated resources according to need.

Key Evidence:

- A.6 Narrative
- Budget and Historical Expenditures
- NACSA State of Authorizing
- AAP Budget
- FY 2015-16, 16-17, 17-18, 18-19, 19-20 Statement of Income and Expenditures
- Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020

A.7 Measure: Authorizer Operational Conflicts of Interest

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer implement a clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently implements a clear policy to address conflicts of interest in all decision-making processes concerning the portfolio of charter schools.

- Friends has a conflict of interest (COI) policy that was adopted in 2010 and is included in all charter contracts. The policy includes eight articles that directly address different conflicts of interest. The policy also includes a list of vendors/payees as well as authorized schools within the portfolio. For example, in 2019, the list included 43 vendors/payees and twelve authorized schools. Additionally, Friends specifically defines conflict of interest and autonomy within its Charter School Program Guide. The policy is intentionally implemented as all board and staff members sign a written conflict of interest policy, and it is included in board training documents. Consultants are informed annually of the conflict of interest policy. Moreover, the COI Policy and Procedure document includes a form that all employees are required to sign stating that they have received a copy of the policy, have reviewed it, read and understand it and agree to follow it. During the authorizer interview, participants confirmed that all board and staff members sign a conflict of interest policy annually throughout the authorizing period, and board meeting agendas also confirm this. Additionally, as stated in the narrative and as confirmed by the authorizer during the interview, Friends requires full disclosure of any conflicts between reviewers and decision-makers in advance of reviews or decisions.
- Friends avoids conflicts of interest that might affect its capacity to make objective, merit-based application and renewal decisions (e.g., involvement in school's performance). The Charter School Program Guide and the conflict of interest policy specifically require merit-based decisions and prohibits anyone from engaging in the activities that may prevent this. For example, an email in the COI Examples document shows that the authorizer declined a school's request to have one of the evaluators serve as a coach, citing a conflict of interest. In another email, a school's director refers to the policy when requesting permission to work with an outside consultant. These are both fully documented examples of implementing the conflict of interest policy.
- Friends ensures that application review and decision-making processes are free of conflicts of interest and requires full disclosure of any potential or perceived conflicts of interest between reviewers, decision-makers and applicants. The Reviewer Training and the Reviewer COI Statement documents, as well as the COI Policy and Procedures document, confirm that reviewers are trained in the policy and asked to sign an agreement.
- The authorizer's implementation of policy has successfully prevented or resolved conflicts of interest in a timely, fair and appropriate manner, as seen in the fully documented examples of emails in the COI Examples document. Emails were responded to within a week and cited the conflict of interest policy.
- During the evaluation, MDE did not inquire about a specific conflict of interest.

- During the interview, charter school leaders consistently confirmed that the conflict of interest policy is in place, that school representatives are aware of it and that they have seen it in practice. For example, they described that the conflict of interest policy is included in all contracts, in the Charter School Program Guide, on the Friends website and is reviewed with all schools new to the authorizer. Additionally, charter school leaders stated that they are not allowed to hire anyone, have anyone volunteer or have anyone participate in school-based discussions who is currently working for or who has any financial or personal interest with the authorizer. Conflicts of interest are also reviewed in the annual reports. Survey results show that 95 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that they are familiar with the authorizer's conflict of interest policy. 77 percent of respondents stated that they are not aware of violations of the conflict of interest policy made by the authorizer, while 23 percent of respondents stated that they are aware of violations.

Key Evidence:

- A.7 Narrative
- Charter School Program Guide
- Reviewer Training
- Reviewer COI Statement
- COI example
- Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedures
- Authorizer Interview, March 16, 2020
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- School leader interview, April 8, 2020

A.8 Measure: Ensuring Autonomy of the Charter Schools in the Portfolio

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer preserve and support the essential autonomies of the portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently preserves and supports the essential autonomies of the portfolio of charter schools.

- Friends has a clear policy to ensure school autonomy, which is detailed in its contracts (Section 2) where it states that the authorizer does not make academic or financial decisions. The policy has been in place since 2010. The Charter School Program Guide outlines the authorizer's role in relation to its schools. Specifically, it states that the authorizer's role is that of oversight, and notes six guiding principles in line with its statutory duty, including: monitoring and evaluating performance only (but not managing or operating schools); no authorizer staff sitting on school boards; no authorizer staff employed by or volunteering at school level; voluntary technical assistance; minimization of burden on schools; and merit-based decision-making. During the interview, the authorizer described its approach to autonomy and confirmed that the policy informs all of its monitoring and oversight work.
- The authorizer's policy on school autonomy establishes and recognizes the school's authority over academics, financials and operations and respects the schools' authority over the schools' day-to-day operations. For example, the policy ensures that Friends does not operate schools or involve itself in the financial or day-to-day operations. As stated in the policy, authorizers do not work at any schools (past or presently), and technical assistance is voluntary.
- The authorizer's practice aligns with policy, as evidenced by email responses from Friends to complainants that reiterate the authorizer's jurisdiction. Specifically, the emails explain that the role of the authorizer is to provide oversight and monitoring, and that it does not manage or operate the charter school. For example, one complaint is related to teacher performance; however, the authorizer refers the complainant back to the Friends policy. Another complaint is in regards to curriculum, and, again, the authorizer refers the complainant to the policy. Furthermore, interventions and monitoring reports provide evidence that the authorizer holds charter schools responsible for performance outcomes and compliance with statute rather than for processes and inputs.
- The authorizer's policy aligns with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards as it ensures autonomy over governance, personnel, school culture, vision, programming and budgets. Friends has written a blog for NACSA outlining best practices on autonomy, showing its expertise on the subject. According to the narrative, Friends only steps in when a school has failed to meet financial, academic or legal outcome measures. The narrative states that the authorizer respects the school's authority over day-to-day operations and does not direct or participate in school-based decision-making. In authorizer and charter school leader interviews, participants explained that Friends only requires the minimum required reporting measures necessary to adequately monitor the schools in its portfolio. This is to reduce the burden on schools. Moreover, it provides a waiver to schools who are consistently compliant and meet performance goals, further reducing their reporting requirements. This confirms that the authorizer holds charter schools accountable for performance outcomes and compliance, rather than processes. Representatives from Friends confirmed these practices during the interview and in the 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement document.

- During the interview, most charter school leaders agreed that the authorizer’s policy and practices ensure their school’s autonomy. For example, they explained that Friends reviews all monthly board minutes but does not monitor board work, and, while the authorizer asks probing questions and offers advice, schools are not required to follow the advice. Some school representatives commented that the authorizer continually refers back to the contract in terms of roles and responsibilities and autonomy. MAPES Cohort One School Leadership Survey results indicate that 82 percent of respondents agree or strongly agree that the authorizer preserves the school board’s autonomy over policy matters related to operating the school.

Key Evidence:

- A.8 Narrative
- NACSA Minutes Blog
- A.8 National Standards Alignment
- Charter School Program Guide
- Charter Contract
- Complaints and Responses
- AAA/AAP
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- School leader interview, April 8, 2020

A.9 Measure: Authorizer Self-Evaluation of Capacity, Infrastructure and Practices

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer self-evaluate its internal ability (capacity, infrastructure and practices) to oversee the portfolio of charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 3-Commendable

Finding: The authorizer regularly self-evaluates its internal ability (capacity, infrastructure and practices) to oversee the portfolio of charter schools.

