



ACADEMIC MONITORING

Recognized Best Practices

Regulatory Framework

The Revised School Code ([MCL 380.507\(1\)\(e\)](#)) identifies the oversight role of the authorizer as it relates to academic performance of charter public schools. Authorizers are required to “develop and implement a process for holding a public school academy accountable for meeting applicable academic performance standards set forth in the contract and for implementing corrective action for a public school academy that does not meet those standards.” It also states that the contract may be revoked by the authorizer if the authorizing body determines that the charter public school has failed to demonstrate “improved pupil academic achievement for all groups of pupils or meet the educational goals set forth in the contract” ([380.507\(4\)\(a\)](#)).

In addition to the oversight of the authorizer, Michigan Department of Education (MDE) provides an academic framework for all public schools: Michigan School Index System and the Michigan Parent Dashboard for School Transparency, as established by [MCL 380.1280g](#) of the Revised School Code and the federal Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA). The Michigan School Index System assigns a letter grade for a series of indicators (student proficiency, student growth, graduation rate, English learner progress, state assessment participation, and school quality/success). Schools in need of support are identified as Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI) schools, Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI) schools or Additional Targeted Support (ATS) schools.

All public schools report their student academic data to MDE. MDE makes the information and the school accountability designation publicly available on the MI School Data website. Charter schools also report their academic data to the authorizer for academic monitoring and accountability.

While the academic goals in the charter contract are the main source of accountability for charter public schools, it is imperative that the authorizer, charter public school board, and school leadership understand MDE’s academic accountability framework and the actions that the MDE may require if a school is identified as a CSI, TSI or ATS school.

MCCSA Guiding Principles and Standards

MCCSA has adopted Principles and Standards that guide authorizers as they develop strong authorizing practices. To balance charter public school autonomy and student academic outcomes, the first principle of MCCSA’s guiding principles is for authorizers to focus on Performance & Accountability. The responsibility of continuous monitoring lies with multiple agencies including the

charter public school's authorizer and the MDE. Part of effective monitoring requires clear, continuous, and direct communication among the oversight entities and with the charter public school so that there is minimum duplication of effort and unnecessary burden.

As described in MCCSA's *Authorizing Excellence: Michigan's Model for Authorizer Accountability*, monitoring for academics is multi-faceted. Waiting to report school performance until the contract term ends is not a best practice, rather regular oversight and reporting is necessary to ensure that students are receiving the best education available. Specifically, it is stated in the section *Overseeing & Evaluating a Charter Public School* that "authorizing means understanding the responsibility of establishing a comprehensive system that monitors and evaluates school performance and compliance. This system should provide the necessary information to oversee, evaluate and periodically report the performance of the charter public school. An authorizer's oversight system should preserve and protect the autonomy of the school while minimizing its compliance burden."

Furthermore, "if, during the course of the charter contract term, the authorizer determines that a public charter school is not making adequate progress, the authorizer shall give notice to the school and allow reasonable time and opportunity for the school to make necessary changes. However, if after the changes, the school is still not making adequate progress, the authorizer shall send notice to a school regarding their lack of progress and provide intervention support strategies that work to improve student outcomes and operations while maintaining program autonomy and accountability."

What is academic monitoring?

Academic monitoring is the process conducted by an authorizer on an ongoing and annual basis to determine if the charter public school is on track to meet its student academic expectations outlined in the charter contract. Strong academic monitoring is valuable in informing authorizing decisions and ensures that the charter school board and leadership are clear regarding how they are doing according to the authorizer's expectations. In addition, school academic performance should be publicly displayed in a way that families can use the information to make informed choices. Academic monitoring includes, but is not limited to, school performance on the state rating system, charter goals that measure student academic outcomes, and authorizer frameworks or scorecards. It may also include mission-specific goals, school site visits where teachers are observed (as opposed to a document review) and engagement with families, staff, and students regarding school academic learning and social-emotional development.

