



Ready-to-Open Benchmarks and Meeting Protocol for New Charter Schools

2015-2016

The University of St. Thomas (UST) is dedicated to working with accepted charter school founding teams to ensure the realization of the high quality, successful schools envisioned during the application process. The pre-operational period is a critical time in which the school is laying the foundation for future performance. As such, UST is committed to working closely with school founders throughout the planning year, which culminates in a final Ready-to-Open (RTO) meeting 6-8 weeks prior to the start of the school's first operational year.

The RTO meeting will allow the school to demonstrate work that has been done and will also serve as a check-point to ensure that the RTO benchmarks have been met. In the event that the school is unable to satisfy the RTO benchmarks, the opening of the school will be postponed by one year in accordance with *Minnesota Statute 124D.10*, subdivision 4(c):

The authorizer may prevent an approved charter school from opening for operation if, among other grounds, the charter school violates this section or does not meet the ready-to-open standards that are part of the authorizer's oversight and evaluation process or are stipulated in the charter school contract.

Start-Up Process

Prior to the RTO meeting, pre-operational oversight for UST-approved schools is provided via a detailed checklist designed to walk new schools through the processes of developing their learning program, reaching out to potential students, securing facilities, creating appropriate financial management and governance policies, and ensuring compliance with the law. Progress in completing checklist activities is monitored by UST staff through meetings held with school founders/leadership on a twice-monthly basis.

The checklist encompasses the RTO benchmarks as well as numerous other tasks that require completion during the pre-operational period.

Ready to Open Benchmarks

The RTO benchmarks consist of eight areas of critical importance which are aligned with the detailed checklist used during the pre-operational period. In order to open, the school must demonstrate its satisfaction of each area. The benchmarks are as follows, see Appendix A for a full description of each item and required documentation:

- 1) **Enrollment** is sufficient to allow for financial viability and programmatic integrity.
 - a. Confirmed enrollment is at or above the minimum number acceptable per the school's contingency budget for lowest possible operating enrollment
- 2) **Contract with UST and all attachments** have been finalized, including certificates of proper insurance as well as a completed accountability plan.
 - a. Completed contract is on file with UST
- 3) **Board governance** is competent and compliant with law.
 - a. UST observation of board meetings and minutes indicates understanding of key laws (e.g. Open Meeting Law) and use of best practices
 - b. Mandated training has been completed
 - c. Necessary board policies, procedures, and bylaws are in place and approved by the board
- 4) **Appropriate school site** has been acquired and the lease signed.
 - a. UST has received a copy of the lease, received the opportunity to review and comment as specified by contract, and has no significant concerns.
 - b. Facility is safe and suitable to receive students
- 5) **Funding** is prepared to flow from the state to the school.
 - a. At least 9 of the 11 items listed below must be completed before the school will be considered eligible to operate. Any items not completed are well underway, will be completed prior to opening, and will not prevent funding from flowing to the school.
 - i. Lease aid
 - ii. SERVS
 - iii. EDRS
 - iv. UFARS
 - v. PERA/TRA set up
 - vi. Direct deposit for funds set up
 - vii. Title 1 app in if applicable
 - viii. MARSS
 - ix. Food service plan
 - x. CSP grant items
 - xi. 501(c)(3)

- 6) **Learning program** elements are in place for meeting the mission of the school.
 - a. The curriculum scope and sequence for the grades to be served in the school's first year are complete
 - b. All necessary materials (e.g. books, manipulatives, etc.) have been purchased and will be on-site prior to opening
 - c. Classroom environments are suitable for the mission-specific learning program.
 - d. Appropriate policies and procedures for the receipt and review of student records are in place.
 - e. Appropriate policies and procedures for identifying and servicing English learner and special education students are in place.
- 7) **Transportation** plan is in place and viable.
 - a. The school has secured bussing either through the resident district or an alternative vendor
- 8) **Key staff** and majority of teachers have been hired.
 - a. The school leader and at least 75% of staff members have been hired
 - b. The school has an appropriately-licensed special education director in place prior to opening
 - c. A plan is in place to hire any remaining staff well before the start of the year

Ready to Open Meeting

Attendees

The following persons must attend the RTO meeting.

- Board chair and treasurer
- Financial manager
- School leader
- Operations manager/Start-up Coordinator
- UST representatives

Additional board members are welcome to attend; however, please be aware of Open Meeting Law requirements with respect to quorum. Representatives from MDE will be invited to attend and participate in the meeting.

Location and format

The RTO meeting will be held at the school site and will commence with a brief tour of the school facility followed by an opportunity for the school to demonstrate how each benchmark has been satisfied. The final portion of the meeting will be reserved for discussion of the school's progress. A RTO meeting will typically take 2-3 hours, but may require additional time if the school is facing numerous or complex issues.

Final Decision

UST will issue a Final Determination of Readiness to Open within two weeks of the RTO meeting. Schools unable to satisfy all criteria after this period will be allowed to open no sooner than the start of the following academic year, contingent on satisfaction of RTO benchmarks at that time.

UST reserves the right to terminate the charter with the founding board at the time of the Final Determination if it is clear that significant deficiencies exist which lead UST to question the viability of the program. Those deficiencies will be outlined in the Final Determination correspondence.