- The authorizer annually evaluates its internal ability to oversee the portfolio. The AAP includes four areas for self-evaluation, including: staff performance reviews, authorizer procedure review, staffing adequacy and internal process. Annual reports from FY 2016 through FY 2019 discuss ways in which the authorizer evaluates its internal ability to oversee the portfolio of charter schools. This includes: the board regularly monitoring school performance and requiring reporting of school performance at its board meetings, and the authorizer meeting with staff regularly to review priorities, assess work product, and review procedures and initiatives. The annual reports state that the authorizer met all four annual organizational goals for each year in the term, as discussed and documented at board meetings. Additional documentation shows that the authorizer completes self-evaluations in four areas: staff performance reviews, authorizer procedure review, adequate staffing, and internal processes. Board meeting agendas reviewed showed that the authorizer spent a portion of the meeting discussing topics or processes integral to their work. A review of the employee performance appraisals for the education program specialist and executive assistant between 2015 and 2019 include short- and long-term goals to be accomplished by the next appraisal period. These include several improvements to staff technical skills, plans to create instructional materials, and website improvements to make school submissions of reports more streamlined. Emails and tickets submitted also show that these website improvements were requested. Staffing adequacy is also reviewed annually and is seen in financial reports as well as board meeting agendas. Documents, including board meeting agendas, show that the authorizer conducted several procedure reviews during the review term. For example, review of an attorney's invoice from January 2016 shows that FOE worked with an attorney to better understand closure law. The authorizer then worked with MACSA to propose revisions to Minnesota Statutes, section 124E.10 pertaining to school closures. A comparison of contract templates shows that FOE revised its contract to align with the language of the proposed revisions. Additionally, an attorney review of the complaint process as evidenced by attorney bills, resulted in a change to the Charter School Program Guide. Board meeting agendas confirm that the school closure, complaint process and change to the Charter School Program Guide were discussed. Board meeting agendas and an attorney bill also confirm that the authorizer reviewed its conflict of interest procedures but did not make any changes. FOE monthly board meeting agendas also confirm that internal financial reviews (budgets, audits, financial positions and statements) are also part of the evaluations. The board also reviews the Annual Report each year.
- Self-evaluations are intentional and used to build the authorizer's capacity, infrastructure and practices to oversee its portfolio of schools. Board meeting agendas confirm that the authorizer regularly (annually) discussed organizational goals. The authorizer also engaged in a strategic planning process in 2019 in which it interviewed school leaders and board members, identified strengths and weaknesses and then made action plans in the areas of oversight such as financials, governance, growth plans, marketing and oversight. Board meeting minutes show that the strategic plan and a following action plan were discussed with the board.
- A review of the authorizer's Continuous Improvement Schedule and Calendar shows that it is engaged in improving its practices. There are some clear connections between the authorizer's self-evaluation activities

(strategic plan, staffing review, financial reviews) and the Continuous Improvement Schedule and Calendar. For example, some activities on the Continuous Improvement Schedule, such as financial reviews, are connected to the board review of financials. Additionally, staff reviews are listed on the Continuous Improvement Schedule.

- Although the authorizer provides documented evidence comparing their practices to the nationally recognized Ohio Department of Education authorizing standards, including a plan to address gaps, there is no evidence that this comparison was done more than once. Nor is there any additional documented evidence of reflective practices to maintain an organizational focus on purposeful improvement. Finally, the authorizer confirmed during the interview that it has weekly meetings to gather information and discuss how to improve practices. A review of meeting agendas confirmed that they included topics such as goals, a review of annual reports and improvement; however, the agendas only listed general bullets around self-evaluation and did not include detailed information.

Key Evidence:

- A.9 Narrative
- CIP Schedule
- OH Sponsor Compliance Requirement
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- AAA/AAP
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- A.9 Narrative Supplement
- A.9 Supplement

A.10 Measure: Authorizer High-Quality Authorizing Dissemination

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer disseminate best authorizing practices and/or assist other authorizers in high-quality authorizing?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently disseminates best authorizing practices and assists other authorizers in high-quality authorizing.

- Friends engages with other authorizers to improve the authorizing community of practice, as evidenced by its role in leading professional development, providing ongoing support, and attending Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA) meetings regularly. A review of meeting minutes from MACSA shows that the authorizer regularly attended meetings between November 2015 and October 2019. Emails between other authorizers and Friends of Education show that, in addition to attending the MACSA meetings, the authorizer regularly engaged with other organizations between 2015 and 2019 around improving authorizing practices.
- Friends regularly shares best practices with and provides support to other authorizers, both by proactively leading sessions and responding to technical support inquiries. The National Request for Assistance document and the Friends Provides Technical Assistance Session document show that NACSA has referred other authorizers to Friends for assistance. The authorizer has also shared a number of resources with other organizations, including its charter contract template, information about school closures and a sample revocation letter and information about open meeting laws. The National Request for Assistance document shows that Friends also shared knowledge regarding school contracts and general authorizing during a NACSA Leadership Conference session. Friends representatives presented on Contracting for Renewal at the NACSA conference in October 2015. Additionally, the authorizer hosted a technical assistance session on Charter School Leases from a Developer/Landlord in June 2016, to which it invited other authorizers.
- Friends' best practices and supports are sought out by other authorizers, as evidenced by Friends presenting at national conferences, referrals by NACSA, requests from other authorizers and references to its contract template as an exemplar. Emails from other authorizers show that they sought out Friends of Education's knowledge and expertise repeatedly between 2015 and 2019. In addition to the items listed above, colleagues sought the authorizer's guidance on items such as board membership, processes for conducting background checks and waiting lists. Finally, the Friends Provides Technical Assistance Session document shows that the authorizer has been sought out by other organizations to provide clarity around different state statutes.

Key Evidence:

- A.10 Narrative
- MACSA meeting minutes
- Friends Provides Technical Assistance Session
- Authorizers Request Friends' Assistance
- National Requests for Assistance
- NACSA Blog
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- AAA/AAP

A.11 Measure: Authorizer Compliance to Responsibilities Stated in Statute

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer comply with reporting, submissions and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statutes?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently complies with reporting, submissions and deadlines set forth in Minnesota Statutes.

- According to MDE records, the authorizer was 100 percent compliant throughout the term in all relevant areas, including MDE required trainings, statement of income and expenditures, authorizer annual reports, supplemental affidavits and renewed charter contracts. The authorizer did not open any new schools or have any mergers or changes in authorizer during the review term.

Key Evidence:

- A.11 Narrative
- MDE Review of Yinghua Contract
- AAA/AAP
- MAPES Compliance Data Spreadsheet – Friends of Education

Performance Measures A: Rating (25 Percent Weight of Overall Rating)

MAPES Performance Measures A Rating for Friends of Education is 3. 95.

Performance Measures A: Rating Drivers

- Friends of Education has stayed true to its mission. All actions taken and decisions made align with the mission. It also has clear organizational goals and timelines, and evaluates its work regularly in terms of its authorizing mission and organizational goals.
- Friends has a clear structure of duties and responsibilities that are sufficient to effectively oversee its portfolio of schools, and safeguards school and student information as well as records relating to authorizing. Its staff has appropriate experience, expertise, skills and credentials that align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards.
- Friends has intentional, regular and customized professional development for staff that is measured and evaluated. Moreover, Friends frequently disseminates best practices and assists other authorizers.
- Friends has a clear conflict of interest policy and implementation of the policy that is intentional and has prevented conflicts. Friends also has clear policies and practices in place to ensure the autonomy of schools, and recognizes schools' authority over academics, financials and day-to-day operations.
- Friends has not implemented regular, intentional and consistent tools and processes for self-evaluation and continuous improvement plans.

Performance Measures A: Recommendations

- Create a tool to capture the reflective practices that the organization is using around purposeful improvement and use this tool to regularly self-evaluate FOE's internal ability to oversee its portfolio of schools.

Performance Measures B: Authorizer Processes and Decision-Making

B.1 Measure: New Charter School Decisions

Guiding Questions: *To what degree does the authorizer have clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate new charter school proposals? To what degree did the authorizer's decisions and resulting actions align to its stated approval and process standards and promote the growth of high-quality charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate new charter proposals.

