

I. Historical Context: Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA)

1991 MN Charter Law stipulated that the sponsor's authorization for an "outcome-based school" shall be in the form of a written contract signed by the sponsor and the board of directors of the outcome-based school. However, in the early years there was not a clear shared understanding of the process for authorizing a new school. It became clear that the quality of the sponsors' decision about start up and the quality of its oversight of the school during the term of the contract were critical to the success of the school and the state's chartering program.

So in 2003 Education Evolving (a nonprofit, nonpartisan policy analysis, design, and advocacy organization focused on improving American public education) began working to strengthen sponsors and sponsoring in Minnesota and created the **Sponsors Assistance Network** led by former MN education commissioner Bob Wedl and funded initially by the Center for Policy Studies and with a grant from the St. Paul Foundation and then with a part of the MDE's administrative allotment from the Federal Charter School Grant. The goals were to

- Assist organizations to improve their sponsoring capacities through individualized assistance provided by a cadre of experts as well as facilitating statewide training and networking.
- Develop a quality indicator system for sponsors and assist sponsors to achieve these qualities to assure that all chartered schools will have high quality sponsors
- Collaborate with key partners for support to gain the financial assistance needed by sponsors in order for them to provide quality sponsoring
- Be a partner in the ongoing effort to improve learning opportunities for Minnesota's children and youth.

Significant accomplishments:

- 1) February 2004 published "**Sponsoring Chartered Schools: A Resource Guide for MN Chartering Agencies**" to assist the sponsor of chartered schools in defining and carrying out their roles and responsibilities
- 2) 2005 published "**The Cost of Sponsoring of Minnesota Chartered Schools**" - Sponsor revenue had remained unchanged between the mid 90s and 2005- First three years, \$30 per pupil up to a maximum of \$10,000 per school per year that reduced after the first three years to \$10 per pupil up to a maximum of \$3,500 per school per year. The publication helped improve the sponsor revenue to current levels (base \$5,948 per school per year, cap \$23,792 per school per year).

In 2009 MN Statute was revised to include more requirements for authorizers, and all authorizers essentially had to reapply for approval to serve as authorizers. The number of authorizers in Minnesota dropped from 54 to 25.

In 2011 as the expectations of authorizers ramped up, a group of authorizers and the director of the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools visited Central Michigan University and the Michigan Council of Charter School Authorizers to learn more about developing the state association. Upon returning the Minnesota Association of Charter School Authorizers (MACSA) formed and MACSA extended invitations to all approved authorizers and MDE, MACS, and Charter School Partners to attend meetings.

II. Current Status

What is the focus of the work now? The mission: *The mission is to increase the quality of charter school authorizing in the State of Minnesota by developing and identifying practices and policies that ensure effective oversight and evaluation of Minnesota charter schools.* To accomplish the mission:

- MACSA engages stakeholders such as the MDE and the Minnesota Association of Charter Schools (MACS) in discussions to identify effective practices and policies (ex. in resolving complaints the MDE receives about chartered schools, in creating conditions for innovation, in administering the Minnesota Authorizer Performance Evaluation System)
- MACSA participates in various advisory committees on effective practices and policies (state accountability technical advisory committees, NACSA stakeholder committees- National Activities Grant to improve oversight practices of charter school special education program/services, MACS board and committees)
- MACSA facilitates sharing of effective practices (surveys members to identify needs, hosts conferences, works with MDE on conferences to meet needs)

What's the structure of the organization? MACSA has a set of agreements under which members operate. There's a chair, an executive committee and a strategic planning committee. No dues.

Who participates? All authorizers are invited to opt in. There are currently 15 authorizers. There are usually at least 10 authorizers represented at the meetings.

What is on the agenda regularly?

- The beginning of the agenda always includes Stakeholder Updates (usually 30 minutes to an hour) from MDE, MACS, and others.
- After updates the stakeholders leave and MACSA continues with ongoing business including updates from the executive committee and strategic planning committee as well as any member participating on an external committee.

How often do we meet? MACSA and the Executive and Strategic Planning committees meet monthly. An authorizer hosts the MACSA monthly meeting.

What impact has MACSA had most recently?

- Changes to the MN Authorizer Performance Evaluation System (MAPES)
- Improved practices through shared resources (ex. contracting, performance frameworks, policies related to avoiding COI and maintaining school autonomy)
- Authorizer feedback influences MDE processes such as complaint resolution
- Authorizer engagement resulted in changes to state accountability system in how schools are rated
- Communication reduces misinfo and promotes understanding among stakeholders