Appendix A
Ready to Open Benchmark Requirement Detail

Benchmark	Criteria	Documentation	Submission Timeline
1) Enrollment is sufficient to allow for financial viability and programmatic integrity.	Enrollment is at or above the minimum number acceptable per the school's contingency budget for lowest possible operating enrollment (See pre-September checklist).	Contingency budget Current enrollment figures (based on families who have completely filled out enrollment forms—those who have indicated interest but have not formally enrolled may not be counted).	File with UST at least one week prior to RTO meeting (reference pre-September checklist) File with UST at least one week prior to RTO meeting. Bring copies of most updated figures to RTO meeting if changes have occurred. (reference April and May checklists)
2) Contract with UST, including all attachments, has been finalized.	Completed contract signed and on file with UST.	Completed contract (Although preliminary contract will have been executed, items such as insurance certificates will need to be added prior to opening. Check all attachments for accuracy and completion.)	June 30 th or one week prior to RTO meeting, whichever comes first. (reference pre-September checklist)
3) Board governance is competent and compliant with law.	a. UST observation of board meetings and review of minutes indicates understanding of key laws (ie: Open Meeting Law) and use of best practices such as review of member attendance rates, functioning committees, oversight of pre-operational functions, etc. b. Mandated training has been completed for all members. c. Necessary board policies, procedures, and bylaws are in place and have been approved by the board.	UST Notes Minutes, board attendance rates, listing/descriptions of committees established and functioning Complete board contact information sheet attached as Appendix B Board policy handbook; current bylaws should be included in contract. If changes have been made since contract, include updated bylaws.	At least one week prior to RTO meeting. (reference September and October checklists) At least one week prior to RTO meeting. (reference November checklist) At least one week prior to RTO meeting. (reference October, January, February, and July checklists)

4) Appropriate School Site acquired/Lease signed	<p>UST possesses a copy of the lease, received the opportunity to review and comment as specified by contract, and has no significant concerns.</p> <p>Facility is safe and ready to receive students.</p>	<p>Signed lease</p> <p>UST observation of site and discussion of improvements completed and underway.</p> <p>Certificate of Occupancy</p>	<p>At least one week prior to RTO meeting if changes were made to the lease UST reviewed and commented on.</p> <p>(reference checklist for November)</p>
5) Funding is prepared to flow from the state to the school.	<p>At least 9 of the 11 items listed below must be completed before the school will be considered eligible to operate. Any items not completed are well underway, will be completed prior to opening, and will not prevent funding from flowing to the school.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Lease aid ii. SERVS iii. EDRS iv. UFARS v. PERA/TRA set up vi. Direct deposit for funds set up vii. Title 1 app in if applicable viii. MARSS ix. Food service plan x. CSP grant items xi. 501(c)(3) 	<p>The items below may be documented through a variety of means, suggestions for verification of each item are found below. No additional verification is required for CSP items as authorizers are copied on all official MDE grant notices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Copy UST on the electronic submission of the Lease Aid Application (or forward MDE's verification of receipt). ii.,iv, viii. Completed MDE Site Change Request Form iii., v., vi. Electronic or other document verification ix. Completed contract with food service provider, confirmation of enrollment in reimbursement program vii. Enrollment projections including number of projected FRL and ELL students. xi. Copy of 501(c)(3) award letter 	<p>All electronic verification must be sent to UST at least one week prior to the RTO meeting.</p> <p>(reference checklists for pre-September, January, May, and June)</p> <p>Attend the meeting prepared to discuss the current status of each item.</p>

<p>6) Learning program elements are in place for meeting the mission of the school.</p>	<p>The curriculum scope and sequence for the grades to be served in the school's first year are complete. All necessary materials (ie: books, manipulatives, etc.) have been purchased and will be on-site prior to opening. Classroom environments appear safe and suitable for the mission-specific learning program.</p> <p>Policies and procedures for student record receipt and review are appropriate and in place.</p> <p>Policies and procedures for identifying and servicing EL and SPED students are appropriate and in place.</p>	<p>Curriculum scope and sequence document Purchasing plan and copy of CSP grant budget Policy/procedures on student record receipt and review. Policy/procedures on identifying and serving EL/Sped students.</p>	<p>At least one week prior to RTO meeting. (reference March checklist)</p>
<p>7) Transportation plan is in place (and viable).</p>	<p>The school has secured bussing either through the resident district or an alternative vendor.</p>	<p>Signed contract with vendor or resident school district agreement verification</p>	<p>At least one week prior to RTO meeting. (reference May checklist)</p>
<p>8) Key staff and majority of teachers have been hired.</p>	<p>The school leader and at least 75% of staff members have been hired. Plans are underway to hire any remaining staff well before the start of the year. The school has an appropriately-licensed special education director and, if applicable, EL certified staff member in place prior to opening.</p>	<p>Complete teacher licensure verification form attached as Appendix C Include an all-staff listing with titles and positions remaining vacant MDE memo approving Special Education Director</p>	<p>At least one week prior to RTO meeting. (reference June checklist)</p>

Appendix B
Board Contact Information

Appendix C

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Teacher Licensure Verification