Specific key performance indicators to consider as part of academic monitoring include but are not limited to:

- Academic proficiency
- Academic growth
- Subgroup performance
- Student motivation and engagement
- College and career readiness
- School culture, climate and stakeholder engagement
- Mission-specific goals

Why is academic monitoring important?

The primary objective of academic monitoring is to ensure that students are receiving a quality education and to assure families and community members that public dollars are supporting student learning. In between high stakes charter public school reviews, such as renewals, monitoring of student performance allows the authorizer, school, and community to know whether a charter public school is making adequate progress to meet its charter goals, providing the school with the assurance that it is on track or allows time to improve if not. The absence of strong academic monitoring could result in a charter public school failing to appropriately serve students for years.

What is the difference between academic monitoring and compliance monitoring?

Simply stated, academic monitoring measures outputs and compliance monitoring measures inputs. Academic monitoring evaluates measurable outcomes reflecting student performance. Compliance monitoring that falls under the realm of academics includes compliance with teacher qualification requirements, compliance with special education laws such as IDEA and ADA, compliance with laws governing English learner education, compliance with certificate of occupancy, and other areas that, when followed, should result in better student outcomes.

Academic Monitoring Best Practices

Transparency and Clear Communications

A transparent academic monitoring and reporting process will result in greater outcomes and ensure that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of expectations and the performance of the charter public school. It is best practice to publish all rubrics, guidance, and documents and provide them to school leadership well in advance of a site visit or monitoring review. To enhance the academic monitoring system and ensure there are no surprises, it is important to inform schools, families, and community members of what will be monitored and when.

Multiple Measures

Measuring school quality is most effective and valid when multiple measures are used that go beyond state assessments and frameworks. Key performance indicators beyond standardized test results can provide a more holistic view of school quality. Consider utilizing the key performance indicators listed earlier. Other measures to consider could include student portfolios, school-based assessments, as well as gradebooks, attendance, and transcripts. It is essential that authorizers do not focus on inputs such as choice of curriculum, school schedule, or other inputs not outlined in the charter contract or accountability framework.

Site Visits

Site visits are an effective tool in providing strong academic monitoring oversight. Site visits provide the authorizer and charter public school leadership with qualitative evidence to inform decisions and can provide valuable feedback to the charter school board and school leadership. Formal and informal site visits should be utilized strategically to gain a full picture of school quality. Formal site visits should always be conducted with a rubric, so there is a clear standard of excellence without bias for school mission or programming. Informal or unannounced visits, when used appropriately, can help to provide an authentic view of a school in action.

Know your schools

It is important that the authorizer builds a relationship with the charter public school board and school leaders to help strengthen communications. In addition, authorizers can gain a more complete understanding of the school by not only communicating with the charter school board and school leaders but also communicating with students and families who choose the school. Authorizers can utilize site visits as an opportunity to interview leadership, staff, students, and families to accomplish this. The use of climate and culture surveys can also be a valuable tool.

Take appropriate actions

To have a strong academic monitoring system, it is essential to include clear indicators and authorizer processes to take the appropriate actions when necessary. High performing schools should be recognized and celebrated. While underperforming schools should be identified and interventions should be implemented to improve the school's performance. Interventions might include increased monitoring, submission and implementation of a corrective action plan, and eventually closure if the charter public school fails to demonstrate adequate progress.

Reflective Questions:

Does your academic monitoring utilize multiple measures to reflect quality?

How are you using site visits effectively to further understand quality education at the charter public school?

Are you providing performance reports to schools and the public that reflect academic expectations outlined in the charter contract?

Does your academic monitoring process clearly articulate the actions the authorizer will take if the charter public school is not making adequate progress?

Resources:

[Michigan School Index System](#)

[Michigan Parent Dashboard for School Transparency](#)

[Curriculum Review](#)

[Educational Program Review](#)

[Performance Report - Example 1](#)

[Performance Report – Example 2](#)