- The charter school application includes six overall sections: executive summary, school foundation, pre-operational planning, fiscal soundness, other (i.e., other applications) and required attachments. Within each of these sections are sub-categories and aligned questions, which the applicant must complete. For example, within the section for school foundation, the applicant must provide information about: the need for the school; the management organization; whether or not the school will provide virtual/online programming; the vision and mission; the purpose of the charter school; the school's learning program and goals for student achievement; and the school founders. The authorizer provides clear and specific instructions and criteria for the completion of a new school application, including an application timeline with an application due date and an approval/denial decision date. The authorizer's application process is comprehensive, includes clear application questions and guidance and includes fair, transparent procedures, timelines and rigorous criteria, with an information stage, a development stage, a desk review phase, an expert review phase, interview phase, evaluation phase and results communication phase, and comprehensive review of materials and data against a rubric. The process also includes interviews, trainings and one-to-one assistance. Friends conducted an external evaluation of its process. It updated the process to include virtual schools and English language guidance. Application materials can be found on the authorizer's website, and all applicants complete the same process, according to a review of the application.
- The authorizer's decisions on applications and resulting actions are consistent across the portfolio of charter schools. According to the narrative, and as confirmed by the authorizer during the interview, all schools complete the same process and all reviewers complete a training. Reviewer training materials are included in the documents. The authorizer received only one application in the last five years, as seen in the narrative and as confirmed by the authorizer during the interview. This application shows a rigorous process and high standards. Evidence in the Decision Summary from the one application shows that Friends applied its evaluation criteria and, as a result, the application was denied. Notes show that the application was denied because it was incomplete. Specifically, required information (i.e., founder information and interested family contact information) was omitted. Additionally, the application showed "significant fiscal deficiency." In the authorizer interview, participants explained that there have been few new applications, and they attributed this to "market saturation" of charter schools in Minnesota. According to the narrative and as confirmed in the authorizer interview, Friends has taken steps to address the lack of applications and to reflect upon how it can increase them.

- Decisions and resulting actions align with the AAP. Questions within the application align with the authorizer's mission of improving the education of children through increasing school performance, maintaining quality by focusing on content-rich models and increasing the number of disadvantaged students who are served. The application specifically asks the applicant to describe the learning program, including the education philosophy; curricula, tools, methods and instructional techniques; how it will serve traditionally disadvantaged students, special education students and students with limited English proficiency; and how students will be assessed. Additionally, the application requires accountability goals and an explanation of how the educational program and accountability outcomes are designed to meet or exceed the outcomes established by the Minnesota Commissioner of Education for public school students. Furthermore, the application seeks information about the school's operational planning, including governance; marketing outreach, enrollment and admission; facility plan; calendar and transportation; and management goals and challenges. The application and decision-making ensure that new schools are fiscally sound. As stated above, the one new school application received by the authorizer was denied in part due to lack of fiscal soundness.
- The authorizer's new charter school application and decision process aligns with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards: NACSA Standard #2: Application Process and Decision Making. The application materials and applications meet several national standards; the process states chartering priorities, articulates comprehensive application questions, provides clear guidance, welcomes first time applicants, encourages expansion, considers diverse approaches, allows time and requires applicants to demonstrate capacity to serve students with diverse needs. The application process is open, well-publicized and transparent, and is posted to the authorizer's website. There is also sufficient time between each stage of the application process as shown in the timeline document. The authorizer grants charters only to those who have demonstrated competence and capacity in all aspects of the school consistent with stated approval criteria. Additionally, the document showing a charter application denial due to lack of fiscal responsibilities is further evidence of the alignment with nationally recognized authorizing standards.
- The application and decision-making process reflects a clear strategy to promote high-quality charter schools. The process is detailed, includes a thorough review related to all aspects of high-quality charter schools, including academic and financial performance and is applied to applicants. Friends has only had one new application during this term. The New Charter School Decision Summary and Review Process Example document shows that the authorizer denied authorization for the following reasons: incomplete application, omitted required founder information, omitted required interested family contact information; significant fiscal deficiency: assumes grant funds currently not available. According to the narrative, despite being denied authorization by Friends, the school applied for approval with another authorizer. This school has now opened under another authorizer and fell 40 percent below its enrollment target (see MN Charter Sector Growth Data Review). The lack of demonstration of sufficient interest was one of the reasons that Friends denied the application, showing their commitment to opening high-quality charter schools.
- According to the narrative, the Charter School Application has been in place since at least 2015, although it has been amended to include inquiries regarding virtual/online schools, to correct typographical errors and to update terminology related to ELs, among other minor revisions. Documented examples of the charter applications date to 2016, and authorizer interviews confirmed that the application and the process have been in place throughout the term.

- A majority of school representatives verified during the interview that the application process is clear, transparent and aligned with standards, and that it promotes high-quality charter schools. For example, school leaders outlined an application process that includes performance goals in the application, a review by the authorizer and outside experts and an interview. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey data shows that 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the approval process, application and timelines are clear.
- The authorizer's decisions have resulted in high-quality charter schools. MDE has rated 83 percent of Friends' portfolio as high-quality, and ten of its schools have received that designation more than once. According to the Friends' Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools document, three schools have been designated as National Blue Ribbon Schools. Additionally, this document shows that Friends' schools consistently outperform the state average on state tests and Friends' high schools are ranked in the top twelve ACT scores in the state.

Key Evidence:

- B.1 Narrative
- External Review Survey
- Charter School Application
- Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools
- B.1 National Standards Alignment
- Charter Application Timeline
- New Charter School Decision Summary
- New Charter School Evaluation Rubric
- Replication Application
- Reviewer Training
- B.1 website screenshots
- AAA/AAP
- Final MDE Analysis of Submissions
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- Charter School Performance Data
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- School leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.2 Measure: Interim Accountability Decisions (i.e., site/grade level/early learning expansions, ready to open, and change in authorizer)

Guiding Questions: *To what degree does the authorizer have clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate proposals of existing charter school expansion requests and other interim changes? To what degree did the authorizer's decisions and resulting actions regarding charter school expansion and other interim changes align to its stated approval and process standards and promote the growth of high-quality charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently has clear and comprehensive approval criteria and process standards to rigorously evaluate proposals of existing charter school expansion requests and other interim changes, and decisions and resulting actions regarding charter and other interim changes align with its stated approval and process standards, promoting the growth of high-quality charter schools.

- The Charter School Program Guide includes requirements for expansion applications: evaluation of planned growth (how it will affect school facilities, staff and enrollment); evaluation of current school academic performance; evaluation of legal and fiscal performance. The authorizer's application processes for expansion are comprehensive, include clear application questions and guidance and include fair, transparent procedures, timelines and rigorous criteria, which include: internal review of the application for determination of meeting application criteria; site visit and evaluation, recommendation to the charter school committee/board; and committee/board review and decision-making. Applicants are expected to provide comprehensive information with respect to the growth plan and academic, fiscal and operational performance. The application process includes a detailed and thorough review of all aspects of high-performing charter schools (i.e., fiscal soundness, academic performance and operations) including use of a rubric, as shown in the Transfer Example: Friends Decision document. Under school opening conditions, Friends includes school-opening conditions/significant target dates, including by when the school leader will be identified, by when facilities must be secured, and by when enrollment and staffing projections must be realized. Emails provided show reminders from Friends around the level of rigor. All information is provided on the website and the Charter School Program Guide. During the authorizer interview, participants confirmed the processes and that the Charter School Program Guide was put into place in 2010; it has been updated as necessary.
- Friends' decisions and resulting actions are consistent across the portfolio of charter schools. All expansion applicants must complete the same process. For example, early learning expansions must use the same application as other grade level expansions. The authorizer documented three schools transferring or expanding during the review term, and they all completed the same processes. A review of Friends' decisions show that it used its application and review process (including a rubric) to accept a change in authorizer. This was based on the school's strong academic performance and finances, as well as lack of operational issues. Additionally, it approved two school expansions based on strong academic performance and finances, and no significant operational issues. There is no documentation to show that any schools were denied a school expansion request during the review term. Documentation includes expansion and transfer application processes going back to 2015.
- The authorizer's decisions and resulting actions align with its AAP. The rubrics and the processes are set forth in the AAP and additional documentation (Charter School Program Guide, application) confirm the process, which evaluates criteria around academic, fiscal and operational performance. The process outlined in the AAP aligns with the application process in the Charter School Program Guide. This includes an internal review of the application for determination of meeting application criteria; recommendation to the charter school committee/board; and committee/board review and decision.

