



## CSP Funding for Charter Schools

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE)'s implementation of the Federal Charter Schools Program (CSP) grant aims to increase the number of high-quality charter schools that serve disadvantaged students within the state. CSP allows potential subgrantees from across the state to apply for grant funds to either start, significantly expand, or replicate a charter school within the state. Once awarded, subgrantees are eligible to receive up to three years of funding (typically one planning year and two implementation years).

### Key Facts about the Program

- Number of Applicants: 67 (Spring 2018 – Spring 2022)
- Number of Subgrantees: 39 Start-up, 6 Expansion and Replication
- Total funding awarded to subgrantees: \$15,675,375

ICF surveyed all subgrantees and interviewed 12 start-up subgrantees and 6 significant expansion and replication grantees about their experiences with MDE grant administration processes and how they used funding.

### Key Findings

- When asked how critical CSP funds were to opening or expanding/replicating their charter school programs, half of subgrantees said that they were “extremely critical” (see Figure 1). Seventeen percent said that the funds were “critical,” while the remaining 33% said they were “somewhat critical.” Subgrantees indicated that they utilized funds to pay vital staff salaries, purchase necessary curricula and classroom materials, and procure professional development for charter school staff.

**Figure 1.** Expansion and replication subgrantees' perceptions on how critical grant funds were to their expansion or replication.



- Some subgrantees expressed concerns regarding MDE's budgeting and reimbursement process. In particular, they indicated that MDE's interpretation of allowable cost change with MDE staff turnover,

items that were in an approve budget were occasionally denied reimbursements, and there were delays with budget approvals and reimbursement.<sup>1</sup>

## Effective Practices

- MDE provides comprehensive resources about the application process to potential applicants.
- MDE provides comprehensive training to CSP peer reviewers.
- MDE's provides onboarding and initial training that is helpful to subgrantees.
- MDE is communicative and responsive to subgrantee needs.

## Recommendations

Based on ICF's evaluation, MDE staff may want to consider the following:

1. Continue to develop and post additional resources to MDE's website.
2. Create a subgrantee portal for specific CSP resources not available to the public.
3. Host additional trainings for subgrantee leaders who join after initial onboarding.
4. Refine the review process for initial budgets and share a tracking system related to subgrantee communication surrounding budgets and reimbursements.
5. Create and distribute additional examples of how CSP funds can be used during planning or implementation
6. Conduct one-on-one meetings with new subgrantees during the grant period.

---

<sup>1</sup> MDE reported that guidance on allowable costs was emailed to subgrantee on 4.15.2020 and 6.30.2020. On 7.22.2021, MDE emailed subgrantees updated Budget Development Instructions and outlined unallowable costs and on 7.23 and 7.26 MDE held two meetings for subgrantees to walk through updated guidance. MDE has suggested that delays in processing could be due to establishing the allowability of expenses.