- Friends’ interim accountability processes align with NACSA Standard #2: Application Process and Decision-Making. Friends has different application processes and rubrics for expansions and transfer. It provides clear evidence of capacity to open new schools while maintaining quality in existing schools, including distinct requirements that are outlined in the Charter School Program Guide and Change in Authorizer Application and Rubric; documenting the educational, organizational and financial performance of its schools; and ensuring that they meet high standards to earn approval for replication.
- The interim accountability process reflects a clear strategy to promote high-quality charter schools. Documents repeatedly refer to “past performance being an indicator of future performance” and review procedures follow this. The narrative describes a “Ready to Open” checklist with six key related tasks. A review of supplemental documents confirms a comprehensive “Ready to Open” checklist that includes academics (curriculum, instruction, assessment), finances, operations (including facilities) and governance.
- Level 2 indicators were met for the authorizer term to date as confirmed by the Charter School Program Guide as well as by a review of expansion applications and expansion review materials.
- During the interview, charter school leaders verified that Friends has a clear and transparent process for expansion, including criteria that promote high-quality charter schools. For example, leaders described an application for expansion, including a timeline, and an accompanying rubric aligned with MDE standards. Additionally, some school leaders described going through a data-driven expansion process that included a market study of other schools in the area, a plan for a facility, a review of financials and a review of academic performance. Leaders described how, during this process, the authorizer asked probing and guiding questions to support the expansion. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results indicate that 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that expansion processes, application, review timelines and approval criteria were clear.
- Authorizer decisions have resulted in high-quality charter schools, as evidenced by state and national recognition, state test scores and ACT scores. Friends schools are consistently highly ranked, often in the top ten schools in Minnesota. For example, in the Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools document, the following schools were designated as high-quality by MDE, many of them several times: Aspen Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019), Cologne Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2020), DaVinci Academy (2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), Eagle Ridge Academy (2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), Hennepin Elementary School (2016, 2019), Nova Classical Academy (2017, 2018), Parnassus Preparatory Charter School (2019, 2020), Seven Hills Preparatory Academy (2016, 2019), St. Croix Preparatory Academy (2016, 2017, 2019, 2020), Yinghua Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020).

Key Evidence:

- B.2 Narrative
- Expansion Application
- Change in Authorizer Rubric
- Expansion Example HES
- Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools
- B.2 National Standards Alignment
- Transfer Example Application Review
- Transfer Application
- Transfer Example: Friends Decision
- Transfer Example Reviewer Packet
- Transfer Example Site Team Reviewers Combined Comments
- AAA/AAP
- Program Guide
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- School leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.3 Measure: Contract Term, Negotiation and Execution

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer execute contracts that clearly define material terms and rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently executes contracts that clearly define material terms and rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer and that meet statutory requirements.

- Contracts in the authorizer’s portfolio of charter schools meet current statutory requirements, as evidenced by the crosswalk of the contract to the statutes as well as information within the MAPES data compliance tracker. For example, each statute is mapped to a section of the contract. Additionally, 100 percent of the contracts in the authorizer’s portfolio of charter schools meet current statutory requirements throughout the term, according to MDE. Contracts provided date back to 2015 and are consistent in format and content.
- A review of Friends’ contracts with its charter schools clearly shows that the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer are clearly defined. All of Friends’ current contracts state explicitly that the authorizer confers certain rights, privileges and obligations onto the school. These rights and responsibilities are then defined and explained in the contract. For example, the contract explains the school’s responsibility related to financial and operational performance and governance. Additionally, the contract states that if there is a change in existing law that alters the rights of the school or authorizer, the contract will be amended to reflect applicable law.
- The authorizer’s contracting practices are consistent across the authorizer’s portfolio of charter schools, as evidenced by review of the individual school contracts. The authorizer uses a contract template as the basis for each school. Charter school leaders confirmed this during the interview. Contracts from St. Croix Preparatory Academy, Eagle Ridge Academy, Nova Classical Academy, Cologne Academy and Hennepin Elementary show consistency across the portfolio of schools, including roles and responsibilities of the school and of Friends (i.e., oversight and monitoring), operating requirements, compliance with state and federal law. The roles and responsibilities of schools are outlined in contract sections IV, VI, VII, VIII and Exhibits D-L.
- Contracts were executed no later than the first day of the renewal period, as evidenced by MAPES Data reports and the contracts.
- Review of contract amendments shows that Friends executes contract amendments for material changes to current school plans when necessary, and not in lieu of conducting renewal evaluations. The narrative states that amendments may be requested by the authorizer or schools, are reviewed on a case-by-case basis and are required to be submitted to the authorizer in writing. Moreover, the authorizer does not make amendments to academic goals if the goals are not met or if the school has failed to make progress without outside factors. Within Friends’ contracts with its schools, the language specifically references amendments as necessary to reflect applicable law. For example, Friends amended its contract with Hennepin Elementary School as of June 2018 to reflect the school’s expansion from grades K-6 to grades K-8. The amendment included new academic targets for grades 7 and 8. Friends’ contract with New Millennium Academy was amended as of February 2018 to reflect updated goals specific to the use of assessments. The authorizer’s amendments to its contracts with Clarkfield Area Charter School in November 2017 and Nova Classical Academy in December 2017 established new admissions policies and procedures at each school. All of the submitted contract amendments were completed in addition to, and not in lieu of, renewal evaluations conducted by the authorizer.

- Level 2 indicators were met for the authorizer term to date, as evidenced by a review of contracts.
- Charter school leaders consistently verified during the interview that the authorizer executes contracts aligned with statutes and that they clearly define material terms and the rights and responsibilities of the school and Friends. On its website, Friends includes a contract template and gives guidance on what is non-negotiable in the contract. Non-negotiables include alignment with statutes, academic, financial and operational goals and comparison school data. Some charter school leaders described having multiple conversations with the authorizer that were rooted in the contract and its provisions. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results indicated that 100 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that contracts have clear provisions and terms, include terms the school negotiated for and clearly outline the responsibilities of the school. 95 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed in the survey that the contracts clearly outline the responsibilities of the authorizer.

Key Evidence:

- B.3 Narrative
- Charter Contracts and Exhibits Template
- Charter Contracts Amendment Sample
- School Contracts
- AAA/AAP
- Program Guide
- MAPES Compliance Data Sheet
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- School leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.4 Measure: Performance Outcomes and Standards

Guiding Questions: *To what degree does the authorizer execute contracts with clear, measurable and attainable performance standards? To what degree does the authorizer hold charter schools in its portfolio accountable to its academic, financial and operational performance outcomes and standards?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently executes contracts with clear, measurable and attainable performance standards, and consistently holds charter schools in its portfolio accountable to academic, financial and operational performance outcomes and standards.

- The contracts in the authorizer’s portfolio of charter schools meet current statutory performance standards, as seen in the crosswalk between the contracts and the standards. All school contracts in place during the term of the review include exhibits that meet the current performance standards. MDE documents indicate that 100 percent of school contracts meet current statutory performance standards.
- A review of Friends’ contracts with its schools confirms that the authorizer defines clear, measurable and attainable academic, financial and operational performance outcomes and standards, as well as consequences for meeting or not meeting performance outcomes and standards. For example, Exhibit F in each contract lists academic, financial and operational performance standards, as well as consequences of not meeting the standards. Additionally, performance outcomes are in part VI, X and XI of each contract. Each contract has a Governance and Management Plan, Administration and Operations Plan and Financial Management Plan that includes financial and operations goals (e.g., minimum fund balance of 25 percent). Contracts also have academic and non-academic goals built around World’s Best Workforce Goals. For example, contracts include third-grade reading goals and student group goals for reading and math. They also include career and college goals (e.g., administration of NWEA MAP or ACT and aligned performance goals) and readiness for school goals (e.g., the use of screeners to determine Kindergarten readiness).
- Performance outcomes and standards are consistent across the portfolio, as evidenced by the Contract Exhibit F Examples, which contain the same performance standards. A review of contracts for all schools within Friends’ portfolio shows that performance outcomes and standards are consistent. However, in some contracts, standards might be weighted differently for academic performance (e.g., some at 50 percent and some at 40 percent).
- Contract performance standards align with the performance standards of its AAP. A review of both the contracts and the AAP shows that contracts have the same standards in place as are outlined in the AAP.
- Friends holds its charter schools accountable to academic, financial and operations performance outcomes and standards defined in the contract. For example, in the documents showing termination, compliance notices and interventions, the authorizer has held six schools accountable through the implementation of interventions. These range from financial concerns to academic underperformance. For example, review of the Interventions Schedule shows Friends’ concern that a school board member who had a financial interest in a potential vendor did not recuse himself during a related board vote. This resulted in Friends issuing a Notice of Concern and requiring a Performance Improvement Plan. In another example, Friends notes three successive years of academic decline at a school. In response, it met with school leaders on the topic (confirmed by the release of state test scores) and sent a Notice of Intent to Terminate/Not Renew Charter Contract. As a result, the school underwent a third-party evaluation, participated in a hearing, crafted an improvement plan and received a contract extension. It should be noted that the school transferred to another authorizer. Charter school leaders consistently confirmed during the interview that they immediately respond to any interventions and always follow up on an improvement plan, when necessary.

- The authorizer executes contracts that align with nationally recognized quality performance standards. For example, the performance standards align with NACSA's Standard #3: Performance Contracting Standards because Friends' contracts define clear, measurable and attainable academic, financial and organizational performance standards and targets that the school must meet as a condition of renewal. A review of Exhibit F across all of the contracts confirms that the contracts all provide evidence of standards alignment.
- The authorizer's performance standards reflect a clear strategy to promote high-quality charter schools, as shown in its contracts and in its assurances, which are specific and aligned with statutes. For example, the authorizer has provided communication about assurances. The performance standards are meant to approve and monitor high-performing schools that are intentional about improving student achievement, and performance goals are tied to workforce goals.
- Level 2 indicators were met for the authorizer term to date, as evidenced by a review of contracts and by intervention examples. Contracts were in place with the majority of schools prior to 2015 and were renewed during the review term.
- Charter school leaders consistently verified that contracts include clear, measurable and attainable standards that are considered non-negotiables in the contract. The non-negotiables include alignment with statutes as well as academic, financial and operational goals, in addition to comparison school data. School leaders also discussed specific sections of the contract, for example, Exhibit F, where academic goals are listed. Furthermore, some school leaders stated that during the renewal process, the authorizer reviews how a school performed as compared to the goals in the contract. They explained (and a review of the contracts confirmed) that academic goals are weighted the highest when determining renewal.
- The authorizer's performance standards have resulted in high-quality charter schools, as evidenced by national and state recognition of schools, ACT scores and state test scores (higher than the state). Friends' schools are consistently highly ranked, often in the top ten schools in Minnesota. For example, in the Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools document, the following schools were designated as high-quality by MDE, many of them several times: Aspen Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019), Cologne Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2020), DaVinci Academy (2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), Eagle Ridge Academy (2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), Hennepin Elementary School (2016, 2019), Nova Classical Academy (2017, 2018), Parnassus Preparatory Charter School (2019, 2020), Seven Hills Preparatory Academy (2016, 2019), St. Croix Preparatory Academy (2016, 2017, 2019, 2020), Yinghua Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020).

Key Evidence:

- B.4 Narrative
- Assurances
- Exhibit F Examples
- B.4 National Standards Alignment
- AAA/AAP
- Friends Practices Result in High Quality Charter Schools
- Renewal Process Seven Hills
- Charter Contract & Exhibits Template
- Contract Examples
- Intervention Schedule
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- School leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.5 Measure: Authorizer's Processes for Ongoing Oversight of the Portfolio of Charter Schools

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer monitor and oversee the charter schools in the areas of academics, operations and finances according to the processes outlined in the contract and the AAA/AAP?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently monitors and oversees the charter schools in the areas of academics, operations and finances according to the process outlined in the contract and in the AAP.

- The authorizer has clear processes for oversight and monitoring. For example, the authorizer monitors academics through review of data (e.g., state assessments) and annual site visits. It ensures financial viability through monthly financial reports, regular audits and interviews with school staff and board members. Friends ensures consistent operations by conducting site visits, requiring regular reporting (e.g., attendance) and review of board minutes or attendance at board meetings. Friends ensures legal compliance through site visits and compliance reviews. Friends tracks submission of reports and general compliance. It keeps an ongoing list of reporting requirements, which school representatives can access through a reporting system via the authorizer's website. A review of the annual reports confirms monitoring processes listed above. Contracts, oversight examples and reporting documents (Consolidated Final Review Document, External Audit Review document, Reporting Compliance Document, Annual Reports) date back to 2016.
- The authorizer conducts charter oversight that competently evaluates academic, financial and operational performance and monitors compliance with applicable law, as shown in Ongoing Oversight Example documents. For example, the authorizer has Ongoing Oversight Example documents for each school, and they include audits, board minutes, financial statements and annual reports. Review of site visit reports showed that the authorizer conducts site visits and reviews data to ensure the school is meeting its academic performance goals. This was detailed in the narrative and confirmed by school leaders during the interview. The Reporting Compliance 2016-2020 document also shows that the authorizer tracks document submissions of key academic, finance and compliance documents such as school calendars, board data and enrollment data. The Annual Report Compliance 2016-2019 document shows that the authorizer is monitoring compliance for each school in areas such as enrollment, staffing, governance and academic performance. The Intervention Schedule shows how the authorizer evaluates information gained in reports and determines whether or not to take action. For example, one school showed declining academic performance for three years in a row, which resulted in performance plans and potentially termination, and another school showed a financial deficit for two years, which resulted in corrective action.
- Comparison between the AAP, the contract template and the oversight examples confirm that Friends' oversight activities align with its stated oversight and monitoring processes in its AAA/AAP. For example, in the AAP, it states that Friends will use the oversight criteria, processes and procedures identified in the contract. A review of the contract describes the oversight responsibilities of the authorizer in Article III, as monitoring and evaluating academic, financial and operational compliance. Oversight examples such as Reporting Compliance 2016-2020 and Ongoing Oversight Example 2015-2020 show alignment with the AAP and the contract in terms of actions and responsibilities. Furthermore, school leaders confirmed in the interview that the authorizer follows procedures in the contract for oversight.

- The authorizer’s oversight and monitoring practices are consistent across the portfolio of charter schools, because Friends has tracked all of its oversight and monitoring practices, uses a schedule, and asks for the same requirements during the same time period. For example, the complaint schedule and annual report compliance document show that Friends determines whether the complaint is within its purview, reviews law and school policy and takes corrective action if necessary. Reporting documents also track each school and each requirement.
- Friends’ processes align with NACSA Standard #4, Ongoing Oversight and Evaluation, as it provides this information in the contract, and conducts audits and site visits and provides annual reports.
- The authorizer’s processes for ongoing oversight of the portfolio of charter schools reflect a clear strategy to promote high-quality charter schools. For example, Friends uses specific tracking and reporting tools (audits, reporting compliance, final review documents) to monitor and ensure that schools are maintaining high-quality academics, finance and operations. The authorizer then follows up specifically on its monitoring. This is in alignment with its mission of improving education for all students.
- Level 2 indicators were met for the authorizer term to date, as evidenced by a variety of documents including data from years 2016-2019, such as Annual Report Compliance, Reporting Compliance 2016-2020 and Ongoing Oversight Example 2015-2020. Moreover, the AAA and AAP, which have been in place over the term of the review, reflect the oversight and monitoring practices, as do all contracts in place with schools since July 2015.
- School representatives consistently verified during the interview that the authorizer monitors and oversees schools in the areas of academics, finance and operations. For example, school representatives described submitting annual reports, financial audits, academic reports, academic data, board minutes and compliance reports. School representatives also described an online portal to submit information and reports that lists everything in the contract and when it is due. A majority of school representatives also described consistent feedback on reports, including annual reports, in the case that Friends finds anything missing, incomplete, low-quality or incorrect. Survey results also indicate that 95 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the authorizer monitors academic, financial and operational performance as outlined in the contract.
- Friends’ oversight has resulted in high-quality charter schools, as evidenced by state test scores that exceed state averages, ACT scores and state and national recognition. Additionally, the authorizer denied one application in 2017 for lack of fiscal responsibility and closed one school (Minneapolis Academy) in 2016 for low academic performance, showing its monitoring processes at work.

Key Evidence:

- B.5 Narrative
- Ongoing Oversight Examples ERA, FY 16-20.
- Reporting Compliance 2016-2020 All School summaries
- B.5 Alignment to National Standards
- Annual Report Compliance
- Aspen Academy (communication)
- Consolidated Financial Reports
- External Audit Review
- Ongoing Oversight Example 2015-2019
- Required Reporting
- Website Compliance Reviews
- Reporting Compliance 2016-2020
- Complaint Schedule
- Intervention Schedule
- AAA/AAP
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- Charter Contracts and Exhibit Template
- Charter School Program Guide
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Charter school leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.6 Measure: Authorizer's Standards and Processes for Interventions, Corrective Action and Response to Complaints

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer have clear and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints, intervention and/or corrective action?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints, intervention and corrective action.

- The authorizer implements clear and comprehensive standards to address complaints, intervention and corrective action. According to the Charter School Program Guide, complaints must be submitted in writing, whereupon the authorizer conducts an inquiry and attempts to respond within 30 days. For intervention, the authorizer also has a remediation process. If an issue is not resolved, Friends begins termination processes. This is evidenced in the Complaint Schedule and Intervention Schedule document, as well as the intervention example documents for several schools. The Charter School Program Guide contains the Stakeholder Grievance Policy, which outlines four key steps within the procedure: a notice of complaint; a notice of receipt; a responsible inquiry; and, the authorizer's response. Review of the complaints submitted to Friends show that it acknowledged the complaint and, when appropriate, conducted an evidence-based inquiry in order to inform its final decision. The authorizer then contacted the complainant to share the determination of inquiry. During the authorizer interview, respondents confirmed the intervention process.
- Friends' decisions and resulting actions are consistent across the portfolio of charter schools and align with its stated standards and processes in its AAA/AAP. Complaint and corrective action documents show that Friends does not intervene in complaints that are not within its realm of oversight, following the language in the AAP. Complaint and Intervention Schedule documents, as well as the intervention examples from several schools, show consistent processes, decisions and actions. Review of complaints submitted to the authorizer between SY 2015 and SY 2020 show that, when applicable, the authorizer followed the procedures outlined in the Charter School Program Guide. For example, in 2015, the authorizer received a complaint regarding a student who was able to bypass the waitlist in order to be enrolled at a school. Documents show that the authorizer immediately responded to the complaint and then opened an investigation. After a fact-based inquiry, the authorizer then came to a decision and communicated it with all parties. In other instances, the complaints did not merit a full inquiry as they were not within the authorizer's realm of oversight (e.g., were about ethical decisions versus legal decisions); in such cases, Friends cited statute and referred the complainant back to the school's board and/or school director.
- Decisions made regarding complaints, intervention and corrective action are aligned with data generated under oversight and monitoring practices. For example, a site visit or financial audit may trigger a corrective action, as seen in the Intervention Schedule and confirmed by the authorizer and the school leaders in the interviews. In cases where schools were found at fault, the authorizer created corrective action plans. For example, there were three concerns that surfaced at Hennepin in October 2015. In response, the school submitted a nine-step performance improvement plan to address deficiencies. Further documentation shows how Friends holds the school accountable for implementing its improvement plan until the deficiencies are resolved. Another example was from New Millennium Academy where there were concerns about discriminatory termination of two teachers and illegal board conduct. The authorizer followed its policy, asked for a third-party investigator and after a delay in action from the school, gave a warning, a request for how the school will rectify the concerns, a notice of termination and an informal hearing. During the interview, the authorizer confirmed that New Millennium Academy has been sent another reminder (March 2020) on the notice of concern regarding operational and governance issues. A review of additional documents confirmed the follow-up letter.

- Friends' processes and standards are aligned with NACSA Standard #4: Intervention, because processes are transparent and communicated, and the complaint process and intervention processes are based on evidence from oversight. Friends allows reasonable time for remediation and does not dictate specific strategies for responding to interventions or making improvements. A review of the charter contract shows a clear remediation process and potential consequences, including notices of violations with explanations of deficiency with specific evidence, providing schools with ample time to correct actions and repeat reminders, allowing schools to submit performance improvement plans to resolve non-legal deficiencies while retaining autonomy. Intervention documents confirm this, as well as complaint documents from Hennepin and Minneapolis Academy.
- During the interview, charter school leaders consistently verified that Friends has clear, consistent and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints, intervention and corrective action. For example, they described the complaint process as determining whether the complaint was justified and within the authorizer's purview, and if so, gathering data and information, determining if a corrective action plan or intervention is needed, and following up on the corrective action plan and intervention, oftentimes requesting documentation. They explained that the authorizer does a courtesy call to the school leader if the complaint is not within the authorizer's purview to ensure clear communication. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results also indicate that Friends has responded to complaints, with 61 percent responding that yes, Friends had responded (27 percent responding they did not know and 11 percent responding not applicable). Approximately 5 percent of schools responded that they had an intervention for academic or operational performance, with approximately 11 percent having corrective action.

Key Evidence:

- B.6 Narrative
- Complaint Schedule
- Complaints and Responses
- Interventions HES, NMA, PAI, STR, WCPCS
- B.6 National Standards Alignment
- Program Guide (Grievance Process)
- Charter Contract
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- 3/16/20 Friends of Education MAPES Supplement
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020
- Charter school leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.7 Measure: Charter School Support, Development and Technical Assistance

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer support its portfolio of charter schools through intentional assistance and development offerings?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently supports its portfolio of charter schools through proactive intentional assistance and development offerings.

- Friends' support and technical assistance are regular and proactive. The Charter School Technical Assistance and Best Practices Dissemination Schedule identifies which type of technical assistance is used and when. The authorizer provides direct assistance (based on requests) and professional development. The authorizer has a schedule that outlines the schools' individual professional development needs, which the authorizer cross-references to its overall technical assistance offerings.
- Support and technical assistance are provided in a variety of areas (academics, governance, operations and finance). The technical assistance schedule shows that Friends provided support in areas including data-driven instruction, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and individual education plans (IEP), as well as leadership, Excel, website compliance and finance, as well as other topics.
- Friends provides support and technical assistance in a way that preserves school autonomy. For example, schools are not charged for the assistance and charter school leaders consistently verified that it is voluntary. Evidence provided in the form of sign-in sheets shows that not all schools attend.
- Support and technical assistance are provided in a manner that is consistent across the portfolio of charter schools. A review of communication (e.g., emails) from Friends shows that all schools are invited to participate in technical support sessions, and that email "blasts" are sent to invite schools to sessions. Additionally, Friends received questions and requests from a variety of schools and stakeholders on topics ranging from the law to academics. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results indicate that 82 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the authorizer provides quality technical assistance.
- Support and technical assistance are regularly offered, based on demonstrated need and designed to prevent problems. Friends provides a calendar of annual technical assistance services and events, and shows which ones are proactive. Schools demonstrate their need through general surveys and post-session evaluations, as well as informally through emails from schools. The technical assistance schedule spans from 2015 through 2019, with multiple sessions offered during each year.
- Friends designs support and technical assistance in order to promote high-quality charter schools. Friends seeks out and shares strategies and materials from other high-performing charter schools such as Uncommon Schools. Friends offered technical assistance in topics that included academics, finance, helping disadvantaged students and diverse learners, operations, leadership and governance. For example, Friends provided technical assistance around instructional best practices, including a session focused on interactive approaches to reading (November 2016), and sessions modeled on *Teach Like A Champion* (August 2018), Uncommon Schools' *Check for Understanding* strategies (August 2018) and Uncommon Schools' *Get Better Faster* (November 2018).

Key Evidence:

- B.6 Narrative
- Charter School Technical Assistance and Best Practices Dissemination schedule
- Email Qs Technical Assistance
- Magstadt Technical Assistance
- Schedule of Need
- Support for Schedule of Need
- Uncommon Schools Program of Success
- AAA/AAP
- Annual Report
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Charter school leader interview, April 8, 2020

B.8 Measure: High-Quality Charter School Replication and Dissemination of Best School Practices

Guiding Question: *To what degree does the authorizer plan and promote model replication and dissemination of best practices of high-quality charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently and intentionally plans and promotes model replication and dissemination of best practices of high-quality charter schools.

- There is an intentional plan for successful model replication and dissemination of best practices and models have been identified. The authorizer's AAP clearly outlines the plan for replication: 1) new charter schools must identify research supporting their educational model to confirm high quality; 2) implement a high-quality model for replication; and, 3) promote and support replication of existing high-quality Friends schools. The AAP also outlines the plans for dissemination, including identifying best practices, identifying Friends schools that have exceptionally implemented best practices, sponsoring dissemination of additional best practice acquisition demonstrated at Friends' schools at events not sponsored by the authorizer and sponsoring dissemination of best practices at the school board governance level. In the Evidence of Best Practice Dissemination document, Friends outlines its plan to identify best practices, identify schools within the portfolio that use these and sponsor dissemination. Emails included in the Evidence of Best Practice Dissemination document show that Friends hired consultants to help with dissemination. A review of annual reports details how Friends has shared best practices around topics such as data-driven instruction and governance, and outlines sharing information to schools. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results indicate that 72 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Friends has shared an intentional plan for model replication with them.
- During the interview, Friends confirmed that three schools are moving towards replication or have replicated (DaVinci, Eagle Ridge, Seven Hills). The Evidence of Best Practice Dissemination document confirms that these schools have replicated. Friends also identified several practices from Uncommon Schools, such as data-driven instruction, which they have disseminated during technical assistance sessions and that have been replicated. Additionally, schools within the portfolio (Yinghua Academy, Eagle Ridge) have been featured in the Uncommon Schools materials and there are email communications that show dissemination of best practices such as data-driven instruction to at least one school outside of the authorizer's portfolio. Survey results indicate that 89 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Friends has a plan to disseminate best practices.
- Friends has disseminated best practices to all of its schools, and more than one of its schools adopted this practice. The Evidence of Best Practice Dissemination document shows that Friends has disseminated practices from Uncommon Schools. Additionally, the Eagle Ridge staff shared data-driven instructional strategies with the Spectrum staff in 2016, as evidenced by emails. Nova implemented data-driven instruction at its Upper School as evidenced by board minutes. Finally, at least nine of the schools in the portfolio are recognized by the state as high-performing schools (award schools): Aspen Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019), Cologne Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2020), DaVinci Academy (2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), Eagle Ridge Academy (2016, 2018, 2019, 2020), Hennepin Elementary School (2016, 2019), Nova Classical Academy (2017, 2018), Parnassus Preparatory Charter School (2019, 2020), Seven Hills Preparatory Academy (2016, 2019), St. Croix Preparatory Academy (2016, 2017, 2019, 2020), Yinghua Academy (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020).

Key Evidence:

- B.8 Narrative
- Evidence of Best Practice Dissemination
- AAA/AAP
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Document: Hennepin Supplemental Affidavit
- Authorizer interview, March 16, 2020

B.9 Measure: Charter School Renewal and Termination Decisions

Guiding Questions: *To what degree does the authorizer have clear and comprehensive standards and processes to make high stakes renewal and termination decisions? To what degree did the authorizer's renewal and termination decisions align to its stated renewal standards and processes and promote the growth of high-quality charter schools?*

Performance Level Rating: Level 4-Exemplary

Finding: The authorizer consistently has clear and comprehensive standards and process to make high-stakes renewal and termination decisions, and renewal and termination decisions are consistently aligned with its stated renewal standards and processes and reflect a clear strategy to promote the growth of high-quality charter schools.

- The authorizer has transparent and rigorous standards and processes designed to use comprehensive academic, financial, operational and student performance data to make merit-based renewal decisions and terminate charters as necessary to protect student and public interests. For example, the renewal application is clear, simple and transparent, is tied to school performance and is related to data already generated. The Charter School Program Guide states that, by September 1 of contract termination year, the school must submit a renewal application to the authorizer. The renewal application includes three parts: 1) school performance aligned with performance goals and including governance performance, compliance with reporting and fiscal management; 2) proposed SMART goals designed to meet or exceed the commissioner's goals for public school students; and, 3) other information for the authorizer to consider. High-performing schools may be waived from the renewal application process, with the exception of submitting proposed goals. Additionally, the Charter School Program Guide states that Friends will base renewal decisions substantially on the school's attainment of its academic outcomes. It also states that the authorizer will base the decision on achievement of statutory purposes, financial and operational performance and compliance with applicable law. The comprehensive and detailed renewal example included, the termination example included and the charter contract are further evidence of this. The termination example also includes a summary and timeline of all actions taken during the process. There is evidence of termination and renewal decisions that dates back to 2015. For example, Friends decided to terminate a contract in 2016 due to academic outcomes that did not meet performance standards.
- Friends' decisions and resulting actions are consistent across its portfolio of charter schools, as evidenced by the Intervention Schedule and by the Renewal Data document. Comparison data between Aspen Academy, Eagle Ridge Academy and Minneapolis Academy shows how Friends determines renewal. Moreover, it confirms that decisions are consistent across the portfolio. During the authorizer interview, participants confirmed consistent processes throughout the review term, that are largely based on student achievement. For example, they explained that that even though Eagle Ridge had a fund balance below 25 percent (which would normally preclude them accepting the expansion), Friends considered that, with an increased number of students, the fund balance dip was temporary and that it planned to monitor the fund balance to ensure it increased.

- The AAP states that renewal decisions are based on performance data rather than site visits, and that Friends' decisions are based on output. Additionally, the AAP states that student performance is weighed more heavily in terms of determining renewal. This is evident in the Seven Hills renewal decision (Renewal Process Example Seven Hills document), where Friends recognizes the school for its high academic performance. Within the document, there are several emails showing a negotiation during the renewal process around academic performance goals. A review of the School Performance document shows a summary of academic performance, as well as proposed goals. The Renewal Data document confirms that Friends is tracking academic performance data for all the years within the term for all its schools in order to determine renewal.
- Friends' renewals standards and processes align with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards. The process and standards are aligned to NACSA Standard #5: Revocation and Decision-Making. As stated above, Friends outlines clear performance standards in its contract and uses data to make renewal decisions. Additionally, the contract termination outlines the reasons for termination as being largely due to low academic performance, insufficient finances and inadequate governance.
- Friends' renewal standards and processes reflect a clear strategy to promote high-quality charter schools, as the renewal and monitoring process includes strict academic performance, financial, operational and legal requirements and that the monitoring and oversight processes align with these performance standards. Friends' renewal data tracking around academics, finances, operations and governance shows it has clear standards and processes in place to promote high-quality charter schools.
- Level 2 indicators were met for the authorizer term to date. The Charter School Program Guide, which outlines the renewal process, and contracts in place since 2015, as well as documents, such as the Renewal Process Example Seven Hills Document and the Renewal Data document, confirm that Friends had implemented the renewal practices consistently since July 2015.
- Friends' renewal decisions result in high-quality charter schools as evidenced by national and state recognition. For example, several of the authorizer's schools have been recognized by MDE as high-quality charter schools, as have other sources such as *US News and World Reports* and *Schooldigger.com*. Additionally, three of Friends' schools were recognized by the National Blue Ribbon Schools Program as "Exemplary High Performing".
- During the interview, charter school leaders consistently verified that Friends has clear and comprehensive standards and processes to make high-stakes renewal and termination decisions. They explained that the authorizer uses comprehensive financial, academic, operational and student performance data to make merit-based decisions aligned with its stated renewal standards. For example, school representatives verified a process that begins approximately a year before the contract expires and that includes an application, timeline and rubric, as well as a negotiation over performance goals and a site visit. MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey results showed that approximately 88 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the authorizer is responsive and transparent and adhered to the renewal process, and that the renewal process is clear. Results also indicate that approximately 87 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that renewal processes, review procedures and timelines are clear and that the quality of assessment is strong, with 11 percent strongly disagreeing to all categories listed. 11 percent of respondents strongly disagreed that the authorizer is responsive, transparent and adhered to the renewal process, and that the renewal process is clear.

Key Evidence:

- B.9 Narrative
- Renewal Process Example, Seven Hills
- Renewal Data Sheets
- Contract Termination Example
- Friends Authorizing Practices Results in High Quality Charter Schools
- Program Guide
- AAA/AAP
- Charter Contract and Exhibits Template
- FY2017 Renewal Contracts
- FY2016 Renewal Contracts
- FY 2016 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2017 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2018 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- FY 2019 Authorizer Annual Report – Friends of Education
- MAPES Cohort One Charter School Leadership Survey – Friends of Education
- Authorizer Interview, March 16, 2020
- School Leader Interview, April 8, 2020

Performance Measures B: Rating (75 Percent Weight of Overall Rating)

MAPES Performance Measures B Rating for Friends of Education is 4. 00.

Performance Measures B: Rating Drivers

- Friends' application processes are comprehensive, include clear questions, fair and transparent procedures and timelines and rigorous criteria, which are demonstrated in a rubric. It has implemented clear, comprehensive, fair and transparent approval criteria and processes, which are consistent across the portfolio and aligned with nationally recognized quality authorizing standards and they have resulted in high-quality charter schools.
- Contracts in Friends' portfolio consistently meet current statutory requirements, and clearly state the rights and responsibilities of the school and the authorizer. The contracts define clear, measurable and attainable academic, financial and operational performance outcomes and standards, and Friends holds schools accountable to the performance standards.
- Friends has clear processes for oversight and monitoring that evaluate academic, financial and operational performance and compliance. These processes are aligned with the AAP, are consistent in the portfolio and aligned with nationally recognized authorizer standards and they have resulted in high-performing charter schools.
- The authorizer implements clear and comprehensive standards and processes to address complaints, interventions and corrective action, that are consistent across the portfolio and have been in place since the start of the term.
- Friends provides support and technical assistance in a variety of areas (i.e., finance, academics, operations, governance). It is focused on providing targeted support that responds to individual needs, as well as on disseminating best practices to all the schools within its portfolio (e.g., data-driven instruction). As a result, schools have adopted best practices and schools have replicated successful models.
- Friends has transparent and rigorous standards and processes designed to use comprehensive academic, financial, operational and student performance data to make merit-based decisions and to terminate charters when necessary. Its practices are consistent across its portfolio of schools and ensure high-quality charter schools and the improvement of education for students.

Performance Measures B: Recommendations

- Not applicable.

Appendix A: Authorizer Portfolio Information

Operational Schools: Aspen Academy, Clarkfield Area Charter School, Cologne Academy, DaVinci Academy, Eagle Ridge Academy, Hennepin Elementary School, New Millennium Academy, Nova Classical Academy, Parnassus Preparatory School, Seven Hills Preparatory Academy, St. Croix Preparatory Academy, Yinghua Academy

Preoperational Schools: N/A

Closed Schools: Minneapolis Academy, Paideia Academy, West Concord Public Charter School

Never Opened Schools: N/A

Schools that have transferred into portfolio: N/A

Schools that have transferred out of portfolio: Stride Academy

Merged schools over the term of the review period: N/A

Appendix B: Evaluation Methodology

SchoolWorks is committed to ensuring inter-rater reliability and consistency across all MAPES reports. In order to achieve this, SchoolWorks adopts the following methodology.

1. SchoolWorks assigned each authorizer a two-person evaluation team that includes a team lead and team writer.
2. All evaluators then engage in a training with the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) during which they norm around ratings, evidence and report language.
3. The lead and writer review all submitted documents and rate the evidence submitted by the authorizer.
4. Teams participate in a pre-interview call. During this call, the team comes to consensus, deciding upon initial ratings. Also, during this call, team members identify any standards for which they need additional clarification.
5. Team members lead in-person interviews with authorizing staff and representatives from the authorizer's portfolio of charter schools. Following the interview, evaluators may ask for additional documentation to be submitted by the authorizer. ***
6. Team members use interview responses and any additional document submissions in alignment with the MAPES standards and, if applicable, revise their initial ratings.
7. Team members participate in a consensus call during which they finalize their ratings.
8. Draft reports are completed and reviewed by a SchoolWorks content editor. The content editor reviews ratings and evidentiary alignment with the MAPES rubric within each individual report and ensures consistency of ratings across all reports.
9. The SchoolWorks project manager reviews all reports to ensure consistency of ratings and sufficiency of evidence.
10. Draft reports are submitted to MDE for review.
11. MDE shares draft reports with authorizers for factual review. During the factual review, authorizers may submit additional documentation to clarify factual errors.
12. SchoolWorks evaluators review the factual corrections submitted by the authorizer and any accompanying documentation. Based on the authorizer's submissions, they consider whether additional evidence impacts the ratings identified in the final report.
13. Evaluators finalize their MAPES reports and submit to the SchoolWorks project manager.
14. The SchoolWorks project manager reviews all finalized reports.
15. Final reports are submitted to MDE for review.

*** Due to COVID-19, interviews were conducted via videoconference.